

FRENCH COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY DOCTRINE AND THE ALGERIAN PEASANTRY

BY MAHFOUD BENNOUNE

Looked at in retrospect, the armed Algerian struggle of national liberation which shook the countryside and the French political and military scene between 1954 and 1962 possesses a historical significance comparable to that of those great events that have shaped the contemporary world: the 1917 revolution, the resistance movements against fascism, the Chinese proletarian-peasant revolution, the Cuban experience, and the valiant Vietnamese armed struggle against colonialism and imperialism. In the words of Eric Wolf:

[T]he Algerian events are important not only because a small force of guerrillas challenged a large modern army (at times the number of French troops reached 800,000) and deprived it of victory, but also because it gives rise to two influential theories on warfare involving peasant population. One is the "theory of revolutionary war," developed and advocated by officers of the French army that fought in Algeria, the other is the theory of colonial revolutions put forward by Frantz Fanon.^{1*}

Mahfoud Bennoune was a liaison officer in the Algerian Army of National Liberation. He is a Ph.D. candidate in anthropology at the University of Michigan.

* Notes will be found at the end of the article.

This essay will focus on the French counter-revolutionary doctrine and its effects on 2,300,000 peasants who were subjected to brutal relocations in the *centres de regroupements* during the Algerian revolutionary war. The second most significant aspect associated with the application of French counter-insurgency theories, which must be analyzed in connection with these forced settlements, is "the scorched-earth strategy," directed against the peasant villages.

On the eve of the decisive Dienbienphu defeat inflicted upon the French army by the Viet Minh, some colonial officers were studying not only sociological, anthropological, and psychological works, but also revolutionary writings concerning the strategies of mass mobilization for the purpose of smashing oppressive power relationships.

The first work to attract the attention of these French officers of "psychological warfare" was, paradoxically, Serge Chakotin's anti-Nazi pamphlet, *The Rape of the Masses*. In this study, Chakotin suggested that in order to undermine the effectiveness of Nazi propaganda on the German masses, Pavlovian psychological conditioning and advertising techniques should be utilized. According to him, to influence the masses psychologically to the extent of changing their attitudes, "the essential thing is to appeal to all sides of the psychical complex, to leave it no means of escape; it is not sufficient to play on any chance string; the rule is to appeal to every one of the deep-lying instinctive bases of the human soul."²

But the most important doctrinaire of psychological warfare, one who had close ties with the French military proponents of counter-revolutionary strategy, was a French psychologist by the name of George Sauge. According to William Bosworth, Sauge "has organized a 'center for advanced study of social psychology' and a movement called *Force Psychologique*. This movement seems to have a certain influence in the French army." Sauge's importance "has been enhanced by giving regular courses in psychological warfare to . . . army officers."³ His ideas were enthusiastically received by the French counter-revolutionary strategists. In fact, the correspondent of *Le Monde* in Algeria reported, on February 12, 1960, that "Sauge was the official theoretician of psycho-

logical warfare" among the active officers of counterinsurgency. His fascist doctrine asserts that basically every individual is susceptible to being "conditioned to do and to believe in practically anything."⁴

These French counterinsurgent officers also turned eagerly to the study of Mao's writings on military strategy. Indeed, upon reading Mao, General Chassin drew the conclusion that henceforth revolutions cannot be defeated by the classical colonial wars of conquest; they must be opposed by a similar strategy, that of "subversive" war itself. Besides, the imperialist armies should rely on socio-psychological manipulative techniques to persuade the colonized masses to dissociate themselves from the "outlaws." He wrote that "it is impossible to win a war, especially a civil war, if the people are not on your side." We must fight "among the masses, for control of the masses, by a mixture of organizational and psychological techniques." He concluded that even nuclear weaponry cannot protect the Western colonial powers from revolutionary warfare; "without the slightest doubt, the most dangerous form of war for France, and perhaps for the West, is subversive war, because it can be waged with the least risk by an opponent acting through intermediaries, who can gradually deprive us of every strategic position in the world."⁵

Another French theoretician of pacification by terror, whose ideas on counterinsurgency warfare were carefully studied and applied by a large number of Western imperialist powers is Colonel Roger Trinquier. In his book *Modern Warfare* (by which he means revolutionary warfare), Trinquier asserted that this type of warfare exhibits the following features: it "is an interlocking system of actions—political, economic, psychological, military—that aims at the overthrow of the established authority in a country and its replacement by another regime." In order to achieve this goal, the "agitators" would try "to exploit the internal tensions of the country attacked—ideological, social, religious, economic—any conflict liable to have a profound influence on the population to be conquered."⁶ It should be noted that the colonel has lumped and confused the underlying objective conditions leading to a revolution with the technical aspects of revolutionary warfare. Upon studying super-

ficially Mao's writings on revolutionary war, Trinquier also concluded that, "the *sine qua non* of victory in modern warfare is the unconditional support of a population. According to Mao Tse-tung, it is as essential to the combatant as water to the fish. Such support may be spontaneous, although that is quite rare and probably a temporary condition. If it does not exist, it may be secured by every possible means, the most effective of which is terrorism."⁷

In fact, Trinquier not only suggested the resort to terrorism to secure the neutralization of the Algerian peasantry, but also practiced its art, as an active officer in Algeria, with a disturbing realism. The premises underlying Trinquier's conclusions are based on a pessimistic fascist philosophy that contains an inherently debasing view of man and power relationships in society. This conception of both revolutionary conditions and counterinsurgency strategy and tactics is motivated by his own anguish and despair, generated by the fact that 800,000 professional soldiers, "supplied with the most modern equipment," could not defeat the 15,000 members of the ALN (over 80 percent of them from a peasant background); they were "in general, poorly equipped with only light weapons."⁸

Thus, in accordance with these counterinsurgency theories propounded by various officers and by some academic scholars, the French army established, in March 1956, a center of counter-revolutionary warfare in Arzew, near Oran. The successive directors of this center set themselves the task of disseminating the French doctrine of *Guerre Révolutionnaire*. However, the systematic training of officers of psychological warfare predated the creation of this school. In 1955, the number of such officers had already reached 1,400.⁹ The corps of these counter-insurgent officers, called *Section Administrative Sociale* (SAS), was created by a decree signed by none other than the anthropologist governor-general of Algeria, Jacques Soustelle, on September 26, 1955.

The early general curriculum of the center at Arzew focused on empirical data regarding the Algerian revolutionary situation coupled with emphasis on military strategy and tactics. Gradually, the program was oriented towards intensive training in a variety of interrelated topics: psychological warfare,

Marxism-Leninism, Islam, and the Algerian society and culture. During the directorship of Colonel Bruges, a veteran of the French Indochina war, the officers undertook a thorough investigation of Mao's writings as well as other doctrines of revolution, supplementing them with various theoretical works pertaining to socio-psychological conditioning. The ideas derived from the studies of these topics were integrated, adapted, and immediately applied in the field. According to Alf Heggoy, an American apologist and popularizer of the French doctrine of *Guerre Révolutionnaire*, "the officers came to understand that military considerations alone would not provide a suitable solution to the war."¹⁰

By 1960, the curriculum of this center at Arzew consisted of three subfields of instruction: the nature of the military conflict, the socio-political context of the war in its internal and external dimensions, and the theories of psychological warfare and their application. The first consisted of "a statistically oriented discussion of the number of casualties on each side within specific periods of time. . . . Lectures and discussions, often offered by guests who were academic specialists, demonstrated that the insurgency arose from internal social and political contradictions as well as from certain international forces. Among the foreign influences studied were the development of revolutionary warfare, world communism. . . . Lectures also discussed the chief characteristics of Algerian society, the enemy's organization and history, and psychological action."¹¹

Thus, since the Algerian peasants were recognized as forming the backbone of the ALN, "numerous regional, subregional, and sectorial commanders thought then that there was no other solution for ending this state of affairs but to apply Mao Tse-tung's method: 'the rebel lives within the population like a fish in water; drain away the water and the fish will die.'¹²

When the French government realized that the Algerian "rebellion" was not a peasant *jacquerie* but a genuine revolutionary war organized in conformity with the basic principles of a people's war that required and generated the general mobilization of the masses, which permitted the ALN not only to attack and destroy entire army units but also to "out-organize" the colonial administration, it asked Robert Lacoste, the resident

minister in Algeria, to relinquish all power to the army in April 1956. The army was ordered to carry on "political and psychological work." This task was considered by Lacoste to be "as important as its purely operational activity."¹³ Henceforth, the officers of psychological warfare were given *carte blanche* to apply the theories of *Guerre Révolutionnaire*.

The Application of *Guerre Révolutionnaire*: Forced Dislocation of the Peasants

In conformity with the implications of the various sociopsychological theories and Mao's dictum that stressed the self-evident revolutionary truth that the rural masses form the lifeblood of a genuinely popular armed struggle against colonialism, the French military high command ordered its field commanders to clear off the peasants from their villages and to bring them under the implacable watchful eyes of the officers of the SAS. The purpose was to prevent them not only from manning the guerrillas but "from informing, guiding, supplying, and lodging the ALN."¹⁴

From the outset of the dislocation operations, the basic objective of the colonial army was dictated by strategic considerations. Its primary immediate goal was to isolate the peasants from the "outlaws" by putting them under permanent surveillance in the *centres de regroupements*. As the long-range counterinsurgency perspective, it aimed at subjecting the uprooted captives to a "social surgery" so that either their will to fight would be broken or their loyalty to the revolutionary organization would be at least modified, if not won by the colonial power. Finally, a third minor goal emerged from the first two: when the news of systematic murder and dislocation leaked out, in order to disguise and even justify the devastation and "genocide" generated by the military strategy of the *zones interdites* (prohibited zones), followed by the regroupment of the peasantry into the camps, the colonial administration resorted to a well-orchestrated propaganda campaign designed to gain the support for the French effort of "pacifying" Algeria. Indeed, an official note, No. 146/G.R.P., stated that "it will be more convenient, whenever this is possible, not to carry this out in isolation from different actions undertaken in

favor of the *regroupement* by presenting them as improvements in agriculture, communal organization, housing, schools, sanitary services, etc." To this effect, statements were made to convey the impression that the peasants had voluntarily fled from the "rebels" and come to the French military posts to request protection.

By 1962, 2,350,000 peasants were in the *centres de regroupements*. Their forced dislocation was achieved through two levels of military operations. When it became obvious that the colonial army had lost complete control over rural districts, the joint chiefs of staff declared them *zones interdites*. After October 1956, the meaning of these areas came to signify "zones open in permanence to the fire of all the armies: infantry, air force, etc., and by definition everyone that could be found there was deemed to be a rebel."¹⁶ These terrorizing military actions were followed by periodic large-scale "search and destroy" inland operations, known in the military jargon of the time as *ratisage* (scraping off). As a result, the peasants who survived these various military activities were driven by force to the *centres de regroupements*, surrounded by barbed wire and mined fortifications; their rural villages were always eradicated. This scorched-earth strategy aimed at the total obliteration of the peasants' socio-economic life. Their livestock were either killed by the French war planes while grazing in the meadows, or seized and consumed; their houses were blown up and burned to the ground. In fact, as early as July 1956 I observed numerous villages that were destroyed in this fashion in the North Constantine areas. For instance, in February 1956 the French troops came to my native village on a surprise military operation in the early morning and caught the inhabitants while they slept. Nineteen peasants were shot. Fortunately, the rest of them escaped. *La Dépêche de Constantine* reported next day that 45 armed "outlaws" were killed by the "forces of order" in a decisive engagement. A few months later, in August 1956, the colonial army mounted another large-scale operation that lasted three days against a vast rural region situated between Constantine, El Milia, and Skikda. In only two peasant settlements, Beni Sbih and Beni Tlilan, 69 unarmed civilians were murdered. Again the same newspaper reported on the front page

that 120 "armed outlaws were killed in a fierce battle to the southeast of El Milia." In the two instances, the houses of the peasants were demolished.

The distance between the original peasant settlements that were dispersed into homesteads and the new locations of the *centres de regroupements* varied between 1 km. and 120 kms. This coerced relocation of the peasantry into these "concentration camps" was rechristened, under General de Gaulle's rule, the policy of *mille villages*. Efforts were made to present it to the outside world as a humanitarian action motivated by the French civilizing mission.

The Settlement Patterns of the Camps and the "Ethnological Law" of the Technicians of Counterinsurgency

The intent behind the concentration of the peasantry into the camps of regroupment may be discerned in the following passage written by Captain Charles Richard: "The essential is, in effect, to regroup these people who are everywhere and nowhere. The essential is to render them seizable for us. When we get hold of them, we shall be able then to do things that are impossible to do today and that will permit us perhaps to possess their minds after having gotten hold of their bodies."¹⁸

Besides the lessons derived from the historical French colonial experience, the theoreticians of counterinsurgency strategy relied heavily on the structural theory of anthropology. Indeed, they based their entire model for effectuating "social surgery" in the camps on their version of a pseudo-ethnological law of Lévi-Strauss. The goal of this "social surgery" was to change the attitudes of the peasantry toward the colonial order, which was objectively the primordial cause of the "Algerian rebellion." This law was stated in the following manner: by changing man's natural habitat and settlement patterns, his cognitive processes which predetermined his modes of social perception and thinking would be altered or restructured accordingly. As a consequence of such environmental changes, man's attitude towards his secular and sacred universes would be radically readjusted.

In fact, the two major French anthropologists, Lévi-Strauss and Bastide, propounded the view that the rearrangement of

the spatial dimension—such as the settlement patterns which shape the elemental symbolic projections of the most fundamental social structures and cultural patterns of a society—generates a generalized mutation. To support this, Lévi-Strauss noted that the Catholic missionaries in Brazil have seen the transformation of both the spatial relocation and the resettlement patterning as the prerequisite conditions for obtaining the conversion of the Bororo people to Christianity. “So vital to the social and religious life of the tribe is this circular lay-out that the Salesian missionaries soon realized that the surest way of converting the Bororo was to make them abandon their village and move to one in which the huts were laid out in parallel rows. They would then be, in every sense, disoriented. All feeling for their traditions would desert them, as if their social and religious systems . . . were so complex that they could not exist without the scheme made visible in their ground-plans and reaffirmed to them in the daily rhythm of their lives.”¹⁷ Thus, by the mere act of constructing models based on oppressive manipulations of colonized populations, structural anthropology unintentionally provided both a rationale and an incentive for the further manipulation of the oppressed peoples.

In accordance with this structuralist view, the French counterinsurgent officers proceeded to uproot the Algerian peasantry from its traditional habitat and relocate it in most cases in the piedmont. As already mentioned above, this regrouping operation was “carried on by dint of a great array of bayonets and cannons,” so that the previous social structures that maintained both the cohesiveness and the rebelliousness of the peasant society would be stripped of their underlying economic foundations. This operation was considered as a necessary prerequisite for the “restructuration” of “superstructures” of the subjugated rural society. The overall intent behind the regroupment policy was to force its members to accept passively the colonial power relationships established during the previous century. The goal of at least a number of SAS officers was very ambitious in its scope and implications; it entailed the disturbing notion that the historical collective consciousness of a peasantry in revolt, which grew out of an adequate perception of oppression and exploitation, could be repressed or preferably

erased from the memories of millions of individuals so that the status quo would be preserved under a neocolonial form of dependency.

The physical layout and the sites of the centers of regroupment must be described with the view to illustrating the basic contrast between life in the previous rural villages and life in the new resettlement patterns that were imposed upon the peasantry by the psychological warfare officers. Thus, the changes in the modes of life of the villagers were more than just brutally drastic. Although the peasantry had been subjected in most cases indirectly to arbitrary colonialist rule, it was still at least physically free to move and practice agriculture on the available cultivable lands left to it by colonization. In the camps, on the other hand, the captive population lived under martial law, which means that the officers in charge of a given camp had the power of life and death over the peasantry. Most of these officers were characterized by an authoritarian fascist personality. Once they were granted a pure form of power, they became maniacs governed only by their pathological whims of the moment. These authoritarian fascist officers resorted to militaristic methods in their administration of the camps. For instance, the entire existence of the regrouped peasants was subjected to a military order: awakening to reveille, fixed departure time for forced labor, curfew announced by a bell, compulsory daily report to the officers in military formation when decisions concerning the lives of the captives were announced, and so on.

The concentrationary universe created artificially by the counterinsurgent officers consisted of a geographical area of a mere seven square miles into which over two million persons were crowded. The peasants were in this way uprooted from their rural dispersed hamlets and villages in order to be herded into suffocating military compounds. The purpose was evidently to dissolve the traditional peasant social organization by the imposition of the new concentrationary residential settings within the camps. The salient features distinguishing the physical layout of the resettlement patterns were geometric symmetry and an overgeneralized architectural uniformity. As in a pro-

jective test, the structures of the new habitat within which the peasants were gathered reflected generally the French militaristic linear mind. The methods of establishing a *centre de regroupement* were summarized as follows by an officer who became an expert on these military operations: "To establish a *regroupement* is quite simple. One must begin by scraping off, then it is sufficient to choose an open space, to erect barbed wire, to lay out the dividing lines between the *gourbis* (small tile barracks), to distribute the locations, and to fix the deadline for the construction of the *gourbis*."¹⁸ It should be noted that there is no provision for the economic life of the regrouped people. As will be shown below, there were numerous instances of famine and starvation in these prison camps.

The captives were forced to construct their slum dwellings or *gourbis* according to a pre-established plan provided by the service of the Commissariat of Reconstruction and Rural Habitat and supervised by the army. The regrouped peasants were forced to build their houses and to pay the material costs of construction, although no one paid a compensation for their demolished houses in the villages of origin. Even later on, under the government of General de Gaulle when the French military began to build some standardized dwellings, the regrouped peasants had to pay half the cost of the barracks before they were even allowed to move into them. Cornaton reported that because of the creeping corruption within the SAS authorities, these captives were tricked into paying two to three times this prerequisite sum of money in order to get an inadequate dwelling place.¹⁹ This form of habitat was completely unadapted to the local conditions and to the customary housing patterns of the rural population.

This concentrationary architecture was conceived as a function of operational necessity; that is, it was designed in such a way as to satisfy the military exigencies of control and surveillance of the regrouped masses. According to several army officers in charge of the planning of these rural slums, the straight symmetrical lines permit the security forces in charge to clear off the streets easily with automatic weapons in case of demonstrations or riots.²⁰ But resettlement patterns express the implacable

"will" of the colonial order to "destructure in order to restructure" for the specific purpose of breaking the resistance put up by the subjugated society.

The choice of the site of the *centres de regroupements* was also made in terms of security imperatives. These camps were located either on rugged peaks which were very difficult to provision with potable water, or on mountain ridges that exposed the captive populations to violent storms and to a rigorous climate which overwhelmed the inhabitants who were inadequately housed, fed, and clothed, both in winter and summer. Other sites were situated in the foothills at the bottom of basins that were easily flooded during the rainy season. For instance, many children were drowned by floods in a camp near Bougie in 1958. The installment of camps in semi-desert areas resulted in the rationing of drinking water. Every inhabitant received only a half litre per day.

Once these millions of peasants were concentrated in the camps, the officers of psychological warfare devoted their efforts to the dismemberment of the village social organization, which was sometimes considered as the monocausal factor underlying the "rebellion" of the Algerians. They reorganized these peasants into nuclear families made up of a male as the breadwinner and a female as the housewife who is in charge of the children and domestic work. This atomization of the kinship organization was thought of as a prerequisite condition for ushering in *anomie*, which destroys the social solidarity of a human aggregate.

Effects of the Dislocation of the Peasant Rural Habitat

The systematic dislocation of the peasantry resulted in far-reaching but agonizing changes. The housing structures in the camps consisted of barracks or *gourbis* in straight geometrical close rows, surrounded by electrified or barbed wire and guard posts; the imposition of such a uniform structural resettlement pattern that characterized this concentrationary habitat actually served as a catalyst force that, instead of generating the atomization of the peasant social structures, further stimulated the homogenization of the Algerian rural society. Since the whole undertaking was motivated solely by strategic and operational considerations, the French military proceeded to concentrate a

maximum number of people over a minimum of space. The purpose was, of course, to reduce the perimeter to be guarded. The sites of the camps were chosen for strategic rather than hygienic and sanitary considerations.

Since the adult males either were killed, joined the ALN, or emigrated to the cities or to France in search of employment, the regrouped population involved mostly children, women, and old men. In 1961, it was estimated that some 60 percent of the captives were children under 12. Malnutrition and all sorts of epidemics resulted in the death of 175,000 children in the camps alone between 1958 and 1961, because the daily diet fell to one third of the normal subsistence level.²¹ The internal organization of the FLN estimated the death toll of this criminal policy to be at least 290,000. Indeed, Pastor Jacques Beaumont wrote in 1959 in his *Carnet de Notes*: "I know a place where, when we distributed some potatoes, the people ate them raw, without waiting to cook them; this occurred ten days ago, 75 kms. from Algiers." And he added gloomily, "I have seen, in another *centre de regroupement*, five children who were literally dying of hunger, another whose mother told me 'he is going to die,' and the nurse told me as she burst into sobs, 'there is nothing that can be done to save him.'" Another health officer informed Msgr. Rodhain of the current state of affairs that prevailed in most *centres de regroupement*: "The people in this camp began some time ago to eat grass." These widespread occurrences, deliberately provoked by the colonial power, induced Cornaton, who served in the French army, to note: "The military undertook a policy of pacification which assumed sometimes in certain regions the aspects of a true genocide."²²

But despite the fact that every camp was being observed day and night from one or more watch towers occupied by guards armed with electronic devices and machine guns, the entrapped peasants never lost contact with the revolutionary organization. In most instances the regrouped populations organized themselves into secret cells that were organically linked to the FLN-ALN parallel organizations. As a result, they succeeded in providing valuable military and political contributions. In these very *centres de regroupements* the ALN carried out important "operations under the noses of the guards."

However, the deracination of the peasantry from its rural communities ushered in a rapid process of *depaysanisation* which was translated into an increasing awareness of wage labor, the notion of employment and unemployment, and so on.

Moreover, like any prisoners in a just cause, the peasantry perceived this experience as a temporary ordeal that had to be overcome with honor and dignity. As a whole, the majority of the population was certain of the outcome of the war. The intensive conglomeration of millions of people of diverse backgrounds was bound to lead to the overall "homogenization" of the Algerian society. Urban patterns of life spread rapidly among those "urbanites without cities." What the experience of the camps mostly achieved was not by any means the submission of the population involved, but the brutal proletarianization or lumpenproletarianization of a large number of peasants.

The regrouping of peasants did not end once they were concentrated in the camps; various other operations of *resserrement* (compression) and *desserrement* (decompression) were continually carried out. That is, thousands of peasant households were transferred from one center to another, where they were mixed with thousands of other groups. Therefore, the traditional familiarity of the *zribat* and *farqat*, whose settlement patterns were characterized by small clusters of dispersed hamlets and homesteads, disappeared in the camps. All the peasants became anonymous ciphers ensnared inside ugly rural slums. Their common experience reinforced rather than dissolved their social solidarity, which made possible both passive and active resistance against the military order imposed upon the uprooted masses. The permanent maintenance of the organic link with the FLN-ALN organizations allowed them to continue to contribute to the decisive struggle of national liberation as well as to keep their individual dignity and thus to live the experience of the regroupment as a temporary ordeal.

The Basic Flaws Underlying the French Counter-revolutionary Doctrine

The social background of both the theoreticians and the practitioners of psychological warfare induced them to misconstrue both sociological theories and the nature of a revolu-

tionary situation. As a result of pressing operational requirements these officers simultaneously committed a double violence, that is, physical violence against the peasantry and violence against the role and implications of socio-cultural theories. The peasants were used as "rats" for an experiment in "social surgery"; and the social science theories that seemed to suit their aims were subjected to strategic requirements regardless of the consequences of their actions. In the long run the Machiavellian undertakings of these theorists failed, because revolutionary behavior defied reactionary scheming. Revolutionary upsurge cannot be contained either by conventional military action or by clever manipulative techniques of mass deception. Therefore the French counter-revolutionary doctrine collapsed because its proponents were "like men watching a dance from outside through heavy plate glass windows. They see the motions but they can't hear the music. They put the mechanical gestures down on paper with pedantic fidelity. But what rarely comes through to them are the injured racial feelings, the misery, the rankling slights, the hatred, the devotion, the inspiration, and the desperation. So they do not really understand what leads men to abandon wife, children, home, career, friends; to take to the bush and live gun in hand like a hunted animal; to challenge overwhelming military odds rather than acquiesce any longer in humiliation, injustice, or poverty."²³

The counter-revolutionary doctrine elaborated by the French officers of psychological warfare was based on falsification of both social science and revolutionary theory and practice. Dedicated revolutionaries were perceived as assigning "a pre-eminent role to psychological warfare. Its use is based on the sense of good and evil innate in every human being; if the revolution wishes to succeed, it must pervert this moral sense; the superiority of the ethical code of the West, which is assumed by these theorists, should give it an advantage over the enemy as long as it shows equal aptitude in the use of psychological warfare."²⁴

As a consequence of such a gross misconception of a revolutionary situation, the counter-revolutionary doctrine of psychological warfare contained within it basic flaws that undermined its practical application. By terrorizing the masses the

French counterinsurgents unleashed the forces of their own final destruction. The elaborated techniques of popular deception had no significant bearing on the uprooted peasantry. Although brutalizing in the extreme, the "social surgery" performed by the counterinsurgency forces backfired on them. The peasants who were trapped in the Hitlerite concentrationary camps came face to face with the dazzling reality of colonialism. Henceforth, they did not need their leaders to analyze and explain to them in the abstract the dehumanizing effects of an aberrant social order based on the domination of the majority by a minority of pampered settlers protected by a ruthless soldiery. From a social life characterized by heterogeneous conditions and fortunes, the experience of the regroupment made the peasants realize that they all shared a common fate. If they faltered and capitulated, they would all be condemned to a permanent yoke. Under such extreme conditions, colonial oppression became too concrete to be overlooked. Henceforth, the peasants, schooled in applied cruelty and violence taught them by the officers of psychological warfare, became perceptive observers of colonialist behavior. As such, they informed their leaders in the countryside in concrete terms that the agents of the "civilizing mission" were no more than degenerate mad dogs that had to be gotten rid of by any means possible and at whatever cost. As soon as a general consensus was achieved by both the leaders and the followers, any colonialist trappings were doomed to fail. One of the leaders of the FLN told Eqbal Ahmad that "revolutionary warfare does not require simple discontent among the masses but a sense of desperation and a grim determination to end injustice and humiliation. It demands patience with prolonged suffering, and a determined conspiracy of silence and militancy. The success of a revolutionary war is predicated upon the continual and increasing moral isolation of the enemy. When it becomes total, the war has been won, for the population will then fight to the last man."²⁵

However, the key to success in revolutionary warfare lies not only in a resolute will to fight but also in the way an oppressed population carries out a well-orchestrated and protracted struggle. The outcome of this struggle is thus in turn dependent on the specific tactics and strategy employed. Popular energies

should be channelled through efficient revolutionary structures that must be profoundly implanted among the masses. This is the only way that this revolutionary behavior which defies any conventional schemes can be synchronized at every organizational level from bottom to top.

The overall traumatic experience of the Algerian peasantry in the centers of regroupment sparks hope for the downtrodden masses all over the world, because it indicates that they cannot be put in their places by brute force; and at the same time it sows pessimism, anguish, and confusion among the oppressors and exploiters of all kinds, wherever they may be.

NOTES

1. Eric Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 242-243.
2. Serge Chakotin, *The Rape of the Masses: The Psychology of Totalitarian Propaganda* (London: The Labour Book Service, 1942), pp. 29-30.
3. W. Bosworth, *Catholicism and Crisis in Modern France: French Catholic Groups at the Threshold of the Fifth Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), pp. 183-184.
4. P. Paret, *French Revolutionary Warfare from Indochina to Algeria: The Analysis of a Political and Military Doctrine*, Princeton Studies in World Politics, No. 6 (New York: Praeger, 1964), p. 110.
5. L. M. Chassin, "Vers un Encerclement de l'Occident," *Revue de la Défense Nationale*, XII (May 1956), pp. 1198-1199.
6. R. Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (New York: Praeger, 1964), p. 6.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
9. M. Cornaton, *Les Regroupements de la Décolonisation* (Paris: Editions Ouvrières, 1967), p. 64.
10. A. A. Heggoy, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Algeria* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), p. 177.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
12. Florentin, *Le Commandant*, Rapport Officiel du 11 Decembre, 1960, p. 62.
13. Heggoy, *op. cit.*, p. 89.
14. Pierre Bourdieu and A. Sayad, *Le Déracinement: La Crise de l'Agriculture Traditionnelle en Algérie* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1964), p. 11.
15. Talbo-Bernigaud, "Les Zones Interdites," *Les Temps Modernes* (1961), pp. 714-715.
16. Mostefa Lacheraf, "Constances Politiques et Militaires dans les Guerres Coloniales d'Algérie," *Les Temps Modernes* (January 1961), pp. 780-781.
17. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (Paris: Plon, 1955), p. 204.

18. Bourdieu and Sayad, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
19. Cornaton, *op. cit.*, p. 81.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
21. *U.S. Army Area Handbook for Algeria* (January 1965), p. 81.
22. Cornaton, *op. cit.*, p. 91.
23. I. F. Stone, *In a Time of Torment* (New York: Vintage, 1968), pp. 173-174.
24. Paret, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
25. Eqbal Ahmad, "Revolutionary Warfare and Counterinsurgency," in Miller and Aya eds., *National Liberation: Revolution in the Third World* (New York: The Free Press, 1971), pp. 149-150.

You can build a socialist library at half-price
by joining

MONTHLY REVIEW ASSOCIATES

Membership entitles you to:

- A discount of 50% off the list price of any MR Press book. A \$12 book for \$6, or a \$3.95 paperback book for half price, represents a considerable saving—enough to enable you to buy twice as many books.
- A one-year subscription to MONTHLY REVIEW (if you are already a subscriber we renew your sub automatically).
- A choice of one of the following MR Press books: *Workers' Self-Management in Algeria* by Ian Clegg; *China Shakes the World* by Jack Belden; *Strategy for Revolution: Essays on Latin America* by Régis Debray; *Socialism in Cuba* by Leo Huberman and Paul M. Sweezy; and *Writings on the Paris Commune* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

Help MR Press become an effective press of the Left; help the magazine extend its influence, and help yourself to some important books by joining the Associates now.

Monthly Review Associates 116 W. 14th St. N.Y., N.Y. 10011

I enclose \$..... Please enroll me as an MR Associate.
Please send me the free book of my choice from the list above:

I am already a subscriber.

Check category below

\$ 25 - \$49; £10.50 - £20.50

\$ 50 - \$99; £21 - £41.50

\$100 and over; £42 and over

Supporting Associate

Sustaining Associate

Foundation Associate

Name

Street

City State Zip

Please make check payable to Monthly Review Associates.

Those who wish to pay in sterling should remit to our London office.