Joseph Andras

Tomorrow They Won't Dare to Murder Us

De nos frères blessés

Presented by: Aurore Peyroles

By recounting the true story of Fernand Iveton, a French communist militant from Algeria who took part in the struggle for Algerian independence, Joseph Andras's *De nos frères blessés* (Eng. *Tomorrow They Won't Dare to Murder Us*) restores to view a figure largely forgotten in Franco-Algerian history. Yet this short novel also interrogates the categories through which colonial history is narrated, the mechanisms that produce historical oblivion, and the boundaries that determine political belonging. It thus constitutes an act of counter-memory, attentive both to forms of solidarity forged beyond national affiliations and to the historical conditions in which they take shape.

The novel recounts a historical case that had long been obscured. In November 1956, Fernand Iveton, a communist worker and anti-colonialist, decided to plant a bomb in the factory where he worked. His aim was to cause material damage only and disrupt Algiers's electricity supply, without injuring anyone. Discovered before it could explode, the bomb would, according to the experts, have caused very limited damage. As Pierre Vidal-Naquet points out in his preface to Jean-Luc Einaudi's investigation of the case, Iveton "did not want an explosion that would kill. He wanted an explosion that would bear witness" (Einaudi, 8). Yet, in the particularly tense context of the Algerian War, just weeks after the deadly Milk Bar bombings, he was arrested, tortured and sentenced to death. Despite his lawyers' appeals and the fact that no one had been injured, President René Coty and his Minister of Justice, François Mitterrand, refused to grant him clemency. Iveton was guillotined on 11 February 1957, the only European Algerian to be executed by the French justice system during the Algerian War. Iveton's faith in the French Republic makes his fate all the more tragic. At one point, he reflects: "France, even if it is a colonial and capitalist republic, is not a dictatorship; […] it will know how to disentangle truth from falsehood and read between the lines of the enemy" (69). This expectation, which the course of events would cruelly belie, exposes the gulf between the republican ideals to which Iveton remains committed and the colonial state that condemns him.

It is against the silence surrounding this story that Andras writes. The novel dismantles state-imposed silence, historical oblivion and the euphemisms through which those in power distorted the reality of the war. Throughout the narrative, the author deconstructs the language of the state, the press and public opinion, all of which contribute to the construction of an official history. The independence fighters are labelled 'rebels', Iveton becomes "the traitor, the felon, the white man who sold out to the 'crouilles'" (49) – a racist slur for Arabs – while Algerians are reduced to 'indigènes' ('natives'). Against this official language, *De nos frères blessés* sets a lyrical prose infused with political anger. As Andras puts it, he seeks to "shake up official narratives and fray the lofty banners – those of the French authorities and the FLN" (quoted in Chaulet Achour 2018). Without conflating historical responsibilities, the point is to prevent the narratives constructed on

either side from obscuring the complexity of individual trajectories and political commitments.

This is what the choice of fiction makes possible. Andras's project is not to reconstruct a biography or retrace the final months of a condemned man. He explicitly embraces the novel form: "Others had already done justice to Iveton; what I hoped to do, rather, was to give him back life, body, colour and voice – and the novel form has that privilege" (Andras 2016). While remaining as close as possible to the historical facts and existing testimonies, he refuses to let documentation take precedence over narration. He offers neither a retrospective account of his discovery of the character nor a meta-narrative recounting the stages of his investigation, a device that has become increasingly common in French literary writing. The novel's composition interweaves two narrative strands: the first recounts Iveton's arrest, torture, imprisonment alongside Algerian militants, trial and execution at Barberousse prison; the second traces Fernand and Hélène's love story and their life in Algiers. The alternation between these temporal strands brings out the tension between love and political ideals, individual happiness and revolutionary commitment. Above all, it prevents the character from being reduced to his tortured body or his status as a martyr, challenging the image of a hero driven solely by struggle and frozen in sacrificial grandeur. Iveton remains an ordinary man, with his attachments, convictions and vulnerabilities; he suffers under torture and eventually speaks. Fiction restores to him an individual existence, irreducible to the political and judicial category into which the state had confined him. It also extends Iveton's voice, emerging in his letters quoted throughout the narrative, which reveal his emotional attachments as well as his convictions – far removed from any form of heroisation. This restoration of an individual existence takes on a collective dimension in the novel's very title. *De nos frères blessés* does not name Iveton directly: instead, it places him within a community whose boundaries remain to be defined. The possessive 'our' raises a question of belonging: who can recognise Iveton as one of their own? The word 'brothers' evokes political solidarity, a community of feeling and a universalist imaginary all at once. In the colonial context, however, this fraternity is anything but natural: Iveton belongs to Algeria's European population, yet chooses to fight the colonial order alongside those it oppresses. The title thus symbolically achieves what the character achieves politically: it shifts the boundaries of 'us'. This is not to deny differences in historical position, but to consider the possibility of a political community built in opposition to relations of domination. The novel also makes visible the inequalities that such a fraternity must confront. Even in prison, "Europeans are given two blankets and the natives just one; the former are allowed two showers and the same number of shaves a week, whilst the latter are allowed only one" (51). The occasional insertion of Arabic expressions into the French narrative also makes visible the linguistic plurality of colonial Algiers, allowing another language to remain perceptible within a narrative written primarily from the perspective of its European characters.

Published simultaneously in 2016 by Actes Sud in France and Barzakh in Algeria, the novel entered two publishing spheres at once, rather than simply being exported to the historical context to which it relates. "Iveton had to be read in his own country; it was the least one could do," Andras remarked (quoted in Chaulet Achour 2018). The Arabic translation, produced by Salah Badis and published by Barzakh in 2018 under the title *عن إخواننا الجرحى* enabled the story of this European militant engaged in the anti-colonial struggle to circulate in the language of those whose emancipation he had championed. At a meeting devoted to the book in Algiers, the translator explained that his choice of the word *ikhwanouna* ('our brothers') also echoed the name 'El-Khawa', used to refer to Algerian fighters. The title thus places Iveton within a historically situated community of struggle: that of the militants of the war of liberation, to which he belonged through his political commitment rather than his origins.

The novel's account of Iveton's execution ends with a comma rather than a full stop: "It is five ten when Fernand Iveton's head, prison number 6101, thirty years old," (134). At the very moment when the state puts an end to his life, the narrative remains grammatically unfinished. This suspension suggests that the execution cannot constitute the final word on Iveton's story, nor on the political commitments for which he died. Rather than "replaying the war", Andras seeks to "reconnect the threads and trace, as one might reach out a hand, another path: that of the ideal of social and political emancipation that animated the protagonists" (quoted in Chaulet Achour 2018). His refusal of the Goncourt Prize for a First Novel reflects the same determination not to separate the work from the ideals it embodies. He explained his decision by expressing his wish to remain faithful to "the text, the words, the ideals it carries, the suppressed voice of a worker and militant committed to social and political equality" (quoted in Leyris 2016). The novel thus exposes the betrayal of republican and emancipatory ideals by the colonial state, while recovering the possibility of solidarities that exceed the boundaries of national belonging.

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LANGUAGE: French / Français

This title was not censored before publishing