

Book reviewed: Seloua Luste Boulbina, *Alger–Tokyo : Les émissaires de l’anticolonialisme en Asie*, Les Presses du réel, 2024.

“The ties were governmental with China and non-governmental with Japan, which is why the latter does not necessarily appear on the Afro-Asian map of African anti-colonial emissaries in Asia.”

This quotation, taken from Seloua Luste Boulbina’s *Algiers–Tokyo: The Emissaries of Anti-Colonialism in Asia*, published by Les Presses du réel, perfectly captures the question that accompanied me when I first came across this book in a footnote of another work. My eyes stopped on the title: *Algiers–Tokyo*. The pairing seemed almost paradoxical. On one side, Algiers, capital of a colonised country fighting for its independence; on the other, Tokyo, capital of a former colonial empire. What connection could possibly unite these two places? Who were these “emissaries of anti-colonialism in Asia”?

Divided into two parts, the book offers far more than historical answers. In the first section, the author retraces the intertwined trajectories of men and women involved in the struggle for Algerian independence and shows how this struggle travelled all the way to Asia - from China to Vietnam and... to Japan. Through the student networks of UGEMA [1], FLN delegations, militant and diplomatic intermediaries, as well as Japanese translations of Frantz Fanon’s writings and FLN speeches, Seloua Luste Boulbina sheds light on a transnational history of anti-colonialism, far removed from a strictly national reading of liberation movements.

Yet what struck me most while reading the book lies elsewhere. More than a simple work of historical recovery, it constitutes a truly sensitive archive of Afro-Asian solidarity. Photographs, newspaper clippings, letters, handwritten notes, biographies, excerpts from speeches and political declarations together form a living archive of this history. Every page reveals a detail, an anecdote or a face that gives substance to these political circulations. One no longer merely reads the history of Afro-Asian solidarity; one watches it take shape before one’s eyes.

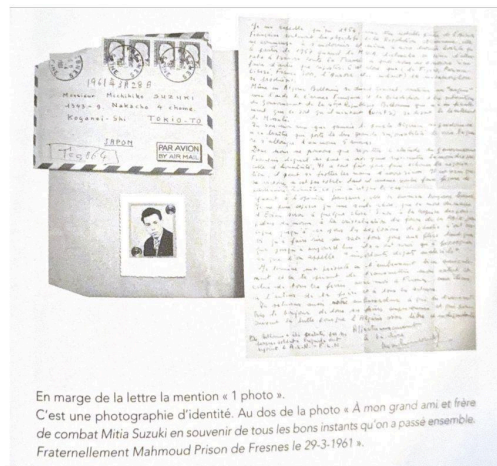
Through these documents, the FLN’s international strategy also comes into view. The book demonstrates how the Algerian War was not only a matter of domestic politics, but also a diplomatic, media and international battle. Algeria was not simply seeking independence; it was also seeking to inscribe its struggle within a global political consciousness that extended as far as Asia.



Tokusaburō Dan et Abdelmalek Benhabylès.

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The second part of the book brings together letters written by the prisoner Mahmoud T. to his friend Michihiko Suzuki, the Japanese translator of Marcel Proust whom he had met in Paris. These fragments of correspondence reveal the intimate underside of revolutionary history: the conditions of detention in Fresnes prison, internal tensions within the FLN, the refusal to be released in order to avoid the camps, but also a man's near-absolute fidelity to his political commitment and his country. Once again, the book moves away from grand heroic narratives to return to emotions, doubts, waiting and pain.



En marge de la lettre la mention « 1 photo ». C'est une photographie d'identité. Au dos de la photo « À mon grand ami et frère de combat Mitia Suzuki en souvenir de tous les bons instants qu'on a passé ensemble. Fraternellement Mahmoud Prison de Fresnes le 29-3-1961 ».

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[1] UGEMA (General Union of Algerian Muslim Students), a student organisation founded in 1955 that contributed to the internationalisation of the Algerian independence struggle.