

The Sale of Blood

Al-Jumhuriya, 7 January 1956.

That was in the last days of this past August, when people in every quarter of the earth heard of that fierce, hateful struggle between the French and our brothers among the people of Morocco and Algeria, and of the grave effect it had in stirring up French public opinion, and in splitting the French into factions and parties; the sincere and faithful among them wished for their homeland to desist from this sinful aggression, which denies outright the very principles of the French Revolution, while the greedy and covetous for wealth wished France to extend its dominion over those lands by whatever means might serve that end, however much blood of her own sons and of the peaceable people of those lands might be spent for it, and whatever values of right, justice, and fairness might be cast aside along the way.

The newspapers in every quarter of the earth were alert to these grave events, eager to receive news of them at every hour of the night and day, and the producers of cinema films were no less alert to these events nor less eager for their stories ... for the newspapers alarm with reports and pictures, but people read them separately, each withdrawn into himself, and so they are alarmed between themselves and their own consciences, and they speak of it when they meet one another.

As for the cinema films, they produce a social terror when they surprise great crowds with images of these events moving before them, occurring within their sight and hearing, so that they witness them, however far the reaches of time and place may lie between them and the events, and are affected by them as a witness is affected, not as one who is merely absent, as though they themselves took part in them and bore their burdens and their sins, and these films stir in their hearts the utmost terror that leaves no aftermath and carries no sin.

And people love nothing so much as they love terror while they themselves are safe, nor are they so fond of anything as they are fond of anxiety while their bodies remain settled in their places, their hearts calm within their breasts, and their consciences content, exposed to no harm or affliction. For this reason, the producers of cinema films are eager to capture images of these events as they occur, and to display them to the crowds, so as to stir in people's souls this safe fear, this reassured terror.

One of the film companies was eager to capture something of the horror that was being poured upon the people of Algeria in those days; so it cabled one of its representatives to seek the means of capturing some of that, and to be ahead of the rest and conspicuous in it, so as to claim for itself what it loved, and to outdo its rivals in being first to satisfy the public.

But its instruction reached its representative — so it seems — after the time had already passed, and the representative was eager to attain from it a measure of satisfaction, and money is the readiest means to that and the most effective in its result, so nothing prevented him from spending a few thousand or many thousand to attain thereby some part of what he desired, if he had missed the whole of what he wanted.

And so he did: he hastened to one of the soldiers and negotiated the matter with him, and offered him a little money or a great deal, and the soldier accepted without difficulty or hardship. And what was to prevent him, when prisoners were many and bullets were ready to hand, and the money was little, and needs are without number or end?!

And so the soldier chose one of the prisoners at the appointed time for that, and ordered the film company's representative to make ready for the pictures, and ordered the prisoner to walk forward before him, and ordered the instrument of death to fire some of what it held of bullets, and the prisoner fell, writhing in his blood, and the representative's hand slipped into his pocket, and then the soldier's hand slipped into his pocket, and the matter was settled!

And the blood of the innocent was shed, sold for a few counted notes out of thousands of francs, as though no one had seen anything, as though no one had heard anything, as though the blood of men had not been forbidden to men without cause! As though the souls of prisoners were the property of the soldiers, to be taken whenever they wished, wherever they wished, however they wished! As though the laws of war — if there was a war — did not guarantee the safety of prisoners' lives and blood until judgment had been passed on their case, permitting them to live or imposing death upon them.

But people saw and heard, and some confided to others, and some then made ready for others, and the news spread and grew until it rose to the commander of the army, and then to the governor-general. And the government ordered an inquiry just as it ordered concealment, and forbade publication and banned broadcast. And the inquiry proceeded

slowly, faltering, if indeed anyone had taken it up at all.

Meanwhile, the pictures were sent to the film company, and were published in North America and South America, and were published in some American newspapers, while the French were either heedless and indifferent or awake and alert, but they said nothing, nor did they trouble themselves to speak, nor did they burden themselves with blame or denial; for it was merely cheap blood, sold at a paltry price, too trifling to deserve blame or denial! And when have masters ever cared for the blood of slaves?! And when have the civilized, steeped deep in civilization, ever concerned themselves with the souls of the savages among the Arabs of Algeria and its Berbers?!

And five months passed in which this event was neither mentioned nor denied, but the electoral war was blazing in France, reaching the utmost pitch of violence possible, and Mendès France had no choice but to bring down Edgar Faure so as to seize power in his place when the National Assembly convened, and he had a popular newspaper promoting him in the elections, and nothing prevented it from broadcasting news of this sinful event so as to stir people up against the head of government two or three days before the election; so that people would remember this sin on the day they went to the ballot boxes?!

And so the newspaper L'Express published this news; and the crowds were stirred by it, and the government was stirred by it, and all the French newspapers plunged into it, and then election day came, and Edgar Faure did not fall, nor did Mendès France fall; rather, both rivals succeeded, to go on with their struggle before the deputies when they convened. And it was only natural that neither one nor the other should fall; for the blood of a man from the people of Algeria is too slight a thing for a seat to be lost over it by a French candidate to the French National Assembly, whoever that candidate might be, and whoever that Algerian might be!

This is the story that you may read in all the French newspapers, and that the telegraph broadcast to every quarter of the world, and that some Egyptian newspapers wrote of, and you need not ask how the blood of man came to be held so cheap by man, nor ask how the inquiry faltered for five whole months without reaching any conclusion, nor ask how the commander of the army in Algeria and the governor-general of Algeria went unaccountable for the faltering of the inquiry through all these long months, nor ask how the French government kept silent, and its

opponents kept silent, and those among the French in Algeria and in France itself who knew of this news kept silent — how all of these kept silent on this hateful matter for five full months, and did not mention it except when one of them needed it to bring down his rival in the election?! Nor ask about these supreme, sacred values: the values of right, justice, liberty, equality, and doing justice to the wronged against the wrongdoers, and taking up the cause of the weak against the strong!

What did the civilized, those excelling in civilization among the French who were the first to recognize the rights of man more than a century and a half ago, do with these values? Do not ask anything of this! For you live in an age in which all these values have been cast to waste; unbridled force has wasted them, when it finds none to turn it back from aggression or hold it off from injustice and tyranny.

And the love of money has wasted them, that love which counts nothing equal to the filling of coffers, and does not hesitate to shed blood and take lives, to orphan children and widow women, so that a small handful of people might be granted to live secure and at ease in a soft life whose substance is pleasure and enjoyment; and self-interest has wasted them, that self-interest which permits a soldier to shed a prisoner's blood so that he might enjoy, for a day or some days, a life better than the life of a soldier.

Do not ask anything of this; for you live in an age in which civilization has made everything easy for the strong, and has made the blood of the weak the cheapest thing that is bought and sold, and ask, if you wish, about something else, which is worthier of being asked about, and of being thought over, and of troubling your waking hours through the day, and driving off your sleep through the night: how can humanity endure the colonialism that drags upon it all this degradation?!