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Algeria

Algeria: Colonisation and racism

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Jean-Michel Apathie, a well-known French mainstream columnist, was suspended from the RTL television channel on 5 March after pointing out that France had committed massacres during the colonisation of Algeria.

The reason for the suspension of this columnist, not known for his radical positions, was that he had said that France had carried out 'hundreds of Oradour-sur-Glane' (in reference to the massacre perpetrated by the SS Das Reich division in the Loire village in 1944) in Algeria. This simple statement sparked outrage across all the media outlets of the right wing magnate Vincent Bolloré, as well as the far right politicians Bardella and Ciotti, who referred to Apathie's origins by describing him as an 'Algerian influencer', in a purely racist logic that prevents any comparison between crimes committed by the French and those suffered by them. The matter has even been referred to the media regulatory authority ARCOM. However, Bolloré's channel was not so zealous when it came to the far right pundit and politician Éric Zemmour, who was never suspended despite several convictions.

The historical reality of the massacres

Apathie merely reiterated the historical truths about the colonial invasion of Algeria from 1830 onwards. He specifically referred to the *enfumades*, for which General Bugeaud was famous, which consisted of trapping children, women and men taking refuge in a cave and asphyxiating them to death. He could also have mentioned the systematic looting and destruction of villages, the massacres of civilians, beheadings and the use of rape to subjugate populations. These crimes were committed with the aim of monopolising land and resources in order to make room for the settlers. The French colony was established through bloodshed until the war of liberation, during which France also distinguished itself by its war crimes: collective punishments, rapes, massacres and torture.

The brutality of French colonialism is still subject to colonial revisionism. Refusing to acknowledge it implies that any reference to France's crimes in Algeria would be an insult 'to the French people'. Moreover, the far right Rassemblement national (RN) has followed suit in its defence of colonisation and racist one-upmanship.

This suspension is part of a worsening of tensions with Algeria, rekindled after Macron's declaration of Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara.

Racist one-upmanship by the government

Since mid-November, the right and far right have been waging a full-scale attack on the Franco-Algerian agreements, which have governed the entry and residence of nationals of both countries since 1968. First, Retailleau - campaigning for the presidency of the LR party - went one step further after the attack in Mulhouse on 24 February, accusing Algeria of refusing to return expelled Algerians. On 26 February, Bayrou announced a neo-colonial ultimatum: all agreements would be revised within 6 weeks if Algeria did not issue more consular passes.

The same media are in a loop, with the right and far right in unison in calling for the cancellation of these agreements, which would supposedly be unfairly advantageous to Algerians - an agreement obtained after 132 years of colonial domination and whose scope has been reduced by successive agreements.

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This new tug-of-war, which mixes domestic and foreign policies, reflects the government's racist radicalisation, which, at the risk of definitively severing ties with Algeria, marks an amplification of the neo-colonial rhetoric developed for internal and external purposes.

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