

The Colonial Crimes: Past and Present - France

By: Dr. Abdullah Robin

Colonialism is defined as “the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically.” Colonialism developed alongside its deceitful sister, “democracy,” and these have filled the world with crimes. One of the smallest of these crimes was a brutal massacre in Paris, resulting in the greatest number of civilians killed in the city since the Second World War.

It did not occur two weeks ago, on the 13th of November, 2015. Rather, it occurred on the 17th of October 1961 when a peaceful demonstration by Algerians against the French occupation of Algeria was crushed. At the Grands Boulevards, the police opened fire on the crowd and charged, leading to several deaths. On the Neuilly Bridge more were shot and killed. Algerians were beaten unconscious and thrown into and drowned in the River Seine at points across the city and its suburbs, most notably at the Saint-Michel Bridge in the very center of Paris and also near the Prefecture of Police, very close to Notre Dame de Paris, and throughout the night, arrests, beatings and torture increased the death toll. Despite piles of bodies in the streets and more bodies being washed up on the banks of the River Seine during the weeks that followed, official records were destroyed and the events covered up until 1998, when the French government made an official acknowledgement of the massacre of 40 Algerians. The historian Jean-Luc Einaudi asserted in 1991 that as many as 200 Algerians had likely been killed. His book, *La Bataille de Paris*, is the most authoritative account. As for the liberation struggle for Algerian independence from French colonial rule, 1954–62, about 1.5 million Algerians were killed in the face of brutal and indiscriminate targeting of the civilian population and the extermination of entire villages. Systematic rape, torture and beheadings brought terror to every living thing that stood and breathed in the face of the French soldiers. In fact, the French had a history of innovation in terror and mass-beheadings.

After the French Revolution, which marked the birth of what they called “The Age of Reason”, they developed a theatrical means of beheading people called the guillotine, which was used in 1793-94 to chop – off the heads of 2,639 people in Paris alone. This was intended to terrorize the people and they gloried in it. The new rulers of France sanctified terror as a political concept of the new Age of Reason, and exported it to the lands they went on to colonize. Maximilien Robespierre, defined terror as “an emanation of virtue; it is less a principle in itself, than a consequence of the general principle of democracy”. If democracy meant terror during times of national emergency for the people of Europe themselves, what hope was there for the colonized peoples outside of Europe?

It didn't take the French long to carry their Age of Reason to other lands. In 1830 they invaded Algiers and applied the principle of terror to their new colony. Demonstrations against the occupation were crushed with the killing of 45,000 people in Setif, Guelma and Kherrata in 1845. French Lieutenant-Colonel Lucien de Montagnac, described earlier how “French civilization” should assert itself in a letter to a friend dated March 15, 1843: “This is how, my dear friend, we must make war against Arabs: kill all men over the age of 15, take all their women and children, load them onto naval vessels, send them to the Marquesas Islands or elsewhere. In one word, annihilate all who will not crawl beneath our feet like dogs.” What he wrote is indeed what was done, in Algeria and throughout the world; not only by the French, but by other European countries, and the US which mastered a new-form of colonialism called neo-colonialism to take what the Europeans could not keep after the losses of the Second World War and the changing international political order.

The subject will be continued and will cover the ugly colonial crimes of other European nations and the US up to the current time.

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