

France's clear conscience

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To recognize the Armenian deaths as genocide is the work of opportunistic politicians to please people.

How can we understand French parliament's decision to define something that occurred almost a century ago as an Armenian genocide by the Turks? From a political point of view, it makes no sense for France to have a conflict with Turkey – Middle East's most important country and an emerging power. Why, then, this official testimony about something that took place, but has nothing to do with present France? I can only find one explanation for this decision: it is a manifestation of “clear conscience” from an Imperial France towards their citizens, who are men and women endowed with high moral principles.

What does “clear conscience” mean in this case? Unfortunately, nothing good. The domination, the empire, the many forms of exploitation always need a clear conscience. They need good moral justifications for their acts or, when this is impossible, they need to show everyone their moral conscience, which, in this second case, constitutes the clear conscience. France, as Great Britain and the United States, needs it, because the book of its imperial violence against peripheral people and particularly against the Middle East is long and dreadful. Until World War II, this imperialism was expressed through the colonial system. When people in that region finally achieved their independence, the imperialism of France and its rich associates expressed itself sometimes by war (against Egypt, against Iran, against Iraq, against Somalia, and, more recently, against Libya) and, in general, through the *soft power* – of advices, threats and pressures exercised on local elites, usually allied and corrupt.

France's record in this matter is deplorable in the Middle East, and terrible in Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa remains, in practice, a French colony managed by a common central bank headquartered in Paris. The participation of the French government in the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda is something that every now and then reappears in the country's mainstream media. Much to the regret of the French people. In view of this situation, the need for a clear conscience becomes imperative. Usually, it appears as a *soft power*, without conflicting with the country's national interests: the leaders of the poorer countries are judged according to the rich countries' standards of cultural and political

development; and, based on this judgment, they severely criticize as “authoritarian” and “populist” all the leaders of poorer countries who dare to be nationalist and establish limits to the interests of their multinational corporations. Meanwhile, friendly dictators are kindly forgotten. Under this guise, clear conscience matches the logic of domination; it expresses the values of democracy while satisfying interests considered as national.

But there are times when things are not that simple. When it is necessary to think in dialectical terms. Since the citizens of the rich countries are demanding in terms of democratic principles and human rights, opportunistic politicians seize certain opportunities to soothe the clear conscience of their citizens with “heroic” acts. This is what happens with the present acknowledgement of the Armenian genocide. In this case, the price of the clear conscience is a decision that is not useful to Armenia, offends Turkey, and does not interest France. But it soothes guilty consciences.