
GLOBAL CRISIS IN MEMORY

Rethinking Colonialism in France's Post-Chirac Era. *From Sarkozy's 'Anti-Repentance' to Macron's 'Crisis of Acceptance'*

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For the first time in post-war history, the French State acknowledged in 2018 the use of military torture during the Algerian War of Independence, through the statement of the French president, Emmanuel Macron. The declaration was inscribed in the context of the Franco-Algerian War, attempting to restore and vindicate the memory of Maurice Audin, a victim of the French colonial system established in Algeria. The article deals with the postcolonial memory of the Algerian War of Independence in French public sphere, focusing on the politics of memory of the presidents Nicolas Sarkozy and Emmanuel Macron. Exploring the uses of the colonial past in French politics, I seek to delineate the process of 'coming to terms' with 'colonial legacy' and to trace the transformations that the 'modes' of remembering have undergone in France over the last few decades.

Over the last few decades, the notion of 'coming to terms with the past' (associated since the 1980s with a mode of cosmopolitan memory in favour of social consensus, reconciliation, transitional justice and human rights) has undergone radical changes. The cosmopolitan mode of remembering emphasizes human suffering in past atrocities and is characterized by reflexivity, regret and mourning, in contrast to the antagonistic mode which provides a Manichean division of good and evil, reliant on glorifying or nostalgic narratives (Bull & Hansen 390). My aim here is to trace the changes that 'modes' of remembering have undergone in the case of France, focusing on the perceptions and the uses of the colonial past.¹ How have the ways of 'coming to terms with the past' been transformed from the 1990s until the 2010s? In what ways has the rise of populist/nationalist forces affected new historical paradigms in France today, and how has this ongoing process transformed the context of rethinking colonialism?

The above questions serve as key elements for this article, directing its focus towards the perceptions of the colonial past in contemporary France, its political uses by various agents (such as political parties and their leaders) in formulating their discourse, and the processes

¹ For the 'modes' of remembering, such as 'cosmopolitan memory', 'antagonistic memories' and 'agonistic memory', see the work of Anna Cento Bull and Hans Lauge Hansen 390–404. Particularly for 'cosmopolitan memory', see Levy and Sznajder 87–106 as well as Lorraine Ryan 501–14.

through which the 'living memory' of colonial trauma is being transformed into a 'cultural memory'.²

The question of how France is 'coming to terms with its traumatic past' will form the backbone of the article. I will briefly explore the structural changes that the modes of rethinking colonialism in France have undergone, from the period following Chirac's presidency until today. In the first part, I will focus on the perceptions of France's 'colonial legacy' through the political and ideological agenda of President Nicolas Sarkozy. In the second part, my interest will be the memory of the Algerian War of Independence, studying the case of Maurice Audin and the official recognition of torture by the French military in Algeria, as announced (13 September 2018) by President Emmanuel Macron.³

The aim of the article is to show that, in order to understand the current challenges that the cosmopolitan mode of rethinking the past faces, there is a need to revisit Sarkozy's period in office. I argue that antagonistic memories emerged through his implementation of an agenda of 'anti-repentance' politics of memory, gradually undermining the cosmopolitan mode and paving the way for today's rise of antagonism, ideologically expressed by conservative and far-right voices.

'Silenced' memories

Since the 1950s, the issue of military torture in the Algerian War of Independence has been highlighted by historians and journalists such as Pierre Vidal-Naquet and Henri Alleg.⁴ During the war itself, newspaper articles often revealed evidence of the use of torture and summary executions in Algeria (Cohen 82–3). Until recently, however, the French state was unwilling to make any official statement recognizing French atrocities during the war. The collective amnesia 'imposed' for almost thirty years, and the 'memory wars' that swept French society during the 1990s,⁵ depicting competitive perceptions of the past from the perspectives of various agents, shaped a particularly fragmented collective memory of the Algerian War (Lindenberg 77–95).

The Algerian War of Independence has been a taboo for French society for over three decades. The events have deeply divided the French people, leading to the fall of the Fourth Republic, while the perceptions of the war have created a mosaic of controversial and often competing memories. Algeria's particular status as a colony (since 1848 it was an integral part of the French Empire) deepened the crisis, transforming the nature of the conflict into what was seen as a civil war situation. The social agents and various groups that fought with different ideological and political motivations (e.g. Harkis,⁶ pieds-noirs, marsiens,⁷ porteurs de valises⁸), along with French soldiers and guerrilla fighters of the FLN (Front de Libération National), transformed the social geography of the conflict, which had many characteristics:

² For 'cultural memory', see the work of Jan Assman. For the concept of 'living memory', see the work of T. G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper.

³ You can read Macron's declaration in: Macron, *Élysée.fr*.

⁴ For the issue of military torture in Algeria, see the works of Pierre Vidal-Naquet and Henri Alleg.

⁵ Memory wars is a term used to describe the memory conflicts and often competing narratives articulated by various agents regarding perceptions and representations of the past, particularly associated with a traumatic experience.

⁶ Algerians who had served as native auxiliaries with the French Army during the War of Independence.

⁷ A word adapted from the French for March (mars) to describe those Algerians who had joined the FLN after the ceasefire on the 19 March 1962 and who were often criticized for their opportunistic stance. See Martin Evans, p. 326.

⁸ Frenchmen who had helped the FLN. Often referred to the Jeanson Network, a pro-FLN group led by the philosopher Francis Jeanson. In William B. Cohen, p. 223.

a war of independence, a *guerre franco-française* (a Franco-French War) as well as an internal civil conflict in Algeria (Shalk 163).

Dealing with the trauma of the war would become a priority in the French state's politics of memory in the post-war years, following integration measures for the 'repatriated' groups. In the context of 'healing the wounds of the past', a collective amnesia has been imposed from above, suppressing the memory of the events. A veil of silence covered France as the 'Vichy syndrome' gave way to the 'Algerian Syndrome'.⁹ The decades following the end of the war until 1990 would be characterized by a total absence of any official ceremony, memorial activity or remembrance of the events in Algeria in the public sphere (of France). As Jan Jansen describes: 'No public "update" or revision of French colonial history was carried out. In general, street names and memorials, which remained unchanged, were slowly abandoned and neglected. In some cases, attempts were made to cover the tracks of the colonial past. [...] these decades of official concealment are often referred to as a period of collective "repression"' (278).

The 'living memory' of many agents (primarily reflecting their personal experience) and the collective remembrance of events within social groups and associations (such as the Harkis or the *pieds-noirs* sharing a common past) would be key elements in their identity construction. Furthermore, it should be noted too that unofficial ways of remembering, perceiving, representing and transmitting the past to the next generations, even when they are happening in a state of official amnesia and total silence, are a very significant process (as happened for example in the camps of the French South where many Harkis had been placed). As the historian Claire Eldridge notes: 'Just because the state was not talking about the Algerian War, we cannot assume that no one else was talking about it' (9). By bringing to light the continuous activism within the *pied-noir* and Harki communities, as well as the commemorative activities behind official occultation, and by focusing on the group memories rather than official commemoration, Eldridge's work has sought to highlight the decisive role of silence and marginalization status in creating identities, revealing a continual presence of memory within these communities (7–12).

The 1990s would be a decisive period for France in 'coming to terms' with the 'colonial legacy', particularly with the Algerian past. The death of Francois Mitterrand in 1996, the appointment of Lionel Jospin as prime minister in 1997 and the trial of Maurice Papon in 1997–8 (which arguably ended the traumatic circle of the 'Vichy Syndrome'), would create a vital space in 1999 for the official recognition of the Algerian War (McCormack 1131–3). Moreover, the testimony of an ex-FLN guerrilla fighter named Louisette Ighilahriz in 2000, leading to the trial of General Paul Aussaresses, would attract great public interest, raising once again the issue of military torture. In addition, social groups and associations would try to represent their own version of the past in the public sphere, claiming compensation from the French state, demonstrating and competing with each other, while attempting to achieve their most important goal: to be included in official memory and become substantial parts of the official narrative (Enjelvin & Kakabadse-Korac 152–77).

The year 2005 can be seen as a turning point, as it was the moment when the colonial past emerged in the public sphere and became an everyday topic in news, media and newspapers, as a result of the 'memory laws' passed in February and the *banlieue* riots of that November (Bancel *et al.* 4). On 23 February 2005, the French state passed a law – sponsored by a group

⁹ 'Vichy Syndrome': a phrase used by the French historian Henry Rousso to describe the process through which the French state and French society have tried to 'come to terms' with the traumatic past of the Vichy period. Rousso describes the memory of Vichy using four chronological phases: 'Unfinished mourning', 'Repressions', 'Broken mirror' and 'Obsessions'. See the work of Henry Rousso. On the 'Algeria Syndrome', see the work of David Shalk.

of right-wing politicians from the UMP party (Union pour un Mouvement Populaire) – combining recognition of those who had participated in imperial expansion with a series of financial measures in favour of those displaced as a result of decolonization, the *rapatriés*. The law was aimed in particular at pied-noir and Harki communities. Objections were raised against Article 4, which stated that French school curricula should recognize the positive aspects of French colonial presence overseas, notably in North Africa (Eldridge, Introduction 1). Finally, the contested article was repealed by presidential decree (Löytömäki 97).

The colonial past has thus offered a historical space that could be revisited by any agent (governments, political parties, social groups, associations with different ideological and political backgrounds) and then used to build their arguments, seek answers in order to explain the current situation or help to forge their identity. As a result, diverse narratives of a traumatic past have emerged, leaving their traces in public history and creating a fragmented landscape of collective representations.

The colonial past and antagonistic memories during the Sarkozy era

In 2007, the election of Nicolas Sarkozy to the French presidency would promote a different approach to rethinking the past, based on a 'rupture' with past politics and an attempt to put an end to the *Françafrique* policy which had for so long determined France's connection with African countries (Melly & Derracq 4, 7).¹⁰ The policy that followed diverged considerably from his declarations. The 'anti-repentance' approach (the conviction that France should get rid of the colonial burden/guilt that the country has been carrying for so long concerning its historical responsibilities of colonialism), supported by intellectuals such as Pascal Bruckner and Max Gallo, promoted the end of France's suffering and self-punishment for its past, and constituted the central pillar of Sarkozy's politics of memory. As the newly elected president, Sarkozy 'made precisely the break with national contrition so urgently demanded by Bruckner and Gallo among others' (Bracher 54). It has been argued that younger people and subsequent generations should not have to carry the burdens of the past, such as the slave trade, colonialism or Vichy (d'Appollonia 306). As Nathan Bracher has shown, Sarkozy's policy tried to put an end to the 'tyranny of penitence',¹¹ giving way to an attempt at building national unity based on two concepts: 'cultural continuity' with the past and the creation of 'shared memories' among a socially diverse population. This plan, promulgated from the very first days of his presidential inauguration as part of an agenda of memory politics, was reflected in celebration of the memory of Guy Moquet and the thirty-five Resistance members in Cascade de Bois de Boulogne (Bracher 54–70). The 'duty to remember' shifted its focus from Chirac's previous approaches based on 'repentance' (notably his 1995 speech about the Vel d'Hiv roundup), to the 'heroic fall' of the *résistants* that Sarkozy celebrated. This attempt to instil national unity addressed simultaneously the collective imaginary of communist memory, honouring one of its martyrs.

The 'anti-repentance' approach inscribed in Sarkozy's politics of memory – which criticized the cosmopolitan mode of remembering for excessive empathy towards victimhood – paved the way for the emergence of counter-memories or antagonistic memories such as antisemitism in the public sphere (Bracher 56). Rather than accepting as a total failure the inability of the cosmopolitan mode to absorb antagonistic memories and incorporate them in an official

¹⁰ The term *Françafrique* refers to the asymmetrical nature of exchanges that for so long have been dictating the relations between Africa and France. Despite de Gaulle's announcement that France would grant independence to its sub-Saharan colonies in 1958, *Françafrique* describes the transition to a neocolonial period where France would try to maintain a structure of dependence with its former colonies – see Dominique Thomas, pp. 393–404.

¹¹ Reference to the work of Pascal Bruckner.

narrative, or emphasize the inadequacy in creating through the human rights movement, seen by some as a last utopian vision (Bull & Hansen 391),¹² we should rethink and reapproach the notion of antagonism in its social context. What is nowadays considered to be a de facto problematic issue as a result of the ideological and political context that defines it (i.e. the concept of antagonism emerging as a discourse from extreme right voices/movements) has not always been that way. Different social groups, minorities and associations (e.g. the Harkis) tried to re-establish their place in French society throughout the 1990s and until the early 2000s. They have emerged from the 'peripheries' of history, challenged collective amnesia, raised their visibility, shaped a collective identity and created memory communities, by in effect antagonizing each other and by using their counter-memories to challenge the hegemonic memory of the state – seeking in the process official recognition. Hence, there is a need to historicize the notion of 'memory wars' in order to have a rounded idea of their impact in French society, neither abolishing nor advocating the notion completely but rather understanding it by placing it in the broader context of its time.

Perceptions of the colonial past can be traced in particular through the political discourse of Sarkozy by examining his speeches in the context of the presidential elections and their aftermath in Toulon (7 February 2007), Algeria (10 July 2007) and Dakar (26 July 2007). The concept of redefining 'Frenchness' while Sarkozy was in power (a national debate on French identity was held in 2009, asking 'what does it mean to be French'),¹³ associated with 'anti-repentance' perceptions of the colonial past, created a symbolic space characterized by a Manichean discrimination between 'us' and 'them'. The 'us' relates to the declining *grandeur* of 'Frenchness', which needed to be reinvented anew in 'heroic' terms such as: the 'glorious past' (a form of colonial nostalgia which has been inscribed in the positive aspects of the *mission civilisatrice*) and the 'united nation' (an attempt, albeit consisting of diverse identities, to build a distinct cultural continuity with de Gaulle's myth of a united resistance). On the other hand, 'them' constituted a constructed 'enemy', created to defend French values and to facilitate the process of constructing the identity of 'us'. The enemy could be internal (Arabs, Muslims, minorities) as the *banlieue* riots showed in 2005, or external ('flows' of immigrants that need to be controlled). As Bancel et al. have noted: 'nowadays, Muslims have become a "global race"' (Introduction 25).

In his 2007 speech in Toulon, a town with a traditionally high percentage of extreme right-wing voters of FN (Front National; now RN (Rassemblement National)) and also a large pied-noir community, Sarkozy criticized repentance and the politics of self-flagellation by stating:

To all the disciples of repentance who are remaking history and who are judging people from yesterday regardless of the conditions in which they lived or the feelings they had. I want to tell them: What gives you the right to judge them? I want to tell them: What gives you the right to demand that sons repent for the misdeeds of their fathers, for misdeeds that their fathers often committed in your imagination alone? (qtd. in Horelt 207–8, translated by Horelt)¹⁴

During his presidential campaign in March 2007, Sarkozy had declared that if elected, he would recognize France's role in the massacre of Harkis, 'so that our forgetting does not

¹² Samuel Moyn in his work *The Last Utopia, Human Rights in History* interprets the human rights movement as a last utopia after the collapse of all the utopias of the twentieth century such as fascism, communism, modernization and decolonization.

¹³ From Associated Press in NBC News, "Great Debate: What does it mean to be French?", 25 November 2009, Accessed 2 May 2019.

¹⁴ You can find the original quotation in: L'OBS.

assassinate them a second time'. This promise was never kept. Although Sarkozy referred to the suffering of the Harkis, declaring that they deserved 'solemn homage', he did not express any apologies or acceptance of France's culpability in the massacres following the Evian Accords in 1962 (qtd. in Sims 132–3, translated by Sims).¹⁵

On his first brief visit in Algeria in July 2007 and addressing the newspapers, Sarkozy further defended the 'anti-repentant' position:

Certainly there was a lot of suffering and injustice during the 132 years France spent in Algeria. But that wasn't all there was. I'm for a recognition of the facts but not for repentance, which is a religious notion that has no place in relations between states. (qtd. in Reuters)

Sarkozy's stance of 'anti-repentance' and the merits of France's 'civilizing mission' were evident during his 2007 visit to sub-Saharan Africa. 'Colonial guilt', as a burden which shifts and passes onto the side of the colonized, onto 'them' (the African 'other'), was obvious in his discourse. In his speech at the University of Dakar in Senegal (2007) he remarked: 'Africa bears some of the responsibility for its own misfortune [...] colonisation is not responsible for all of today's difficulties in Africa' (qtd. in d'Appollonia 306, translated by d'Appollonia). He added: 'The tragedy of Africa is that the African has not fully entered into history [...] They have never really launched themselves into the future' (qtd. in Ba, translated by Ba).¹⁶

Following the post-Sarkozy years in France, we may observe the re-emergence of a discourse concerning the colonial past and its legacy (either pro- or anti-colonial), reflecting political developments and other social change. This 'colonial legacy' has become particularly visible in the public sphere, through the rise of far-right nationalism, through immigration policy, the terrorist attacks of 2015 and even through the renewed public debate about the homogeneity of the national football team that won the World Cup in 2018.¹⁷ In the next section, I focus on the case of Maurice Audin, for many a symbol of anti-colonial struggle against a 'dirty war' and a tragic figure who 'vanished' (among so many other victims) at the hands of a 'faceless' brutal system, while for others a traitor. With Audin, we may see how the 'colonial legacy' continues to be present as a cultural characteristic of France's social memory.

Emmanuel Macron and the politics of memory: Remembering French Algeria, the case of Maurice Audin and the recognition of French torture in Algeria

For the first time in post-war history, France officially acknowledged in 2018 the systematic use of torture during the Algerian War of Independence (1954–62) through the case of Maurice Audin. Maurice Audin was a 25-year-old mathematician, member of the Algerian Communist Party and an anti-colonialist, when he was arrested by the French forces on 11 June 1957, tortured and murdered. His body has never been found. The official version (coming from the French authorities) concerning the disappearance of Audin claimed that he managed to escape. The truth about Audin's case has been revealed by the work of historians, and the collective consciousness of French society has been burdened with a 'guilty secret': that Audin died during torture, or that he was tortured and then murdered by the French authorities. Nevertheless, and despite the late confessions of high-level military personnel (such as General Paul Aussaresses in 2013), or the plethora of evidence proving Audin's murder, there has been no official explanation for his 'disappearance', as the military

¹⁵ You can see the original quotation in: Yann Le Guernigou, Reuters.

¹⁶ You can read Sarkozy's speech in Dakar, in: Nicolas Sarkozy, *Le Monde*.

¹⁷ See the work of Laurent Dubois.

records/archives remain sealed. Macron's predecessors have silently accepted the 'guilty secret' regarding Audin's case and the French state has never admitted that its military forces routinely used torture. Sarkozy said that although 'atrocities were committed by both sides [...] France cannot repent for having conducted this War' (qtd. in Serhan). Former Prime Minister and then-presidential candidate François Fillon said France should not be ashamed of its history in Algeria, which he likened to a 'cultural exchange' (*L'Express*). A letter Josette Audin (Maurice Audin's widow) wrote in 2007 remained unanswered by President Sarkozy (Funes).

The first step towards an official statement about Maurice Audin's case was taken in 2014 by President François Hollande, who officially declared that Audin 'died in detention' (qtd. in Bretton and Albertini). But as historian Sylvie Thénault has noted, what was 'lacking' in Hollande's statement was an 'admission that Audin died because of the torture he was subjected to while in the hands of the military' (qtd. in France 24). On 13 September 2018, Emmanuel Macron made a statement, apologising to the widow of Audin for his murder by the French forces while he was in custody in 1957. Macron's public apology to Josette Audin was followed by a commitment to grant historians access to the state archives, prompting investigations into others who disappeared during the Algerian War of Independence. As Macron declared regarding the Maurice Audin case: 'we do know that his disappearance had been made possible by a system that successive governments permitted to develop. This system is known as "arrest and detain" and gives the forces maintaining order the authority to arrest, detain and interrogate any "suspect" to ensure that the fight against the enemy gets results' (Macron).

Within the wider context of growing populist nationalism, Macron's politics of memory may be considered as another 'top-down' initiative of 'coming to terms with the past'. As Raphaëlle Branche noted in an interview about Macron's latest actions: 'The gap between what is known in the academic community and what the political leadership recognizes is closing' (qtd. in Jublin). Beyond the moral vindication that the declaration of the French president offers to the relatives of the victim and to the people that for so long have been fighting for justice, we should not overlook the symbolic significance of these actions. The truth about Audin's case and the official recognition of the atrocities committed by the French Army in Algeria go beyond individual vindication. Audin becomes part of national memory and with him hundreds of thousands of Audin(s), unknown to the public, lost in sealed archives, who are still missing. People who never managed to return home and were never registered in catalogues, victims of a 'legally established system of arrest and detention' in Algeria – as Macron described it (qtd. in Chrisafis) – become symbols, martyrs of the 'war without a name'.¹⁸

Historical works and projects dedicated to Maurice Audin have recently sought to shed light not only on this particular case but also on so many other 'disappearances' as a result of acts conducted by the French forces during the Battle of Algiers (1957). The historians Malika Rahal and Fabrice Riceputi made public in 2018 an online project registering 'missing people' who were arrested, detained and usually tortured by the French authorities.¹⁹ This represents an attempt to preserve the memory of thousands of people, victims of an official detention and extermination mechanism installed by the French forces. Furthermore, a recent collective volume dedicated to Maurice Audin (coordinated by the historians Sylvie Thénault and

¹⁸ The title of John Talbot's famous work on the Algerian conflict.

¹⁹ "Alger 1957-des Maurice Audin par milliers. Enlevés, détenus clandestinement, torturés et parfois assassinés par l'armée française." The online page provides information (details and photos) of people still 'missing', also collecting documents that relatives may want to share: www.1000autres.org/ Accessed 21 February 2020.

Magalie Besse),²⁰ focuses on the role and the possible uses of transitional justice mechanisms in consolidated democracies, inscribed in the perspective of the 'duty to remember' and of the 'right to the truth' (El Watan). After fifty-eight years, the 'war without a name' gradually acquires the name(s) of its historical agents and resurfaces in public discourse, highlighting the various mechanisms through which a society remembers.

Beyond the aforementioned moral vindication or the symbolic homage to all those who disappeared during the war, it is striking to see how the political, social and cultural conditions of our times, our present needs, fears or aspirations, can define our relationship with the past, transform the collective memory of society and create a cultural frame through which following generations (who are missing the lived experience of the events) remember and reapproach the past.²¹ In most news sites, newspaper articles and social media, Macron's declaration was welcomed positively and in some cases with great enthusiasm, such as by the PCF/Parti Communiste Français (Communist Party of France) whose leader Pierre Laurent said that 'the State's lie that had persisted for 61 years falls' (qtd. in *L'Humanité*). He also wrote on Twitter: 'This is a great moment for Josette Audin and her family, for the PCF that gave so much in the anti-colonial struggle, and all the anti-colonialist activists' (qtd. in France 24). Audin's case appeared on almost all news sites and in all newspapers in France. Opinion articles, reports, interviews with politicians and tributes telling the story of Audin and commenting on the president's actions once again put the most famous 'forgotten war' in mainstream discourse. One particularly prevalent approach encountered in the news was the comparison of Macron's declarations to the 1995 speech by President Jacques Chirac admitting France's culpability in the deportation of tens of thousands of Jews to the Nazi death camps during the Second World War (McAuley).

Far from welcoming the gesture of Macron, however, voices from the far right in France spoke against the president's actions and condemned his declarations. Former president and founder of the FN, Jean Marie Le-Pen, commented in an interview:

President Macron is not responsible for writing the history of France [...] the role of France's President is not to divide the French people by reminding them of the sufferings of the past [...] Emmanuel Macron's statement is a nod to the left and the far left [...] Those who died are dead, France does not need to apologise permanently for having been France [...] Today's young people did not experience these events, the story was what it was. (qtd. in Domenach)

From the same viewpoint, the current president of the RN, Marine Le-Pen, expressing her fears of an imminent social division, stated in 'Le Figaro, Talk' via Twitter: 'Maurice Audin had hidden FLN terrorists who had carried out attacks [...] Macron commits an act of division, thinking to flatter the communists.'²² And she continues: 'What's the point in re-opening the wounds of the past?' (qtd. in LCI). In the same vein, the journalist Eric Zemmour stated in an interview that Audin deserved 'twelve bullets in the skin' because 'he was a traitor, he was against France and was helping the FLN to kill Frenchmen' (qtd. in Beytout).

The perceptions of the past and the frames through which we understand it are evident in the positions adopted by different political parties. The narrative of the Communist Party

²⁰ *Réparer l'injustice: l'affaire Maurice Audin* (edited by Sylvie Thénault and Magalie Besse), Institut Francophone pour la Justice et la Démocratie, 2019.

²¹ On Collective memory, see the work of Maurice Halbwachs.

²² @MLP_officiel. "Maurice Audin a caché des terroristes du FLN qui ont commis des attentats. #Macron commet un acte de division, en pensant flatter les communistes." #LeTalk. Twitter, 13 September 2018, 1:03 p.m., twitter.com/MLP_officiel/status/1040179271128494080 (my translation).

speaks of the Algerian War of Independence as an act of resistance to a 'dirty' colonial war in which the French state did not hesitate to use torture methods that inevitably triggered memories of the Nazi horrors during the Second World War. The rhetoric of the right and the far-right speaks of a heroic war in which the use of violence was more than necessary in the context of national duty, patriotism and retaliation against the terrorist actions of the FLN. The positive aspects of colonialism serve as key features in the 'civilizing' discourse of conservative voices, in an attempt to build a 'glorious' past. This is how – to return to an example discussed above – the nineteenth-century *mission civilisatrice* (civilizing mission) found institutional expression in the 2005 Educational Bill, as an ideological project of the conservative right-wing party UMP which attempted to highlight the positive aspects of French colonialism.

Conclusion

A new vocabulary has emerged to define and describe the social, political, cultural and economic transformations of our times, reflecting the rise of populist and nationalist voices: 'defensive identities', *grand remplacement* (great substitution or replacement), 'cultural insecurity', 'reverse colonization', 'great departure' (Bancel et al. 8–9). Rather than coming out of the blue, these notions that challenge the cosmopolitan mode of 'coming to terms with the past' in France today are deeply related to the ideological polarization evident in the post-Chirac era, and particularly in the Sarkozy period. In order to understand the current crisis and the emergence of antagonistic populist and nationalist voices, there is a need to historicize notions such as antagonistic memories and 'memory wars', tracing their course in historical time. Rather than denouncing the cosmopolitan mode (but at the same time recognizing the need to acknowledge its weaknesses), I have focused my interest on the past, considering Sarkozy's presidency as a defining period in rethinking colonialism. The 2005 'memory laws' are considered to be a decisive moment, a turning point that would bring the colonial past to the surface of the public sphere again. The UMP played a significant role in this public debate, foreshadowing Sarkozy's politics of memory evident during his presidency. Beyond its antagonizing effects, the 'anti-repentant' narrative implemented 'from above', as an answer to the previous cosmopolitan mode, has also facilitated the creation of an 'enemy', unable to accept the 'civilizing benefits' of the superior 'Frenchness'. The UMP has also used this policy in order to regain votes from the FN (Mabanckou & Thomas 324).

Both Nicolas Sarkozy and Emmanuel Macron have shown a tendency to use the past to shape their political agendas, with the former promoting a distinctly 'anti-repentant' approach in rethinking the past, and the latter a vague and ambivalent policy of *accepting* (or expressing a willingness to accept) *every* past. Macron's ambiguous intention to honour the memory of Marshal Pétain on the 7 November 2018 during the memorial celebration of the centennial of the end of the First World War triggered public debates, provoking social disputes and reflecting the controversial politics of memory deriving from his political agenda. What is at stake regarding Macron's politics of memory is the peril of approaching the past as an ahistorical space, detached from every social, political or cultural context – as a no-man's land where every voice would not merely be heard, but also accepted and legitimized, creating a precarious equality through a seemingly multi-perspectival approach. If the distance between Maurice Audin and Philippe Pétain risks being collapsed, inscribed in a multi-vocal 'mode' of remembering, then how far removed from justification is acceptance? It has been argued that the idea of an 'agonistic' mode of approaching the past might be an alternative to the ongoing crisis (Bull and Hansen 390–404). One could say that perhaps Macron's political uses of the past might resemble an unintentional way of revisiting the past through 'agonism'. One might ask: if Audin, why not Pétain? Since it is not the purpose of this article

to venture arguments on this issue, it may express concerns that might help us discuss these processes in the future: How can we secure multi-perspectivity and assure that antagonistic confrontation, political adversaries and rivalries will respect and comply with the democratic context? How can the use of such a theoretical tool be controlled? What political purposes might it serve in times of democratic precariousness? Is the risk of a dangerous ideological and political equation of sufferings not evident? Does this mode not promote a de-politicization of the way we rethink the past?

'Coming to terms with the past' is an ongoing process, where the past interacts with the present, with each element shaping and transforming each other. It is a dialogue, where the aspirations, expectations and pursuits of those engaged in 'politics from below' meet the government's institutional 'politics from above'. There is a need to understand where to situate this meeting point in the present. Is this driving force from below a major force in our times of political, cultural and economic crises? Could we contend that we are experiencing a transformation of the way we rethink the colonial past in France (among other countries in Europe)? If yes, what is the role of academic history in such times of crisis?

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