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Algeria/France

Stora report: a historian at Macron's service

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At a time when the French government is passing its law against “separatism” intended, in particular, to stigmatize yet more a section of the population of this country - Muslims or those supposed to be such – President Macron has asked a well-known historian and specialist in the Algerian war, Benjamin Stora, to present a report to study the outlines of a possible “memorial reconciliation” between France and Algeria.

The result is 150 pages of scholarly compilation where everything is said, but nothing is said about the essence: colonization for 132 years by French imperialism, at the end of which the latter suffered a humiliating defeat, was only a series of massacres, tortures and deportations of populations in the name of the greatness of French civilization. In short, a series of crimes against humanity. But even before this report was published, the Élysée made it known that there will be no apologies or repentance! Only symbolic gestures that do not commit to anything and especially not to attract the wrath of reactionaries of all stripes, nostalgic for French Algeria and especially the far right who it seeks to win over with an increasingly authoritarian and racist drift of his government.

No “common memory” between executioners and victims!

With the false naivety of a courtier to the prince, Benjamin Stora, who is not ignorant of this history since he has himself contributed, in the past, to highlighting some of these crimes, suggests that there would be a possible place for a consensual “common memory” of this dark period between the executioners and the victims! An opinion shared even by some on the left, in particular by Alexis Corbière, one of the leaders of the Parti de gauche, who says in relation to the Stora report: “We must create the conditions for a peaceful dialogue with Algeria. It is a very special colonization with 130 years of common history [...]. We must not consider that the Republic is the mask of a colonizing vision” (*Le Monde* 21 January 2021).

The Stora report is a “final balance sheet” for all the crimes of French imperialism! But, as an Algerian historian Noureddine Amara has rightly said, interviewed on 29 January 2021 by Mediapart on this subject: “Our war of liberation has not broken a bond of friendship with France. Since 1830, France was not Algeria's friend; she was the occupier”.

Macron is in continuity with his predecessors, whom Stora salutes for aborted attempts to open the way to a “Franco-Algerian dialogue”, the presidential candidate Macron going so far as to speak - in Algiers! – of “crimes against humanity”, rephrasing himself more reluctantly after returning to Paris. These loyal servants of French imperialism speak, at best, of the “mistakes” committed by the French state in Algeria for mainly diplomatic and economic interests. And this, without really recognizing the nature of these “faults” and while continuing to practice in France a racist treatment of second-class citizens to the descendants of the victims of colonial wars, imposing on them in the popular neighbourhoods a police and judicial repression very much inspired by the “time of the colonies”.

This Macronist communications coup sounds like a cynical response, not only to the mobilizations of the youth of the popular neighbourhoods to demand justice against police violence and to the decolonial movement for removing the statues of the executioners of colonization, which we have known in France in recent months, but also to the huge popular demonstrations in Algeria of 2019 which expressed a desire to resume the thread of their history. for true independence and for holding accountable those who stole this revolution from them. Relying on the scientific notoriety of a recognized historian, this enterprise of mystification attempts to rewrite the “national narrative” of the

magnanimous greatness of France, which reaches out to its victims, those who fight for truth and justice - these young people, mostly descendants of the victims of French colonialism. A legitimate struggle that Stora tries to discredit from his university pulpit: "At a time of competition for victimhood and the reconstruction of fantasized narratives, we will see that freedom of spirit and historical work are necessary firebreaks to inflamed memories, especially among youth". In other words, a "historical work" which, in the midst of a racist campaign against "communitarianism" and "separatism", aims to prevent any revolt of young people with an immigrant background!

Colonialism: crimes against humanity!

Neither apologies nor repentance says Macron. But sixty years after the end of this dirty war, the victims of colonization, Algerians but also the French people of Algeria and metropolitan France who suffered and fought against this barbarity, need neither of them, but justice and truth: that is to say the definitive recognition that these are indeed crimes against humanity perpetrated for 132 years, and that they were in order to defend the interests of French imperialism, from the Second to the Fifth Republic. A colonialist and racist system that still persists, in other forms, in the so-called "overseas" territories and departments. And is extended in today's state racism against racialized populations.

Yes, the archives of both countries must be widely accessible so that those primarily concerned and their heirs, and not only researchers, reappropriate their history. But after years of censorship, even partial truth has already become known, thanks to activists and researchers engaged in the anti-colonialist struggle, whether it is the massacres in Algeria or in France against Algerians. The mobilizations of these young people that Stora speaks of, around commemorations, such as those of the massacres of October 1961 or May 1945, are not a "fantasy" but a demand for recognition and dignity.

Yes, it is time to officially acknowledge the responsibility of the torturers of the French army in the disappearance of thousands of Algerian nationalist fighters and ban all demonstrations, museums and other commemorative steles of the assassins of the OAS, guilty of the murders of Algerians and French people who opposed their murderous madness, deliberately digging a river of blood between all communities.

Yes, we must pay tribute and never forget all the Algerian fighters who fought for their dignity and the independence of their country but also those who in France and Algeria, admittedly few in number, took their defence, intellectuals like Maurice Audin or Gisèle Halimi but also women and men from the shadows, the "suitcase carriers" of the FLN, in defiance of their lives, and activists like Fernand Yveton, militant of the Algerian Communist Party, a "pied-noir" who took the camp of independence, sentenced to death and executed while the Minister of Justice of the Fourth Republic, fiercely hostile to this independence – just like the social democracy of the time - was a certain François Mitterrand. The same who, at the head of a "left#" government, called, in 1982, for "putting an end to the aftermath of the events in Algeria" by amnestying the generals who, in 1961, had organized a coup d'état to keep Algeria in the French fold!

Yes, it is time to make it clear that the thousands of conscripts who lost their lives or returned completely destroyed by the acts of barbarism they had to commit, or witness were cannon fodder, sacrificed on the altar of the rapacity of French imperialism! Not to mention the harkis, auxiliaries of the French army, who have been parked for decades in squalid camps in France and have suffered the same state racism as the others.

Justice and truth!

But this conquest of justice and truth has nothing to do with either the “peace of the graveyard” or a so-called “memorial reconciliation” invoked by Macron. And the wounds will not close until things are said. But they will not be said by Macron and other servants of the interests of French imperialism who will not accept any truth that would cast a shadow over its prestige, legitimacy and interests!

History is not neutral, and it can be used and diverted as a support by all governments for their own interests. It is up to all the oppressed and the victims of colonialism and imperialism on both sides of the Mediterranean to write their own history, reappropriating the lessons of the resistances of the past. The battle of remembrance is a living struggle that is part of the struggle of the oppressed for justice and dignity. It is a crucial issue to continue the fight for a more just society, free from capitalist and imperialist barbarism.

PS:

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