

Boualem Sansal

2011

Peace Prize of the German Book Trade
Speeches

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Gottfried Honnefelder, President of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association

Greeting

Humankind's richness lies in its diversity and colorfulness. Indeed, who would want to do without the variety of ethnicities, each of which is a unique combination of heritage, language, religion and culture. Together, this variety of differences forms an almost inexhaustible spectrum of perspectives - each of which is equally different and distinct - with which we view the world and ourselves. It is a spectrum that one perspective alone will never be able to fully grasp.

Each of these perspectives represents a homeland for the individual born into it. It is through these perspectives that individuals find their world and themselves - just as the language in which we learn to give our first answers informs the source of our speaking, of our native tongue. It is this medium - the medium of what was first familiar - in which we gain the outlook on life that lends us our sense of self and makes us capable of social interaction.

But the differences that make us unlike one another also allow the "other" to appear as the unfamiliar "foreigner" - something which can seem fascinating at the same time as unsettling and hostile. As indispensable as it is for all individuals to have roots in a nexus of language, origin and culture, differences in ethnicity, religion and culture can also trigger mutual hatred, appear as a destructive disturbance to larger power entities or become the bone of contention between competing powers.

Indeed, it seems that ethnic dissimilarities become a special problem precisely in the process of dissolving and forming more comprehensive state entities - those which characterize modern times - whether it be in the form of a claim to power by one ethnic group over another or in the suppression of all or a single ethnic group in favor of a dominant, higher-ranking claim to power. Whenever these kinds of strategies of domination are combined with totalitarian claims of an ideological nature, we see various kinds of repressive mechanisms, terrorist threats, wars of extermination and even genocide take the place of the rivalries between tribes and

cultures that have always accompanied human history.

No one knows the simultaneous richness and potential threat of ethnic diversity - a diversity born of an abundance of histories, languages and religions - better than someone who not only lives and speaks in it, but also writes about it in such a way as to bring to light the distinctiveness that shapes the different worldviews and their co-existence. The person who writes in this way can - and, indeed, must - become a witness, someone who resists and must resist when the richness that he experiences while writing is at risk of perishing or falling silent.

This individual knows that it is precisely the encounter with the "other," with the "foreign," that allows the self to emerge in its own distinctiveness. Only when seen in the light of other traditions and values am I able to understand my own tradition in a way that allows its potential to emerge in its entire fullness and binding force. It is precisely the other's differentness that allows it to become the foil of one's own self. Indeed, cultures are enriched - rather than dissipated - when they become aware of other cultures.

However, this of course presupposes the ability to see the world and oneself through the other's eyes. The extent to which this ability gains traction will solely determine whether an integrating humankind will also become human - a humankind whose unity is not owed to totalitarian claims to power but, rather, to a diversity of origins.

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Those who know Boualem Sansal and his work will be aware that, up until now, I have been talking about nothing else than the situation in which he lives in today's Algeria and about the way in which he raises his voice as an author. It is the quality of his testimony and the courage with which he bears witness that we honor today.

Born in Algeria's colonial era, Sansal came to know the centuries-old multilingual diversity of his country: of its original Berber population, of which he is himself a member, and of the Kabyle, Tuareg and Mozabite peoples, but also of the French and increasingly influential Arab segment of the population. Here in Africa's second-largest country, independence from France was not followed by a much-anticipated democracy, which would have allowed this long-standing diversity to grow. Instead, it was followed by a trail of blood resulting from civil wars, coup d'états, unrest, terrorism and, in the end, a dictatorship that does not temper but, rather, submits to the increasing dominance of Islamism and Arab nationalism - one that doesn't give anything else space to live.

It was growing anger about the spread of terror, the cynical abuse of power and the erosion of freedoms that caused Sansal, an engineer and economist by trade, to become a writer at the age of 50. He wrote his first novel in four months. The fact that he calls things as they are means that he promptly became - in a manner similar to Si Larli, the hero of this first novel - persona non grata. Both he and his wife soon lost their professional opportunities, and attacks on his house followed. As the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ) noted, in the end, the only thing he had left to lose was "his life."

And yet, Boualem Sansal has stayed put and continued writing. Although his books are banned in Algeria, the tremendous success of his novels and essays (published by Gallimard) has lent him a voice that is at once impressive and

extremely unwelcome. In the same way that the hero of his most recent novel returns to the "Rue Darwin" - which is also its title - to dig up the dead, Sansal also fathoms the depths of the deadly developments in his country. He reminds us of the Shoah of the Jews, which had lapsed into a taboo subject; he defends against the misuse of Islam; he points to how Arabism has suppressed his country's diversity of languages; he does not remain silent about the long-term effects that German National Socialism has had on Algeria; and he criticizes the West's double standard when it comes to the uprisings in North Africa.

His goal is none other than a democracy that lives up to its name by allowing the people inhabiting it to be free to live their growing diversity and differentness. Against the constant threat of terrorism in his country, he issues a demand for a dialogue between languages and cultures, which also entails a dialogue between Algeria and Europe. He finds the strength to do this in the "double culture," by writing in masterly French about the diversity in that part of Africa - a diversity that, for its own part, has lost its voice.

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Boualem Sansal's work is a call for the freedom of languages, cultures and religions that is both exceedingly courageous and remarkable in literary terms. It is an honor to award the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade to him and to thereby create a resonance in the German-speaking world for his plea.

Petra Roth, Lord Major of the City of Frankfurt

Greeting

Ladies and gentlemen, in the name of the City of Frankfurt am Main, I would like to warmly welcome you to the awarding of the 2011 Peace Prize of the German Book Trade to Boualem Sansal.

In keeping with tradition, we are bestowing the Peace Prize here in the Church of St. Paul, the birthplace of German parliamentarianism and a location that continues to be a symbol of a “democratic spring” in Germany. Could there be a better place to honor Boualem Sansal, the great Algerian writer and relentless fighter for the peaceful democratization of his home country? And could there be a better time to honor him, a year in which the autocratic rulers of Egypt, Tunisia and now, as seems likely, also Libya were disempowered by their own people?

The relief and joy that North Africa’s European neighbors feel about its democratic awakening is admittedly great. But, they still have an equal amount of concern as to whether the much-touted “Arab Spring” will truly fulfill the long-term hopes of its peoples. No one knows this better than Boualem Sansal. As both a writer and a critic of the system, Sansal has watched the upheavals in the Arab world with only cautious optimism. Although heroism of any kind is foreign to him, he has still called for the end of Algeria’s authoritarian regime more courageously than any other. Instead of going into exile, he continues to live in his multiethnic homeland even today – despite repression and at the cost of a sound means of existence. And he is the

type of person who worries equally about the future of the entire region.

In Germany, when a writer triggers an uproar, he or she quickly becomes a permanent feature on the talk-show circuit. In other parts of the world, doing so could mean risking life and limb. This is precisely why we commemorate the courage of many authors here in the Church of St. Paul. Like hardly any other author in the region between Europe and Africa, Boualem Sansal embodies a “littérature engagée” that is free of all ideology and solely committed to human dignity and the truth. We can also thank him for not sacrificing what is distant and foreign to a gesture of false intimacy and blind tolerance, to a gesture of supposedly “world literature.” Instead, by capturing the determination and uniqueness of Northern Africa, he rescues it from becoming relativized.

We owe it to Boualem Sansal to expressly thank him for assuming the responsibilities that come with being a critical intellectual and a great writer who knows only one authority: the truth and the universality of human rights.

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Dear Boualem Sansal, I congratulate you warmly on winning the 2011 Peace Prize of the German Book Trade.

Peter von Matt

Laudatory speech

Literature is a slow-moving force. When writers lament their ineffectiveness, we shouldn't pity them. Books are autonomous beings. The effects they have on this world are unpredictable, and authors really have nothing to say about it. Many works lie dormant in a corner for years only to later break out and capture the hearts and minds of an entire century. Others roar up and fizzle out again in what seems like a matter of seconds. In principle, though, what Heinrich von Kleist once said about a political book still holds true: "This book is one of those books that blasts through the stubbornness of the time that cramps it in - but it does so very slowly, not by explosion, but more like a root in a rock." This sentence is all the more remarkable because Kleist himself most certainly would have liked for his own work to have achieved success par explosion.

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Literature is a slow-moving force and, in the long run, there is no rock that can resist it - at least, that is, when literature makes full use of its resources. To blast through the stubbornness of the time requires not only goodwill, but also art. Thus, we must make it quite clear from the very beginning that the man we are honoring today is in equal parts artist and political mind. He is an irrepressible storyteller and an outstanding satirist; he is witty and wise and relentless in his diagnoses of what doesn't work; he is merciless in his judgment of the greed of the powerful; and he is always moved by compassion for the fate of ordinary people in his home country of Algeria. He loves this country just as he loved his mother, who lived a philanthropic Islam in manifest devoutness and attentive performance of rites and prayers. There are many mother figures in Sansal's work, and they always slip gingerly into the symbolic. These mothers - with their great hardships and meager hopes - reflect the tortured land; and the helplessness of the sons vis-à-vis their suffering mothers also reflects the helplessness of Boualem Sansal when faced with conditions in his homeland. This would sound trivial, and it might be even be

true, if Sansal wasn't the great writer he is. His highly-detailed realism pushes us face-first into the daily reality of today's Algeria. His writing affects all five of our senses - it stinks, it screams, it dazzles, it burns our skin and it makes our tongue slippery. Indeed, the sensory onslaught we experience as readers can sometimes even prevent us from immediately perceiving, behind all the tumult, the simple outlines of what the author is actually writing about, whether it be power, violence, cruelty or love. Sansal's writing vibrates as it is held in tension between the microscopically captured small and the smallest, on the one hand, and the large arch of symbolic structure, on the other. It is only through this type of compositional art that he is at all able to speak about the political in its entirety.

Boualem Sansal loves his country. Otherwise, he would have left it long ago, just like many of the young people in his novels do when they turn their backs on their mothers and break away across the sea. There is a special term for them: harragas. Today, this word looms like an eerie beacon over the entire Maghreb coast. The harragas want to get away - just away - over to Europe, even if it means trading one form of misery for another. They are young. They want to work. They want to make something out of their lives - something that has a face. And they have no chance. The American Declaration of Independence once codified the pursuit of happiness as a fundamental right of every man; but it is exactly this right - the right to make it on your own - that they are denied. Sansal also speaks of this desperation when he writes about his country. Indeed, "Harraga" is the title of his most gripping novel.

At the same time, Algeria is rich, very rich. It has decades' worth of oil and natural gas, and it exports both resources in huge quantities. Everyone should be able to have a piece of that pie. Things should be arranged so that everyone with an entrepreneurial spirit, everyone who has preserved a natural joy for learning and working, can make something of themselves. In this way,

they can one day say to their children: "Look, this is how I made it, on my own. And now you can benefit from this and keep it going." Where, if not here - a country in which oil and natural gas flow like milk and honey in the Promised Land - could a diversified economy with sound infrastructures be set up, one in which every individual could find a niche for his or her talent? But vultures gather wherever there is oil. The 60 billion US dollars in energy exports that flow back to Algeria each year make their way into many open hands. And even the most experienced experts can only speculate on exactly which hands get what. Money engenders discretion. And the state is more than willing to enforce this discretion in the form of censorship and control of the public sphere. Unlike those picturesque autocrats who characterized the Arab world until recently, from the outside, Algeria appears to be a very clearly structured presidential republic. The president is elected by the people every five years, and the elections are in no way a mere farce. However, any attempt to gain a clear picture of actual power relations is like walking through a dense fog. We can only fully comprehend this predicament when we listen to experts. The more they know and tell, the more enigmatic the predicament becomes. There are undisputed centers of power, such as the official government, the army, the police, the intelligence agency, industrial organizations, Islamic movements and a colorful mafia. And yet, nobody seems to know exactly how these centers of power behave in relation to each other; or the extent to which they are enemies or allied or both simultaneously; or exactly when one scratches the other's back or when they come to blows. Algeria's political identity is a puzzle even for people active in the government's innermost circles. A couple of years ago, Major General Mohamed Touati, the security advisor to President Bouteflika, wrote the following with astonishing frankness: "The regime is neither dictatorial, nor democratic, nor presidential, nor parliamentary ... We certainly don't live in a monarchy; but, all in all, do we really live in a republic?" This entire sentence is one big question mark.

The competing power groups keep each other in a mutual and precarious equilibrium, and there seems to be enough money for them all. There is no precise political term for such a

system. But when we think of the recent revolutions in the Arab world, and when we think of what may still become of them, it's possible that the missing term has yet to emerge. The fact is that Algeria already went through a Tunisian- and Egyptian-type of revolution in 1988. It was followed by three hopeful years, and then a barbaric civil war broke out. It lasted seven years and cost 200,000 lives, most of them civilian. When the carnage was over, the system we know today was constructed. Similar things could happen elsewhere as well.

In addition to this microscopic view, Boualem Sansal's work also features the historical perspective. Since he loves his homeland, its history is ever-present to him. As part of his character, it permeates his writing completely. It is stirring in each and every sentence. His characters become representatives of historical processes yet remain distinct individuals. One example can be found in his latest, as yet untranslated novel "Rue Darwin," in the form of the powerful grandmother figure, an entrepreneur on a grand scale, director of the country's most successful brothel, head of a clan that has succeeded in networking itself worldwide in today's globalized economy despite coming from the depths of the past. Though she is figure straight out of a Fellini film, she lives and rules not in a fantastical world but, rather, in this sharply-seen Algeria with its terrible history.

And it is a terrible history. Indeed, there are very few countries in Europe's radius whose history in the second half of the 20th century was as bloody. Already on May 8, 1945, the day Europe drew a deep breath of relief, there was a massacre in Algeria that claimed thousands of lives. From then on, the killing never really stopped - and it continues even today. The names given to each battle depend on who has the privilege of interpreting them at the time: It can be a war of liberation, a rebellion, a coup d'état, a religious war, an act of terror. In July of this year alone, in Sansal's current hometown of Boumerdès, eight attacks were carried out resulting in death and injury. The author himself has put up a barbed-wire fence around his house, he doesn't go out at night, and he never drives in rural areas. So, what does he do? He writes. He tells stories. He speaks of his life - even though doing so means putting it at risk.

You can still tell that his first novel, “The Barbarians’ Sermon,” was like opening the floodgates. The narrative gushes in broad deluges in all directions and spills over the edges of the criminal story. Again and again, the author adds to his large lamentation over his country’s plight. He attacks those profiting from revolution, and he ridicules the inability of decorated, prominent figures to even set up a functioning water network for the population. Then, once again, he praises a time gone by in which Jews and Christians, Muslims and atheists, Berbers and Arabs lived here in peace. He speaks of faith as being something that contemplative souls still experience rather than the barking dictates from command centers. This first novel is an unstructured boulder – a writer’s volcanic self-discovery. But it paved the way for the slender, precisely balanced novels that followed quickly thereafter. One of them, the documentary novel of the German SS officer who hides his complicity in the Shoah by morphing into an Algerian resistance fighter, changed historical consciousness in the Maghreb – and beyond.

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Sansal lives in Algeria, and his books deal passionately with it. Nevertheless, they are not allowed to be published there. They are smuggled in and circulated in secret. He himself belongs to no party and no movement. He is a lone voice that trusts in the slow-moving force of literature. He does not believe in change par explosion; he believes much more in the persistent strength with which roots burst through rock. Considering the real balance of power, isn’t this nothing more than self-deception, than a

grand illusion? It may be, but whoever speaks that way has already given up. Whoever speaks that way works in the service of those who share power and pocket the money. Resignation is not only the renouncement of action; it is also a destructive behavior in its own right. Sansal refuses to engage in such behavior. Instead, he writes and, in doing so, he enters into a dialogue with his contemporaries. His 2006 manifesto “Poste Restante: Alger” begins with a sentence whose explosive nature is not immediately clear: “My dear fellow countrymen and women. We have never really had the opportunity to speak to one another. I mean, among ourselves, we Algerians, freely, seriously, methodically, without reservation, face-to-face, around a table with a glass.” This might sound good-natured, but it’s a revolutionary act. The sentence speaks of the freedom of the word as the basis of every other freedom. It speaks of public discourse as a dynamic event, and the only one from which truth can arise – truth not as command but as the result of exchange, dialogue and rational argumentation. This truth is agile; it is constantly reshaping itself. Lessing was the first to speak of it, and one has repeatedly forgotten it in Germany all too often. Only where truth can be formed and transformed in open debate – as the common creation of free spirits – can there be peace. War begins with truth ordered from above long before the first gun is fired. In his irreverent resistance to doctrines, in his outspoken objections, in his anger, mockery and mourning, Boualem Sansal advances the open debate of free spirits. And anyone who loves peace should be grateful to him.

Boualem Sansal

Acceptance speech

Peter von Matt, my esteemed laudator, has spoken so well of me and of my work in his speech that I have nothing to add, except to say thanks; thank you to you, Ladies and Gentlemen for the distinguished honour you have done me by coming to see me, to the German Publishers and Booksellers Association for the princely honour you have done me in awarding me your prize, the Friedenspreis, one of the most prestigious distinctions of your great and beautiful country. In the context of today's world, your gesture is particularly moving and heartening, it testifies to your interest in the efforts we, the peoples of the South, are making to free ourselves from the evil and archaic dictatorships in our countries in a once glorious and enterprising Arab-Islamic world that has been insulated and stagnant for so long that we have forgotten we have legs, that we have a head and that legs can serve to stand, to walk, to run, to dance if we so choose, and that with a head we can do something inconceivable and magnificent, we can invent the future and live it in the present in peace, liberty and friendship. It is an exhilarating and redemptive ability: we invent the future even as it invents us. Mankind is very fortunate to possess such a faculty, to be able to live according to its own will within the unfathomable and indomitable fabric that is Life. In fact this is a banal truth, it is discovering it which is surprising; life is a constant, a revolutionary invention and we are living poems, romantic and surrealist, carrying within us eternal truths and infinite promise, to truly see us one must look below the surface. The free man has no choice but to act like a god, an audacious creator who constantly forges ahead, for otherwise he sinks into the non-being of fatalism, of slavery, of perdition. Camus, the Franco-Algerian rebel, urged us not to resign ourselves, words we believe now more than ever, in a time of terror and hope courage is our only option because it is what is decent and right; this is why we look to the future with confidence.

Thank you, dear Peter, for your powerful words and for your friendship, thanks to you I can use my time to talk about a few things that are dear to my heart, about this prize, about my

country, about the Arab Spring. You have spared me the painful task of talking about my work. Something, incidentally, I would not have done as well as you have. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

My thanks go, naturally, to the Friedenspreis jury and its president, the esteemed Gottfried Honnefelder, I am particularly indebted to them for considering my work to be an act of political commitment which, as you say in your official statement "encourages intercultural dialogue in an atmosphere of respect and mutual understanding". This has a particular resonance for me at a time when a wind of change is blowing through our Arab countries, bringing with it those humanist values, born of freedom and hence universal, which are the bedrock of my commitment. Literary merit, however great, is, I believe, worth little unless it is in the service of a great cause, the promotion of a language, a culture, a political or philosophical vision. I would like to believe that what we do, we writers, filmmakers, poets, philosophers, politicians, has contributed, if only in some small way, to hastening this Arab Spring which makes us dream, makes us impatient as we watch it unfold, driven as it is by the spirit of freedom, of newfound pride and of courage, facing down every threat and, so far, thwarting every attempt to hijack it; and if I have contributed to it in some small way, it is only as one among many Arabic intellectuals and artists who are infinitely more deserving. Some have achieved great fame and their name alone can bring a crowd to its feet.

In this church, in 2000, you honoured my compatriot Assia Djebar who has done much to broadcast the obvious fact that, even in Arab-Islamic countries, woman is a free creature and that unless women are fully possessed of their freedom there can be no just world, only a sick, absurd, vicious world that cannot see it is dying. I can tell you that her struggle has borne fruit: in Algeria, the resistance, true, deep-rooted noble resistance is essentially the preserve of women. During the civil war of the '90s, the black decade, as we call it, when women were the prime targets not only of the Islamists but of the other

camp, of the government and its supporters who saw them as the root of all our misfortunes and used the full force of the law and of propaganda to crush them, they resisted magnificently and now, in coping every day with a difficult present they are fashioning the future. Besides, they are, as always, our last resort.

With your permission at this point I would like to turn for a moment to my wife, who is sitting in the front row between our dear hosts Gottfried Honnefelder and Peter von Matt. I want to look her in the eye as I thank her: dear Naziha, thank you for everything, for your love, your friendship, your patience and for the quiet courage you have shown down the years through all the ordeals we have come through and God knows they were painful, the civil war, the descent into the absurd, the growing, systematic, sterile isolation. This prize which honours us is rightfully yours.

I would also like to thank my distinguished predecessors, the laureates of this famous prize, the Friedenspreis, who have taken the time to come and attend this imposing ceremony, among them Karl Dedecius and Friedrich Schorlemmer. Seeing them sitting here in front of me I feel as nervous and intimidated as a pupil in front of his teachers.

My thanks, too, to my publishers and friends who have made the trip to Frankfurt and who are in the hall tonight, Antoine Gallimard, who presides over the fortunes of Les Editions Gallimard, Katharina Meyer, the director of Merlin Verlag. I salute my German translators, Regina Keil-Sagawe, Riek Walther and Ulrich Zieger who are here today. Without them, who would have read me? It is to them I owe my readership in Germany. I hope my other publishers will forgive me for not mentioning them by name, I have so little time. I owe them much and I thank them all.

In passing I would like to say that I regret the fact that the Algerian Ambassador to Germany is not with us, because today, through me, it is Algeria, the country and its people who are being honoured. That empty chair saddens and worries me, I see in it a ominous sign, it means that my situation in Algeria will be no better even as I bring home a peace prize. If they can hear me, I would like to reassure my compatri-

ots, and to tell them that we are not alone, that in this crowded hall are men and women who believe in us, who support us, among them great writers whose voices carry far, one day that voice will reach them and instil in them that fillip of courage necessary to take on a tyrant. I thank them with all my heart.

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I would now like to go back to those things I wanted to say, things that are dear to my heart. The first takes me back to the now unforgettable day earlier in 2011 - May 10 to be precise - when I received a letter from Germany, from President Gottfried Honnefelder announcing the incredible, unthinkable news that I been chosen as the laureate for the 2011 Peace Prize, a prize which since its inception in 1950 has honoured people of great standing. In all honesty, I was dumbstruck, I thought there must have been some mistake, a whole catalogue of mistakes that meant that I, a humble writer, an accidental militant, a hack as those in official circles in Algeria call me, was being awarded this prestigious honour, a distinction, I can assure you, I had never dreamed of for a moment. It was a serious shock, one that left me beset by anxious, existential questions which plagued me all summer and still plague to this day. If I am indeed the man to whom the peace prize is being given, then I was already a different man... and I didn't realise it! I was suddenly afraid that people would accuse me of ambivalence, false modesty, cynical ambition, naïve inconsistency; I am an easy-going man and I might unwittingly be guilty of one or other of these failings. Yet I am simply myself, unremarkable, and, truth be told, a rather timid man. But is it possible to remain unchanged with the weight of such a prize on one's shoulders?

This is your prize, Ladies and Gentlemen of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association, you know its power to change - I would say to transfigure, for the change is instantaneous, it happens in the moment the announcement is made, as though by magic - those upon whom you bestow it, you know how it can intimidate them, can change them or make them realise that over time they have already changed and that their work no belongs to a different order, one greater than position they imagined they held as writers, philosophers, playwrights, etc, it

makes them realise that they were working for some higher cause, for peace, and not merely to satisfy the narcissistic need to write. We truly discover ourselves through the eyes of others. It is phenomenon of relativity, we live through ourselves but it is through others that we exist, it is through their questioning gaze that we become conscious of our existence and our importance. Standing here at this lectern facing you, I am both myself and someone else, a man I did not know, that I still do not know, the man you have chosen to receive the 2011 Peace Prize. The prize creates the merit, undoubtedly, just as the function creates the organ. I served peace unwittingly, now I will serve it consciously, something which will require of me other skills, I don't know what they might be, perhaps the sense of strategy and prudence that is as indispensable in the art of peace as in the art of war. The peace prize is like the hand of God, like a magician's wand, the moment it touches your forehead it transfigures you and turns you into a soldier of peace.

You can imagine how bewildered I was by the news. Flattered, but bewildered. It was a quantum leap into another world, that of a fame that is greater than you, where the individual disappears behind the image people have of him. A world of great responsibilities which demands ambitions of equal greatness. They say life reveals like developing fluid, every day we become a little more... what we already are. Only at the end will we know what we were at the beginning. Relativity again. Believe me, I had my doubts: I'm being given a peace prize? I thought, I who have lived with war my whole life, who talk only of war in my books and who, perhaps, believe only in war, because it is always there blocking out path, because, after all, we exist only because of war, it is war which makes us cherish life, it is war which makes us dream of peace and strive to find it; sadly, as it happens, such is the history of Algeria down the centuries that we have never had the choice between war and peace, but only between war and war, and what wars they were, each forced upon us, each all but wiped us out until the last, the long, savage war of liberation against colonialism from 1954 and 1962 which, as massacre followed massacre, we discovered was like a Matryoshka doll: nested within the war of independence with its air of nobility was another war, a shameful, cruel, fratricidal war; we fought the colonial po-

wers and we fought each other, FLN against MNA, Arabs against Berbers, the religious against the secularists thereby preparing the hatreds and divisions of tomorrow, and within that war was still another war, the insidious and odious war waged by the leaders of the nationalist movement in their race for power leaving the future of freedom and dignity for which our parents had taken up arms no chance.

And yet, after eight years of war, came peace, but it was a curious peace, it lasted for only a day, long enough for a coup d'état, the first of many, for on the day after the declaration of independence, July 5 1962, the freedom earned in blood was stolen from the people, brutally, contemptuously as one might steal money from the poor, and so began the dark, tragic endless trench warfare that pitted the people against an invisible army, an omnipresent political police supported by a sprawling bureaucracy against which we could do nothing, only through patience and cunning could we resist, survive.

The liberation did not bring liberty, still less civil liberties, it brought isolation and shortages. It was a bitter pill to swallow. Then, in 1991, without so much as a pause in which to assess the psychological damage inflicted by that long and humiliating submission, we were pitched into the worst of all wars, a civil war, an indiscriminate barbarity foisted on us by the Islamist hordes and the military-police complex which left hundreds of thousands dead, left the people destitute and which sundered the miraculous bond which holds a nation together. Now, this barbarism has declined, the protagonists (the Turbans and the Peaked Caps as we call them in Algeria) made a lucrative deal, they shared out the land the oil revenues between them. These mafia-like arrangements were enacted under cover of impressive legislation likely to win over even the most difficult Western observers and their stated aim was civil harmony, national reconciliation, in short complete, fraternal, blissful peace; in reality this peace was merely a stratagem to reward the killers, finish off the victims and with them bury truth and justice forever. They proved themselves to be master strategists, they succeeded in seducing Western democracies and this - the realization that there was no Good, no Truth to be found anywhere - was what finally finished us.

The Turbans seduced them first, in 1991, making much of the supposed legitimacy conferred on them at the ballot box - elections which in fact were rigged - a legitimacy they had been robbed of by the military; when their true, horrifying hateful treacherous nature was later revealed, it was the turn of the Peaked Caps, decked out in their military medals, to seduce the Western democracies who were clearly easily charmed or who sinned in the name of realpolitik. The military made much of their power to protect Western countries from Islamist terrorism and illegal immigration, which, like the dramatic rise of the black market, were simply by-products of their disastrous leadership. And so in this new international division of labour, random torture and murder were sanctioned in our country. Roles were assigned: the South became the lair of the invader, an expedient bogeyman; the North a beleaguered, threatened paradise, and - the height of madness - our dangerous, insatiable dictators were elevated to the rank of Guardians of World Peace, benefactors of mankind, the same rank conferred on Bin Laden by millions of indolent souls in what in the Middle East is called the 'rue arabe' - 'arab Street' - and in the West as 'problem areas'.

As for the Algerian people, worn out by ten years of terror and lies, they were served up the kind of peace that bears no resemblance to peace: silence, that bland soup that prepares for oblivion and futile death. It was that or war, more war, always war. We too allowed ourselves to be seduced because we were exhausted and completely alone. We too committed sins of omission, because no one had told us that a country requires a minimum level of democracy for peace to become a credible alternative, that for that rudimentary peace to flourish and truly benefit everyone other ingredients were required: a little wisdom in the heads of the children, a little virtue in the hearts of old people inured to suffering, a little self-restraint from the rich, a little tolerance from the religious, a little humility from intellectuals, a little honesty from government institutions, a little vigilance from the international community. In a country that has known only dictatorship, military and religious, the very idea that peace is possible means submission, suicide or permanent exile. The absence of freedom is an ache which, in the long run, drives one mad. It reduces a man to his shadow and his dreams to nightmares. The pain-

ter Giorgio de Chirico said something troubling: there is much more mystery in the shadow of a man walking on a sunny day, than in all religions past, present and future. It is possible, it may even be true, but in the pain of a man reduced to his own shadow there is no mystery, only shame. Those who are not free will never respect another, not the slave, whose misfortune reminds him of his own humiliation, nor the free man whose happiness is an insult to him. Only the pursuit of freedom will save him from hatred and resentment. Without that conscious pursuit, we are not human, there is nothing true in us.

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This is my country, Ladies and Gentlemen, miserable and torn apart. I don't know who made it that way, whether fate, history, or its people, I would be inclined to say its leaders who are capable of anything. My country is a collection of insoluble paradoxes, most of them lethal. To live in absurdity is debilitating, one staggers from wall to wall like a drunk. For the young, who must find a future, who need clear landmarks to guide them, it is a tragedy, it is heartrending to hear them baying at death like wolves in the darkness.

The first paradox is that Algeria is an immensely rich country and the Algerian people are terribly poor. It is as maddening as dying of thirst in the middle of a deep lake. What is not squandered is guaranteed to be lost to corruption. The second paradox is that Algeria is a perfectly constituted democracy, with political parties of every possible stripe, including some peculiar to itself, a press that is as free as it can be, a president elected according to law and all sorts of institutions whose stated business is justice, transparency, the separation of powers, public service, and yet at the same time the everyday reality of the people is the cruellest despotism, the famous Oriental Despotism which nothing down the centuries has succeeded in humanising. The third paradox, and to my mind the worst since it is the cause of incurable mental disorders, is this: Algeria has an extraordinarily rich and rewarding history, it has lived cheek by jowl with all the civilisations of the Mediterranean and has loved, embraced and valiantly fought with each of them: the Greek, the Phoenician, the Roman, the Vandal, the Byzantine, the Arabic, the Ottoman, the Spanish

and the French, but at independence, when the moment came to rally the people, including those most recently arrived, the Pieds-Noirs, to marshal their talents and move forward, it erased its memory at a stroke; in an inexplicable autoodi, an act of self-hatred, it renounced its ancestral Berber and Judeo-Berber identity and everything it had learned over thousands of years of history and retreated into a narrow history which owed much to mythology and very little to reality. The reason for this?

It is the logic of totalitarianism, the Unity Party system wanted Their religion, Their history, Their language, Their heroes, Their legends, concepts dreamed up by a select group and imposed by decree, and propaganda and threats guaranteed the condition necessary for these stillborn fables to work: a terrified populace. The struggle for the recognition of our identity was long and painful, repression resulted in the deaths of hundreds of activists, especially in Kabylie, a region that has always been indomitable, torture and imprisonment broke thousands of people and drove whole populations into exile. True to its own logic, repression was extended to French-speakers, Christians, Jews, the laity, to intellectuals, to homosexuals, to free women, to artists, to foreigners, anyone, in fact, whose very presence might threaten this illusory identity. The sweeping pageant of human diversity became a crime, an insult to identity. The struggle is not over, the hardest part still lies ahead, we must free ourselves and rebuild ourselves as an open, welcoming democratic state which has a place for everyone and imposes nothing on anyone.

You know all this, Ladies and Gentlemen, and you know that it is this violence, this endless persecution, this appalling interference in our private lives that led to the rebellions in our countries which have erupted, one after another, like fireworks. These events have brought many tragedies but we accept them because at the end of the road there is freedom.

For having written these things which everyone knows, my books are banned in my country. This is the absurdity dictatorship feeds on: my books are banned but I, who wrote them, still live in the country and am free - at least until further notice - to come and go. If a sword of Damocles hangs over my head, I do not see it.

And if my books still circulate in Algeria, it is thanks to the invisible and highly dangerous work of a number of booksellers. In a letter addressed to my compatriots, published in 2006 under the title *Poste Restante: Alger*, I wrote the following: "But for the fear of pushing them to breaking-point (I am talking about the intolerant), I would tell them I did not write as an Algerian, a Muslim, a nationalist, proud and easily-offended, had I done so I would have known exactly what to write how to be discreet, instead I wrote as a human being, a child of the earth and of solitude, distraught and destitute, who does not know what Truth is or where it lives, who owns it, who apportions it. I seek it out and, truth be told, I seek nothing, I do not have the means, I tell stories, simple stories about simple people whom misfortune has pitted against seven-armed thugs who think themselves the centre of the universe, like those who loom over us, grinning crudely, those who seized our lives and our possessions and who, in addition, now demand our love and our gratitude. I would like to tell them that the bureaucratic, sanctimonious police state they support by their actions troubles me less than the embargo on thought. Granted I am in prison, but my mind is free to roam, this is what I write about of my books, and there is nothing shocking or subversive about it."

In *The Rebel*, Camus says: "To write is already to choose." And that is what I did, I chose to write. And I was right to do so, the dictators are falling like flies.

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With your permission I would like to conclude with a few thoughts concerning the Arab rebellions and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Since the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia we all feel it: the world is changing. What in the old, sclerotic, complicated, doom-laden Arab world seemed impossible has happened: people are fighting for freedom, committing themselves to democracy, throwing open doors and windows, they are looking to the future and they want that future to be pleasant, to be simply human. What is happening, in my opinion, is not simply the overthrow of ageing, deaf, dull-witted dictators, nor is it limited to Arab countries, it is the beginning of a worldwide change, a Copernican revolution: people want true, universal democracy without barriers or taboos. All that des-

spoils life, impoverishes, limits and distorts it has become more than world's conscience can bear and is being vehemently rejected. People are rejecting dictators, they are rejecting extremists, they are rejecting the diktats of the market, they are rejecting the stifling domination of religion, they are rejecting the pretentious and cowardly cynicism of realpolitik, they are rejecting fate even though it has the last word, they are rejecting polluters, everywhere people are angry, everywhere they are rising up against those things that harm this planet and mankind. A new consciousness is emerging. It is a turning-point in the history of nations - what you called 'Die Wende' when the Berlin Wall came down.

In this atmosphere of open rebellion, more and more of us refuse to accept that the oldest conflict in the world, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, should carry on and devastate our children and our grandchildren. We feel impatient, we do not want these two great peoples, so deeply rooted in the history of humanity, to spend even one more day as hostages to their petty dictators, to narrow-minded extremists, to those mired in nostalgia, to the worthless blackmailers and agitators. We want them to be free, happy, living in brotherhood. We believe that the spring which began in Tunis will come to Tel-Aviv, to Gaza, to Ramallah, that it will make its way to China and beyond. This wind blows in all directions. Soon Palestinians and Israelis will be united by the same anger, this will be 'Die Wende' in the Middle East and the walls will fall with a joyous roar.

But the real miracle would not be that the Israelis and the Palestinians might one day sign a peace treaty, something they could do in five minutes on the back of an envelope and which they have come close to doing more than once, the real miracle would be if those who have set themselves up as patrons, tutors and advisors to these two peoples - worse, who have set themselves up as bloody-minded prophets, - stopped imposing their fantasies on them. The Holy Wars, the endless Crusades, the incessant Oaths, the Geopolitics of Origins are long gone, Israelis and Palestinians live in the here and now, not in some mythical past they have no obligation to revive. The demand for recognition of a sovereign, independent Palestinian state within the 1967 borders submitted by president Mahmoud

Abbas to the United Nations struck a pointless blow, we all knew that, but even in failure it may turn out to be a decisive blow, as decisive as the self-immolation of the young Tunisian man Bouazizi which set the Arab world alight. For the first time in sixty years, the Palestinians acted entirely according to their own wishes, they went to New York because they wanted to, they did not ask for support or permission from anyone, neither from the Arabic dictators we are burying one by one nor the Arab League which no longer booms like a war drum nor some mysterious backroom Islamist Grand Mufti.

It's extraordinary. For the first time the Palestinians behaved like Palestinians in the service of Palestine and not instruments in the service of a mythical Arab nation or a sadly all-too-real international jihad. Only free men can make peace, and Abbas came as a free man and perhaps, like Sadat, he will pay for it with his life, there are many enemies of peace and freedom in the region and they feel cornered. It is sad that a man like Obama, the magnificent link between the two hemispheres of our planet, did not understand this and seize the opportunity which he has been watching for intently since his famous speech in Cairo.

Israel is a free country, of that there can be no doubt, a beautiful, vast, amazing democracy, which, more than any other country, needs peace; the ceaseless war, the constant state of alert it has lived with for sixty years is unsustainable, it too must break with extremists and with all the lobbies who, from the safety of their remote paradises, advocate intransigence - fruitless, of course - and ensnare the country in equations that are impossible to solve. In my opinion, we have to get away from the idea that peace is something to be negotiated; though the terms, the forms, the stages can be negotiated, peace is a principle, something to be publicly announced in a solemn manner. You say: Peace, Shalom, Salam and shake hands. This is what Abbas did in going to the United Nations, it is what Sadat did in going to Tel Aviv. Is it a dream to hope that Netanyahu might do the same, that he might come to the UN, or go to Ramallah and announce the principle of peace?

Thank you for your patience.

Translated from French by Frank Wynne.

Previous winners of the Peace prize and their laudatory speakers

1950	Max Tau - Adolf Grimme	1980	Ernesto Cardenal - Johann Baptist Metz
1951	Albert Schweitzer - Theodor Heuss	1981	Lew Kopelew - Marion Gräfin Dönhoff
1952	Romano Guardini - Ernst Reuter	1982	George Kennan - Carl F. von Weizsäcker
1953	Martin Buber - Albrecht Goes	1883	Manès Sperber - Siegfried Lenz
1954	Carl J. Burckhardt - Theodor Heuss	1984	Octavio Paz - Richard von Weizsäcker
1955	Hermann Hesse - Richard Benz	1985	Teddy Kollek - Manfred Rommel
1956	Reinhold Schneider - Werner Bergengruen	1986	Władysław Bartoszewski - Hans Maier
1957	Thornton Wilder - Carl J. Burckhardt	1987	Hans Jonas - Robert Spaemann
1958	Karl Jaspers - Hannah Arendt	1988	Siegfried Lenz - Yohanan Meroz
1959	Theodor Heuss - Benno Reifenberg	1989	Václav Havel - André Glucksmann
1960	Victor Gollancz - Heinrich Lübke	1990	Karl Dedecius - Heinrich Olschowsky
1961	Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan - Ernst Benz	1991	György Konrád - Jorge Semprún
1962	Paul Tillich - Otto Dibelius	1992	Amos Oz - Siegfried Lenz
1963	Carl F. von Weizsäcker - Georg Picht	1993	Friedrich Schorlemmer - Richard von Weizsäcker
1964	Gabriel Marcel - Carlo Schmid	1994	Jorge Semprún - Wolf Lepenies
1965	Nelly Sachs - Werner Weber	1995	Annemarie Schimmel - Roman Herzog
1966	Kardinal Bea/Visser 't Hooft - Paul Mikat	1996	Mario Vargas Llosa - Jorge Semprún
1967	Ernst Bloch - Werner Maihofer	1997	Yaşar Kemal - Günter Grass
1968	Léopold Sédar Senghor - François Bondy	1998	Martin Walser - Frank Schirrmacher
1969	Alexander Mitscherlich - Heinz Kohut	1999	Fritz Stern - Bronislaw Geremek
1970	Alva und Gunnar Myrdal - Karl Kaiser	2000	Assia Djebar - Barbara Frischmuth
1971	Marion Gräfin Dönhoff - Alfred Grosser	2001	Jürgen Habermas - Jan Philipp Reemtsma
1972	Janusz Korczak - Hartmut von Hentig	2002	Chinua Achebe - Theodor Berchem
1973	The Club of Rome - Nello Celio	2003	Susan Sontag - Ivan Nagel
1974	Frère Roger - (keine Laudatio)	2004	Péter Esterházy - Michael Naumann
1975	Alfred Grosser - Paul Frank	2005	Orhan Pamuk - Joachim Sartorius
1976	Max Frisch - Hartmut von Hentig	2006	Wolf Lepenies - Andrei Pleşu
1977	Leszek Kołakowski - Gesine Schwan	2007	Saul Friedländer - Wolfgang Frühwald
1978	Astrid Lindgren - H.-C. Kirsch, G. U. Becker	2008	Anselm Kiefer - Werner Spies
1979	Yehudi Menuhin - Pierre Bertaux	2009	Claudio Magris - Karl Schlögel
		2010	David Grossman - Joachim Gauck
		2011	Boualem Sansal - Peter von Matt