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Algeria

Under the yoke of old and new superpowers, will Algeria always be an "emerging country"?

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1 - François Hollande's "wisecrack" about the "safe and sound" return of his Minister of the Interior following the latter's visit to Algeria, the broadcast on the French TV channel Canal Plus showing a montage of images that illustrated the bizarre nature of the discussion between the president and his guest, the head of the French government, Jean-Marc Ayrault, must have been greeted with hollow laughter in the Algerian capital!

Especially as at the same time, by coincidence of timing or by devious calculation, the Chinese sent their Foreign Minister Wang Yi to recall "the vibrancy of Algerian-Chinese friendship, 55 years after the establishment of diplomatic relations". The minister took the opportunity to highlight the growing importance of trade between China and Algeria, the balance of which has now reached \$8 billion, compared to only \$200 million 30 years ago! Finally, he noted the existence of significant potential "to be exploited by the two countries, particularly in the areas of trade and investment in public works, a sector that now amounts to \$45 billion."

These three events transformed what was nothing more than a *commedia dell'arte* into a Greek tragedy for the French side! They reveal, on the Algerian side, the contradictions and the fragility of the Bouteflika system at the end of the latter's reign. Consequently they reposition the debate on the 2014 presidential election, which is mainly centred on "yes" or "no" to a fourth term for the ailing President, towards more strategic questions, in particular economic issues.

2 - We know the official Algerian reaction. It regrets the "diminished value" for Algerian-French relations that was engendered by this joke in bad taste. No more than that! As concerns public opinion, informed opinion, behind the reactions of dignity and national pride in the face of the misplaced jokes of a "former colonialist", voices emerged which highlighted the "emergence" of the Chinese economy, like that of the other so-called "emerging" economies designated by the acronym "BRICS" (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). These voices are critical of the alignment of Bouteflika's version of capitalism on Western capitalism. They suggest repositioning towards these "emerging" countries, including China and also Putin's Russia. In the opinion of among others the economist Abdelhak Lamiri, Algeria has the financial means to become an emergent economy.

Other analyses in the same vein explain the nationalist, "progressive", even anti-imperialist character of these emerging countries. These analyses explain to us, correctly, that the wars waged by France, in Central Africa and previously in Mali, are the expression of an offensive of Western capitalism, under American hegemony, with the aim of preventing so-called "emerging" economies, notably China and Russia, from developing, and from developing Africa. They nevertheless forget to specify the capitalist character of these emerging economies!!!

However, in terms of real economy, history teaches us that in the nineteenth century the capitalist powers that dominated the world were the two colonial empires, British and French. At the beginning of the twentieth century there was another emerging economy: Germany. It would be at the origin of two world wars, aiming to reorganize the colonial market that had escaped it. It was the USA that would dominate the global capitalist economy following the Second World War. Meanwhile, there was Lenin's Russia and Mao's China, still underdeveloped, who tried another path to emancipation, the path of the emancipation of the wretched of the earth. In their wake there emerged the struggles of colonized peoples for their independence and their emancipation, those of Messali El Hadj, Boudiaf and Abane Ramadhane, those of Fidel Castro and Mandela. Today, are not these emerging countries, such as Putin's Russia, following the same road as Germany and America, in other words are they not new imperialisms who want to replace the old ones? That is the question that is before us in Syria. That is what it means to "emerge"!

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Seen from this angle, the possibility of the emergence of an economy that is still today underdeveloped and dependent, in the framework of capitalism, remains a questionable theoretical hypothesis. But it is questionable from a strictly scholastic point of view! Because even given the presence or the combination of certain conditions, such as for example the Marshall Plan associated with local capital which saw the emergence of the South Korean and Taiwanese economies, or the presence of an energy source that is essential to technological development under the soil of countries that are candidates to emergence, such as Algeria and Iran, the reality of capitalist development is still that of being the agent of massive destruction of human culture and of its environment. That is why it is absolutely essential to reject this path.

So is there not another road to emancipation, another kind of emergence?

3 - This way of posing the problem puts the sterile discussion about the struggles in high circles concerning the end of Bouteflika and the future of his brother back onto a more strategic field. But the struggles for succession are unfortunately only conducted by individuals. Ali Benflis, former head of the government and Bouteflika's opponent in the last presidential elections, is a candidate. Along with Sellal, the current Prime Minister, to whom we could add Ouyahia, the unavoidable servant of the state, as he likes to define himself, they remain potential presidential candidates. But for the moment, none of them represents a political, social and economic project that would create any interest in the debate. Which gives free rein to the most fanciful speculations. Candidates are often seen in terms of petty Philistine calculations, of the interests of small groups or of personal settling of accounts. Motivations of this kind certainly exist. But the profound tendencies that combine local, regional and international interests, but that remain mute for the moment, will quickly become dominant. The Algeria of today continues to represent an important regional stake for a capitalism that is in full financial meltdown.

But faced with a versatile political personnel, and with a debate on the presidential election that is confined to conflicts within closed circles, perspectives of emergence may keep us waiting. Neither the "liberal social economy", which was the campaign slogan of Benflis in 2009, nor the "economic patriotism" of Ouyahia, which is a variant of Bouteflika's programme, and even less the "everything for the private sector" of Sellal will be able to take Algeria towards emerging in a democratic and social fashion, in the service of the majority of Algerians. Only a broad mobilization and a transparent debate on a radical break with the current model can augur brighter tomorrows.