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AN END TO THE "VICHY/ALGERIA SYNDROME"?: NEGOTIATING TRAUMATIC PASTS IN THE FRENCH REPUBLIC

A Thesis Presented

by

JUSTIN W. SILVESTRI

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

February 2011

History

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To my family, both here and across the sea

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I would like to take this opportunity to extend my sincere gratitude to those who contributed to this thesis and provided vital intellectual and moral support. Above all, I would like to thank Professor Jennifer Ngaire Heuer for the steady guidance that she provided throughout this project's development. Her insightful direction, attention to detail, and welcomed assumption of the role of taskmaster helped to keep this project on track, particularly in those moments where I felt overwhelmed by the thesis's ambitious scope. Gratitude should also be extended to Professor Jon Berndt Olsen and his course on Comparative Memory during the aftermath of World War II. Professor Without this stimulating experience, I would not have explored this body of scholarship or have produced the core content that would later be heart of this thesis. Many other academic advisors must be recognized. Professor Dianne Sears' advisory role in this project gave me an open ear and a fresh perspective outside of my discipline. I would furthermore like to thank Professors Neil Shipley, Jay Winter, and James Young for their attention and advice.

Of course, academic advisors alone do not make the production of any scholarly work possible. Critical input and emotional support came from a warm and loving community of family and friends. I'd like to thank my parents for their love and support. Their kind criticism of my subject's relevance forced me to keep a watchful eye on the thesis's coherency. I would also like to express my love and gratitude to Randi, whose loving attention, guidance, and admirable patience made this thesis much easier to complete. All my thanks to the numerous ranks of friends and family who supported this endeavor

ABSTRACT

REMEMBERING THE FRENCH REPUBLIC: REFLECTIONS ON MEMORY, HISTORY AND REPUBLICANISM IN FRANCE

FEBRUARY 2011

M.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Jennifer N. Heuer.

Within the past few years, France has exhibited a changing relationship in regards to its traumatic memory of its collaborationist and colonial past. The controversies of the *loi du 23 février 2005* and the 2007 Guy Môquet Commemoration displayed a new openness to discuss and evaluate traumatic pasts associated with these two public acts. Public debate during the two controversies focused on the difficult process of how to incorporate these traumatic events into the national narrative. Furthermore, this process of negotiation has opened up a vibrant discussion over what parties in France possess the authority and the right to construct the nation's history. Medical metaphors of neurosis and repression no longer appear to fit French practices of commemoration and remembrance.

The Fifth Republic's legislative effort to dictate the content and character of France's past encountered significant resistance from a number of historians and educators. These scholars criticized the inappropriate character of the French State's involvement in the writing of history. While they stood opposed to the State's methods, French historians and scholars came to frame their resistance to legislated history as evidence of their loyalty to republican ideals, namely those of scientific inquiry and *laïcité*. They too desired the creation of a shared national history, yet insisted that this

history could only be formed by respecting the presence of multiple narratives. Other scholars voiced their reservations that the restoration of traumatic narratives might further social breakdown. Interestingly, historians expressed little concern for the role of the general public in the writing of history and, at times, revealed a distinct apathy or active mistrust of the public's capacity to think historically.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A. A Shrug And Silence: My First Encounter With Contested French Memory

From 2007 to 2008, I spent my time teaching at the *lycée* Évariste Galois in Sartrouville under the auspices of a Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship. I had been at the school only a few weeks before I encountered an unsettling scene in teacher's faculty lounge. I remember the agitated buzz that permeated the room and being taken aback by the unusual tension that permeated a space that normally exuded relaxation, relief, and fatigue. I made my way to the vending machine and, as I keyed in my order, my eyes drifted to a piece of paper that had been taped to the front of a nearby machine. This letter urged the faculty to refuse participation in President Nicolas Sarkozy's planned reading of the letter written by Guy Môquet to French students and to protest this intolerable "instrumentalization" of the national past. My curiosity compelled me to ask one of my colleagues to what the letter was referring. She hastily explained that Guy Môquet was a young French communist who had been arrested and later executed by the Germans during the Occupation. The letter stirring up such controversy, she said, was simply the letter he had written to his family on the eve of his execution. My friend punctuated her explanation with an uninterested shrug. She had no reservations about reading Môquet's letter to her students and, regardless of the opinions of her peers, she intended to do so. With a curious air of ambivalence, apathy, and resignation, she ended our conversation.

My colleague's ambivalence towards the Guy Môquet's commemoration appeared somewhat odd in contrast to its fierce and eclectic body of opposition. The French

Communist Party and Socialist Party, once reservedly enthusiastic supporters of the event, now accused President Nicolas Sarkozy of transforming Môquet into a kitschy allegory of French patriotism and republican loyalty. Many French historians and educators bristled at the perceived violation of their professional realm. Professional concerns quickly translated into political anxieties. These historians and educators issued a grave warning that the government's repeated intrusion into historical affairs, particularly in the classroom, contributed to a disturbing deterioration of historical knowledge in France. Some, like Laurence De Cock-Pierre, denounced the Môquet commemoration for being motivated by a dangerous chauvinism that sought to harness the national past to transmit a political ideology to the public.[1]

B. A *Guerre mémorielle franco-française?*

At first, I wrote off the controversy surrounding the Môquet commemoration as only the product of President Nicolas Sarkozy's election. The president's tumultuous political history and public resistance to his proposed economic and social reforms appeared responsible for the politicized character of this event. It would not be until my entry into the graduate program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst that I began to connect the Môquet commemoration to the broader context of negotiating with traumatic pasts in the national narrative. Professor Jon Berndt Olsen's course on the memory of World War II introduced me, to adapt Henry Rousso's phrase, the *guerre mémorielle franco-française* (France's memory war). Since that course in Spring 2009, my understanding of this memory war broadened to include the violent and painful era of the French empire's collapse, especially in regard to the loss of Algeria. The collective

[1] Laurence De Cock-Pierrepont. "Des usages étatiques de la lettre de Guy Môquet," Site du CVUH, May 2007. http://cvuh.free.fr/spip.php?article94 (Accessed April 26, 2010).

traumas of the Occupation and decolonization have made the Republic's legislative efforts to arrive at a shared vision of the French national past difficult, if not impossible.

These efforts by the French Republic recently came to an anti-climatic resolution. On November 19, 2008, the parliamentary committee led by Bernard Accoyer issued a report that recommended that the National Assembly put an end to the legislative practice of the *loi mémorielle*, a category of French law that established the State's official position on historical matters and outlined the consequences for challenging or transgressing this vision of history. The committee proclaimed that the National Assembly ultimately lacked the juridical authority to pass laws which established or endorsed particular interpretations of the national past, elaborating that such laws inhibited the freedom of expression necessary for historical research and democratic society.[2] However, the committee's conclusions did not indicate a renunciation of the Republic's interest in issues of national history or the commemoration of the past. In fact, the committee's report went to great lengths to detail the substantial republican tradition of public commemoration and education in matters of history.[3] At its heart, the Accoyer Report reaffirmed the long-held republican assumption that the past represented an integral method of maintaining and perpetuating a democratic society. The construction and transmission of this common history remained of interest to the French Republic, even if public opinion forced it to abandon certain methods of acting on that interest.

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[2] Accoyer Commission. *Rapport d'Information Fait en Application de l'Article 145 de Réglement au Nom de la Mission d'Information sur les Questions Memorielles.* Assemblée Nationale, November 18, 2008. http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/13/rap-info/i1262.asp (Accessed April 26, 2010).

[3] *Rapport d'Information Fait en Application de l'Article 145 de Réglement au Nom de la Mission d'Information sur les Questions Memorielles.*

What had motivated public opinion to condemn the Republic's efforts to legislate a shared history for its citizens? Growing State involvement in the dictation of historical curriculum in French schools provoked considerable outcry from French historians and educators. However, the Republic's interest in the classroom is unsurprising. After all, the Accoyer Report identified the historical education offered at French *écoles* as "…one of the cements of national unity."[4] The committee particularly emphasized the role of diversity in the national past, which would act to remind citizens that all were gathered together and united under the Republic.[5] In short, republican society would be bound together by a synthesized collective of multiple histories. Ironically, the report's description of the multi-faceted character of France's national past overlooked the fact that it was the same troubling diversity that had compelled the Republic to both institute and later review the use of *lois mémorielles*. In spite of its willingness to cease certain practices, the Accoyer Report demonstrated that French legislators refused to alter or abandon their concept of history as a socially unifying force.

How to explain this renewed enthusiasm for a shared history? Why did legislation that dealt with the national past appear to have such tremendously high stakes? Social and economic transformations taking place in French society around the turn of the twenty-first century likely turned France's attention to its national past for reassurance and counsel. Economic hardship, high unemployment, and racial discrimination lingering from the colonial era provoked occasional episodes of protest and violence by French

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[4]*Rapport d'Information Fait en Application de l'Article 145 de Réglement au Nom de la Mission d'Information sur les Questions Memorielles*.

[5] *Rapport d'Information Fait en Application de l'Article 145 de Réglement au Nom de la Mission d'Information sur les Questions Memorielles.*

youth, culminating in the Parisian *banlieues* riots that gradually spread across the nation in late 2005. Reservation over the Republic's philosophy of assimilation in regards to integrating non-European immigrants into secular French society framed public discussion of headscarves and burkas in public spaces. Growing economic, cultural, and generational divisions both coincided with and encouraged a tortured effort to make amends for national crimes. In 1995, only a few years after François Mitterand's unpopular refusal to participate in a previous commemoration of the Vél d'Hiv round-up, French President Jacques Chirac officially acknowledged France's role in the European persecution of Jews during Hitler's Final Solution. The belated trials of Vichy collaborators Paul Touvier and Maurice Papon brought the traumatic history of Vichy and the Occupation back into national consciousness, reopening old national wounds.[6] Later, in 1999 and 2000, the French Republic finally acknowledged the Algerian War to be more than a police action, and some French generals publicly admitted its army's use of torture. The steady deluge of traumatic memories compelled the French State to take legislative action to contain and neutralize this potentially divisive force.

Not all French accepted the State's campaign to acknowledge and confront the nation's troubled past. In fact, some French historians criticized the government and general public's apparent fixation on traumatic pasts and attributed to this fixation national demoralization and a loss of faith in France's historical mission. According to Max Gallo, French historian and intellectual, this legislative initiative only aggravated the

[6] These trials took place over the course of the 1980's and early 1990's. For further reading see: Henry Rousso. *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France Since 1944*. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); Richard J. Golsan ed. *The Papon Affair: Memory and Justice on Trial*. (New York: Routledge, 2000); Richard J. Golsan. *Vichy's Aftermath History and Counterhistory in Postwar France*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

social ills that it sought to contain. Public recognition of past crimes through routine commemoration allegedly engendered a fierce *communitarianisme* (multi-culturalism) anathema to republican unity. Gallo passionately railed against these trends, writing in sarcastic terms that the campaign that aimed to strip France of its rightful place in history:

> Forget the dreams of grandeur! Let's stop being a country and let's become a gathering of European regions! Away with French exceptionalism! Erase our glorious history from our memories! It is criminal. Do not evoke anymore Versailles, Valmy, or Austerlitz, but the *Code Noir*, the roundup of *Vél d'Hiv*, Dîen Bîen Phu and torture! Let's be a province, Basque or Corsican, Poitevine, Savoyard, Vendean or West Indian, and not a nation! Stay rooted in our communities and regional traditions. […] Thus, we will live better![7]

National unity thus required a shared history that emphasized common ideals and experiences. To Gallo, mending the divisions in French society did not demand any further recognition of diversity or crimes found in France's history. Rather, national ills would be best relieved by a healthy dose of silence and amnesia about these traumatic moments in the nation's history.[8]

The desire to forget or silence ambiguous or undesirable memories in favor of an idealized past is, to be fair, an understandable impulse. The memories of our past commonly become a refuge, a world more stable than the turbulent present. However, Gallo's frustration derived less from an aggrieved nostalgia than the introduction of several marginalized histories and memories into the nation's consciousness. For some, the empowerment of these histories became a source of anxiety and discomfort.

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[7] Max Gallo. *L'Âme de la France: Une histoire de la Nation, des origines à nos jours.* (Paris: Fayard, 2007), 22.

[8] Professor Jay Winter's insight and interest in this project brought the role of silence to my attention. For those interested in silence and its role in shaping public memory, see: Jay Winter. "The Social Construction of Silence." (Keynote Address, 6th Annual Graduate History Association Conference, Amherst, March 27, 2010).

The examination of the *lois mémorielles*' apex from 2004 to 2007 demonstrates that the tension over these laws' existence derived from the national debate over how and where to introduce these traumatic histories. The *Loi française n° 2005-158 du 23 février 2005 portant reconnaissance de la Nation et contribution nationale en faveur des Français rapatriés* unleashed the energies that had been simmering since the early 1990s. Although Minister of Veteran's Affairs Hamlaoui Mekachéra had proposed the law in mid-2004 to recognize former colonists and colonial subjects, tensions boiled over when conservative legislators introduced an amendment designed to emphasize the "rôle positif"[9] of French colonization in the classroom. This provoked French historians and educators to issue a condemnation of the government's intrusion into the classroom. Later that year, two advocacy groups organized to monitor and protest the "politicization" of French history and defend academic autonomy and scholarship; the *Comité de vigilance contre l'usage public de l'histoire* (CVUH) and *Liberté pour l'histoire* (LpH). These two organizations would later be vocal opponents of President Nicolas Sarkozy's commemoration of Guy Môquet. These two confrontations between the Republic and its scholars provide a rich array of events to explore these interrelated issues of contested memory, which public bodies or communities possess the authority to shape those memories into historical narratives, and what form and use these new histories have in democratic society. Furthermore, they raise important questions about the Republic's obligation to remember its past and, more important, its right to lay the past to rest.

[9] French National Assembly. *LOI n° 2005-158 du 23 février 2005 portant reconnaissance de la Nation et contribution nationale en faveur des Français rapatriés*. Legifrance, February 23, 2005. http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do;jsessionid=B683D839F254DD66CC979A93B54A95E4.tpdjo11v_2?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000444898&categorieLien=id (Accessed April 29, 2010).

CHAPTER 2

MEMORY, HISTORY, AND EDUCATION: A REPUBLICAN TRINITY

A. Defining Memory and Its Relationship to History

Before beginning our discussion of these two controversies, I first need to provide a definition of memory and how it is relevant for modern French society. What exactly is memory? How do individuals and societies recall their past experiences, construct them into a defined narrative, and express and transmit that narrative to other parties? What role has memory played in making and maintaining national communities? These questions have received a considerable amount of scholarly attention in recent decades. The end of social history's dominance in the 1980's paved the way for a generation of cultural historians to interact with historical artifacts in new ways to determine how individuals conceptualized and interpreted their contemporary circumstances, culture, social values, etc.[10] This increasingly popular study of *mentalités* made possible the expansion of the historian's ensemble of artifacts acceptable for research.[11] Cultural historians eagerly fixed their attention on literature, public speeches, theater, art, architecture, legal documents, and public monuments in their efforts to study and reconstruct the past. This atmosphere nurtured methodological innovation and contributed to the new interest in memory. Paul Fussell's analysis of the memory and representation

[10] William Sewell provides an informative and intimate overview of this methodological transformation in academic history in "The Political Unconscious of Social and Cultural History, or, Confessions of a Former Quantitative Historian" in *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation.* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2005), 22-80.

[11] Alon Confino discusses the connection between the history of *mentalités* and memory, particularly in regards to its methodological similarities and hazards in *Germany as a Culture of Remembrance: Promises and Limits of Writing History*. (Chapel Hill: University Of North Carolina Press, 2006), 171-172.

of trench warfare in literature published during and after World War I in *The Great War and Modern Memory* marked an early breakthrough in the field of memory studies.[12] Memory studies later expanded outside the boundaries of literary analysis and examined the role of objects as the receptacles of human memory, namely physical monuments, symbols, allegorical figures, film, etc.[13] To be fair, credit for the development of memory studies does not lie with cultural historians alone. Public history's "democratization" of history, particularly in bringing scholarly respectability to oral history, made memory an acceptable subject of study.[14] This tentative cession of scholarly authority to the general public has done much to give individual and communal memory more space and influence in scholarship.

A satisfactory definition of memory still proves to be a difficult task for historians. At its core, memory is a distinctly human trait, an intimate and elusive possession of the individual. This memory appears to be an agglomeration of recollections of past events, thoughts, ideas, and feelings, all interwoven together in an intangible tapestry. These recollections possess a variety of uses and functions. For example, memory can provide the individual valuable guidance for making decisions in the present by offering comparable situations or indicating the previous outcomes of

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[12] Paul Fussel. *The Great War and Modern Memory*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

[13] Examples of this genre of study that deal with the role of material culture and memory include: Pierre Nora. *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*. Lawrence D. Kritzman ed. Trans. Author Goldhammer. 4 Vol. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996-1998); Rudy Kosher, *From Monuments to Traces: Artifacts of German Memory, 1870-1990.* Weimar and Now: German Cultural Criticism. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2000), James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning.* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993).

[14] Exemplary studies in oral history and memory include Allesandro Portelli. *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*. SUNY Series in Oral and Public History. (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1991); Michael Frisch. *Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*. (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1990).

similar choices. It can offer us solace during moments of grief or loss through figurative restoration of the departed. They even give us the pleasant diversion of nostalgic reflection. In short, memory and the capacity for the recollection of the past represent an integral component of human existence.

In spite of memory's prominence in the human experience, historians have traditionally expressed reticence, if not outright refusal, to engage with it in their studies. Scholarly trepidation reveals a particular anxiety over memory's fluid and inventive character. Paul Ricoeur noted that this attitude stemmed from the belief that "…memory is the province of the imagination."[15] There is, to be sure, some truth to that belief. Take into consideration the memoir. The author writes his memoirs in a literal effort to construct a physical object that will act as a receptacle for the sum of his recollections and endure the demise of his earthly vehicle. Still, this artifact ultimately suffers from two major complications. First of all, any written record of memory lacks the precision of language necessary to describe and encapsulate the entirety of human experience. Standardized language subtly frames and limits the expression of memory, an important point to which I will return later. Secondly, the memoir's text is a narrative built in the framework of the author's contemporary circumstances and biases, which reflect the pressures of outside social forces.[16] These factors influence the content of the author's working, determining what experiences and thoughts are recollected and recorded. For

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[15] Paul Ricoeur. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 5.

[16] Paul Connerton notes how political and cultural elites tend to frame their memoirs in the framework of a broader historical narrative. However, he neglects to discuss how that influences the content of their memoirs. For further reading see: Connerton, Paul. *How Societies Remember*. Themes in the Social Sciences. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 19..

example, they may encourage him to censor certain inappropriate or unacceptable actions or thoughts in order to avoid social derision. Inversely, they might lead him to emphasize socially acceptable thoughts or behaviors to win his audience's approval. Furthermore, the author of the memoir typically constructs his narrative with the aim of transmitting morals or valuable instruction to his audience.[17] This too establishes a narrative structure that recollects and discards particular experiences or thoughts in order to achieve the narrative's goal. This propensity for censorship, alteration, or outright fabrication runs contrary, says Ricoeur, to memory's ambitious claim to truth.[18] The slippery character of memory's truthfulness has made it an unsuitable object of study for many historians.

B. Collective Memory and the Birth of the Modern Nation-State

Nevertheless, those historians willing to interact with memory insist that, by subjecting memory to a dispassionate and scientific examination, one can determine the historical truth of its content.[19] This critical approach to memory not only allows the historian to overcome its inherent inaccuracies and obfuscations; it also enables him to evaluate how a society uses the past to explain and justify contemporary circumstances. French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs elaborated on this process in his groundbreaking work, *On Collective Memory*. According to Halbwachs, the construction of individual memory is not an activity free of outside influence. Instead, he proposed that the formation and recollection of memories takes place within the social norms established

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[17] Jacques Le Goff noted the distinct shift in the historian's opinion of memoirs and testimonies as acceptable sources in: Jacques Le Goff. *History and Memory*. Trans. Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Claman. European Perspectives. (New York & Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1992), 185-186.

[18] Ricoeur, 7.

[19] For an excellent overview and diatribe of history's development as a modern science, see Le Goff, 179-199.

by the communities we inhabit, where we "…recall, recognize, and localize…" our memories in conjunction with one another.[20] This does not mean that this communal act of recollection possesses a coercive character or entails the violent elimination of deviant memories. Rather, the act of remembrance depends heavily on the collective effort of each individual to recognize and reinforce the shared content of his memories. Halbwachs describes this process thusly, saying:

> Most of the time, when I remember, it is others who spur me on; their memory comes to the aid of mine and mine relies on theirs…There is no point in seeking where they are preserved in my brain or in some nook of my mind to which I alone have access: for they are recalled to me externally, and the groups of which I am a part at any time give me the means to reconstruct them, upon condition, to be sure, that I turn toward them and adopt, at least for the moment, their way of thinking.[21]

For Halbwachs, memory remains dormant until outside stimuli trigger the need to recall past people or events. The fact that these stimuli (people, experiences, objects, ideas) are "shared" by many individuals ensures that the recollections would be similar. Furthermore, these individuals construct their memories using shared epistemological frameworks. Typically, communities have a basic language, social hierarchy, and value system in common, which also work to make individual memories remarkably similar in content. Regardless of the raw material that constitutes our individual memories, we ultimately construct them in such a way that reflects the presence and collective pressures of the communities that we inhabit.

How exactly does this collective process of recollection work? Does this process lead our memories to resemble the historical record? Halbwachs stated that the social

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[20] Halbwachs, 38.

[21] Halbwachs, 38.

pressures and frameworks inherent in our communities lead to us to "…reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society."[22] In short, contemporary concerns and needs have greater influence over how we remember the past than the real nature of our past experiences. The involvement of contemporary circumstances, cultural mores, values, etc., ensures that particular details are emphasized or expunged from memory and that this remembrance of the past would conform to the present. In this respect, the past exists as an omni-present entity, continuously deconstructed, organized, and remade in the relentless progression of time.

How exactly is this revision of the past transmitted across communities? Halbwachs identified language as the critical social framework for proper collective remembrance.[23] Verbal and written forms of communication provide our memories with a skeleton upon which they can take form. This skeleton, for the lack of a better word, is not a neutral participant in this process. Common, standardized languages rely on singular definitions agreed upon by its speakers, which consequently bind our memories to those definitions. We express our memories in the words of the present, which ensures that we reconstitute the past with contemporary ideas, values, assumptions, and judgments. This sets the stage for the subconscious alteration of our memories in order to orient them within the language of the present. This contributes, like Halbwachs states, to the constant process of historical revision that rewrites our past to the contemporary circumstances and demands of the present.[24]

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[22] Halbwachs, 40.

[23] Halbwachs, 45.

[24] Halbwachs, 47.

While he examined the formation of collective memories in families, religious communities, and social classes, Halbwachs neglected to discuss how the nascent national communities of nineteenth-century Europe reconstructed and remembered their pasts. Unlike past communities, these young nations aimed to subordinate all other forms of communal association under themselves. Fervent nationalists of the eighteenth and nineteenth century typically conceived the nation according to Guiseppe Mazzini's definition, who defined the nation as a community of people "…all speaking the same language, gifted with the same tendencies, and educated by the same historical tradition."[25] In other words, the natural boundaries of a nation could easily be determined by the existence of a shared language, culture, and, most importantly, past. How did nationalists propose to construct the new national community in the wake of such ignorance and distortion? How did they intend to make the nation knowable to the unwitting citizen? Mazzini proposed that what the nation needed to do was make itself known to the public and undertake an ambitious program of public education, writing:

> Every citizen ought to receive in its (the nation's) schools moral teaching, a course in the history of nationalities, including a rapid survey of the progress of Humanity, and in the history of his own country, a popular exposition of the principles which direct the legislation of the country, and the elementary instruction about which there is no dispute. Every citizen ought to learn in these schools equality and love.[26]

Proper public education in moral conduct, civil society, and history provided the necessary foundation to create a community of citizens capable of participating in a democratic nation. Only virtuous citizens fluent in their nation's language, culture, and

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[25] Guiseppe Mazzini. *The Duties of Man and Other Essays.* Issue 24 of Everyman's Library. (London; Toronto: Dent, 1915), 52.

[26] Mazzini, 89.

government could maintain and perpetuate the national community. In order to accomplish this goal, nationalists and their partisans set about constructing and transmitting national cultures connected to the past. This involved the resurrection, reinvention, and fabrication of previous symbols and rituals in society. Eric Hobsbawm's and Terence Ranger's edited collection of essays, *The Invention of Tradition,*[27] defined these "invented traditions" as

> …a set of practices normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past."[28]

These new or rediscovered traditions could be found anywhere: clothing, folklore, language, literature, coronations. Other traditions, like the tartan and kilt as a symbol of Scottish nationalism, had to be completely fabricated.[29] Nascent nation-states needed to rely heavily on these "invented traditions" to survive. Hobsbawm demonstrated this point in his discussion of the Third Republic of France. French republicans appropriated the history of the French Revolution and constructed an entire culture of public commemorations and ceremonies, pantheons of heroes, and material objects in order to justify their regime.[30] The construction of republican France did not consist of the "rediscovery" of the republican past alone. Deliberate forgetting or silencing of particular memories acted to neutralize potential challenges to the national community and to

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[27] Hobsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger eds. *The Invention of Tradition*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[28] Hobsbawm, 1.

[29] Hugh Trevor Roper. "The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland" in *The Invention of Tradition*, 15-41.

[30] Hobsbawm, 270-273.

secure the loyalty of its citizens. As noted by Ernest Renan, the nation is as much about forgetting the past as it is remembering that past.[31]

How did nationalists successfully transmit and impose their vision of the national community on the hearts and minds of their audiences? The reason for this development likely has to do with the revolution in Europe's means of communication. Benedict Anderson proposed in his work, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,*[32] that the development of nationalism had its roots in print-capitalism. According to Anderson, Europe's capability to mass-produce books, newspapers, and pamphlets written in a vernacular allowed individuals separated by great distances to conceptualize themselves as members of a much broader community outside the limits of their village, town, or city.[33] Certainly, the rise of literacy rates in Europe during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries enabled the mass consumption of print-culture necessary for establishing a sense of community among its readers. Some scholars, like Adrian Hastings, have criticized this argument for ignoring that print had existed and been circulating Europe long before the eighteenth century.[34] Nevertheless, Hastings misses the important point that a means of communication can do only so much if a small fraction of the population can understand and use it. The idea of the nation may have existed in the minds of Europe's leaders, but this means very little if

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[31] Renan, Ernest. "What is a Nation?" , Eric G.E. Zuelow, The Nationalism Project: Nationalism Studies Information Clearinghouse, http://www.cooper.edu/humanities/core/hss3/e_renan.html (Accessed April 28, 2010).

[32] Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* Revised ed. (London & New York: Verso, 1991).

[33] Anderson, 44-45.

[34] Adrian Hastings. *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 11.

the public did not think in such terms. Increasing literacy rates, standardized languages, and public education made it possible for the middle-class, working-class, and peasants to envision a national community and imagine themselves to be a part of it.

C. Inventing a Republican France and National Past

The circumstances surrounding the Third Republic's establishment reveal an energetic campaign by republicans to construct a national community and link its existence to the Republic. French republicans, brought into power in the wake of a disastrous war against Prussia in 1870, found their Republic threatened by a powerful monarchist movement and a divided public. Although the monarchist movement lost considerable momentum by the 1880's and fizzled out by the 1900's, the Republic still needed to secure the allegiance of its citizens. The republicans had a monumental task in front of them. Eugen Weber noted in his book, *Peasants into French: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914,*[35] that regionalism still frustrated the Third Republic's desire for a citizenry capable of participating in a national democratic society. To republicans, regional difference represented "…imperfection, injustice, failure, something to be noted and to be remedied."[36] In order to rectify these perceived obstacles to national unity, the republicans expanded on past efforts to development domestic infrastructure (roads, railroads, and bridges), instituted obligatory military service for all male citizens, and implemented an ambitious array of educational reforms and programs. These programs would encourage citizens to conceptualize themselves outside of traditional identities of village and church and consider themselves as members of a broader national community.

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[35] Eugen Weber. *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914.* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

[36] Weber, 9.

This would diminish regional differences and subordinate local loyalties to the Republic and the nation.

Language education proved to be critical in the Third Republic's efforts to create a modern nation. After all, many citizens living in the Third Republic continued to speak in local languages, dialects, and *patois* that distinguished their regional communities from each other and barred them from engaging in a national culture. By 1863, about 8,381 communes out of 37, 510 or nearly a quarter of France spoke a language other than French.[37] This represented a major obstacle for republican aspirations of national unity. According to Weber, regional languages represented a political threat to the integrity of the Republic because they interfered with the transmission of information from Paris or and participation in the daily workings of democratic society.[38] More importantly, I believe that these linguistic differences represented an obstacle to the Republic's goal to construct the collective memory necessary for creating and maintaining a national community. Communities with different languages or dialects would retain their regional distinctiveness and collective memory, preserving regional identity and loyalties that could oppose the Republic.

Schools acted as the space in which the Republic could neutralize local dialects and integrate these communities into the national fold, largely in part of Jules Ferry's reforms that made primary education free, universal, and mandatory for all French children. Furthermore, republicans in Paris secured the school as a republican space by successfully wrestling it away from the control of the Jesuits and the Catholic Church.

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[37] Weber, 67.

[38] Weber, 72.

This ensured that the Church, a historical enemy of French republicanism, would not be able to use schools as a space in which to subvert democratic society. The zealousness of the republican's efforts revealed their desire to subordinate any community capable of posing a political or ideological threat to the new national community. Indeed, the physical uprooting of peasant children from the confines of their homes and towns and installation within these public schools both literally and figuratively cut them off from any connection to alternative communities; their families, churches, and towns. This compulsory character of public education also represented a symbolic subordination of alternative communities to the nation. Uniform language instruction contributed to the subordination of regional and religious communities to the Republic.

Historical education also served to strengthen the bonds of national unity and reinforce this republican collective memory. The history of France's glorious accomplishments combined with an emphasis on the obligation of military service and moral instruction aimed to inculcate a fierce patriotism in French students.[39] These lessons permitted students to conceptualize themselves as members of a community firmly established in history and deserving of their loyalty and service. Furthermore, this education provided students with the knowledge and imagery necessary to imagine the unseen nation of which that they were a part. For example, George Bruno's popular textbook, *Tour de France par deux enfants*, offered French students a written and visual representation of the nation that they were members of.[40] This portrayal of the geography of France deliberately implied that the country enjoyed a distinct regional and cultural

[39] Weber, 331-336.

[40] Weber, 335.

unity under the aegis of the Republic and the nation. In this fashion, the French State used education in an attempt to make the Republic and the nation synonymous.

The Third Republic's efforts to subordinate competing visions of the past to a republican narrative did not enjoy total success. Nor did teachers fully possess the public's trust. Angered Catholic and conservative communities resisted the Republic's progressive and secular vision of the French past, even after their defeat in the Dreyfus Affair. In 1904, scandal broke out when history teacher Amadée Thalamas refused to accept a student's essay that acknowledged the divine character of Joan of Arc. Thalamas denied that the student's interpretation of the past was valid, due to the fact that he did not consider the Christian God or his miracles to be valid historical evidence.[41] Republican positivism and anti-clericalism likely motivated Thalamas's refusal to accept the student's essay, which made him a target for reactionary movements. Mass protests against Thalamas broke out in Paris, where reactionary and anti-Semitic crowds clashed with left-leaning counter-protests.[42] Concerns over what past(s) were taught in the classroom were not the exclusive domain of the extreme Right. Public suspicion and anger at "unpatriotic" teachers resurfaced again in the interwar period. Mona Siegel noted that the French Left and Right as well as contemporary historians accused the Republic's teachers of sapping the nation's will to fight during World War II by teaching its youth a

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[41] Marc Ferro. *The Use and Abuse of History: Or How the Past is Taught to Children*. Trans. Norman Stone and Andrew Brown. Revised English Addition. (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 153.

[42] Neil McWilliam. "Conflicting Manifestations: Parisian Commemoration of Joan of Arc and Etienne Dolet in the Early Third Republic," *French Historical Studies*. Vol. 27. No. 2. (Spring, 2004) 381-418, 401-402.

strident pacifism.[43] In short, the public classroom remained a space, republican as it may be, in which the national past continued and continues to be contested.

D. The Collapse of a Republican Past?

Certainly, one can argue the extent to which the Third Republic successfully supplanted other communities that fought for control over the nation. For example, Robert Gildea's work, *The Past in French History*, extensively detailed how rival communities of royalists, radical right-wing politicians, socialists and Bonapartists continued to thrive in French society and transmit their own visions of the French past to the general public.[44] Still, the memory of the Revolution and the Republic formed an imposing meta-narrative that all French citizens could recognize and with which they obligated to interact, if only for the purpose of refuting it. However, this republican memory was by no means invulnerable. In fact, republican France found itself gravely threatened by the catastrophic experience of World War II. The quick collapse of the Third Republic during the 1940 invasion shook France to its core, and many citizens sought out an answer as to this shocking defeat was possible.[45] Public disillusionment paved the way for the establishment of a conservative and authoritarian government led by the war hero Philippe Pétain. In spite of initial optimism towards the Maréchal's new regime, Vichy's use of a repressive police force against French citizens, namely workers,

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[43] Mona Siegel. *The Moral Disarmament of France: Education, Pacifism, and Patriotism, 1914-1940*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[44] Robert Gildea. *The Past in French History*. (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994).

[45] Two books in particular reveal France's psychological and moral confusion in the aftermath of their defeat in 1940. For further reading, please see: Marc Bloch. *The Strange Defeat: A Statement of Evidence Written in 1940*. Reissue. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999) and Robert Paxton's *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944*. 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

republican and communist agitators, and Jews; repression of the resistance; and its complicity with Germany's conscription of forced labor and deportation of Jews left behind bitter divisions in the postwar era. Henry Rousso examined France's agonized effort to confront Vichy's shadow in the national past in his book, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France Since 1944,*[46] which claims that contemporary recollection of Vichy has taken on pathological characteristics. Rousso stated that initial Gaullist efforts to efface the divisions engendered in French society and restore the national community through the "resistanticialist myth," the idea that an eternal and timeless France had risen to resist the German occupier, ultimately failed to knit the nation back together.[47] Although Rousso hinted at a possible resolution to this difficult process of France's coming to grips with the past, he has apparently recanted his earlier optimism. In a collaborative work with journalist Eric Conan entitled *Vichy: An Ever-Present Past*, Rousso indicated that the public discourse on Vichy has taken a dangerous turn, transforming into a sensationalized narrative with little or no regard for historical truth or critical analysis.[48]

Decolonization also contributed to the breakdown of the republican mystique, especially in the case of Algeria. Algeria, unlike other colonial possessions, represented an administrative extension of the French metropole, and this status made the war to

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[46] Henry Rousso. *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France Since 1944*. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1991).

[47] Rousso, 302-303.

[48] ---, and Eric Conan. *Vichy: An Ever-Present Past*. Trans. Nathan Bracher. Contemporary French Culture and Society. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998), 14.

retain the territory imperative.[49] The Algerian War of Independence caused catastrophic damage to the Fourth Republic's stability, eventually bringing about a military coup, the government's collapse and De Gaulle's return to power. The vicious war against FLN partisans and the aftermath of decolonization caused significant social division and psychic trauma in French society, which led the Fifth Republic to cast a veil of silence over the conflict.

In the war's aftermath, the nascent Fifth Republic took steps to prevent any extension of the domestic tensions caused by the Algerian. President Charles De Gaulle granted amnesty to the majority of those who participated in the conflict, as a "…way to avoid continuing conflict and division over the merits of the war…"[50] This amnesty effectively silenced any further discussion of French tactics in the war, namely torture and summary execution, and allowed the new Republic to avoid lengthy and divisive legal confrontations with domestic agitators for the FLN and the OAS. *Pieds-noirs,* colonists of European descent, and *harkis*, Algerian collaborators with French forces, encountered a cool reception when they arrived in France. Public opinion held the *pieds-noirs* responsible for the escalation of FLN violence and the nation's failure to retain Algeria as a French territory.[51] The French State and general public had particularly little sympathy for the *harkis*. Tens of thousands of *harkis* fled the Algerian State's murderous campaign

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[49] William B. Cohen. "The Algerian War, the French State, and Official Memory," *Historical Reflections*. Vol. 28, No. 2. (2002), 219-2239, 219-220.

[50] Cohen, "The Algerian War, the French State, and Official Memory," 223.

[51] According to Todd Shepard, the French intellectual class had created a hostile sentiment towards the *pieds-noirs* due to the selfish inability to hold to republican ideals of colonization. For further reading see: Todd Shepard. "Pieds-Noirs, Bêtes-Noires: Anti-"European of Algeria" Racism and the Close of the French Empire" in *Algeria & France, 1800-2000: Identity, Memory, Nostalgia*. Patricia Lorcin ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 150-163.

against them to France, where they were housed in refugee camps and abandoned villages away from the general population.[52] Legal amnesty, French and *pieds-noirs'* discomfort, and *harkis'* humiliation ensured that France would remain relatively silent about the Algerian War for decades.

In the past two decades, the Fifth French Republic has broken its imposed silence and has moved to confront the ghosts of its past. President Jacques Chirac's announcement at the 1995 commemoration of the Vél d'Hiv deportation that responsibility rested at the foot of the French State represented an important first step in this effort. At the commemoration, Chirac confessed that France had irrevocably compromised itself in its complicity with the Nazi occupiers, saying:

> France, fatherland of the Enlightenment and the Rights of Man, land of openness and asylum, took part in the irreparable. Betraying her word, she delivered her citizens to their jailers.[53]

This confession certainly posed significant problems for the Republic, especially in regard to its appeal to the citizen's loyalty to the nation. However, Chirac quickly evoked the narrative begun by De Gaulle, stating that the crimes Vichy committed in France's name did not represent the France that the Republic embodied.

> But there is also France, a certain idea of France, upright, generous, loyal to her traditions, to her spirit. This France was not at Vichy...She is present, one and

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[52] William B. Cohen documents the harkis' troubled efforts to integrate into French society in "The *Harkis*: History and Memory," in *Algeria & France, 1800-2000: Identity, Memory, Nostalgia*. Patricia Lorcin ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 170.

[53] Jacques Chirac. *Allocation de M. Jacques CHIRAC Président de la République prononcée lors des ceremonies commémorant la grande rafle de 16 et 17 juillet 1942.* Archives de la Présidence de M. Jacques Chirac, 1995-2007, July 16, 1995. http://www.elysee.fr/elysee/elysee.fr/francais_archives/interventions/discours_et_declarations/1995/juillet/allocution_de_m_jacques_chirac_president_de_la_republique_prononcee_lors_des_ceremonies_commemorant_la_grande_rafle_des_16_et_17_juillet_1942-paris.2503.html (Accessed April 27, 2010).

indivisible, in the heart of these Frenchmen, these "Righteous Among Nations…[54]

The French state may certainly have been guilty of unspeakable crimes, but the French nation was not. Like De Gaulle had earlier proposed, Chirac insisted that there was an eternal spirit that the French nation not been betrayed during World War II. This nation, with Free France and righteous citizens as her disciples and De Gaulle as her prophet, had upheld its principles by resisting the Nazi war machine and the Final Solution. However, the French State had the obligation to act on its high-minded principles and demonstrate its sincere regret and make contrition for its previous failures. The Republic had a duty to be vigilant against the forces that had led the State astray and Chirac made it clear that the Republic would zealously fight against racism, bigotry, and anti-Semitism.

> In the matter, nothing is insignificant, nothing is banal, nothing is inseparable. Racist crimes, the defense of revisionism, provocations of every kind- small phrases, one-liners-all come from the same sources… Hiding nothing of the dark hours in our history is to simply defend an idea of Man, of his dignity and of his liberty. It is to struggle against dark forces without end.[55]

The zealous prosecution of racism and revisionism in France represented both the proof of France's fidelity to the ideals of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* and her contrition for past crimes. The schizophrenia of this assertion may puzzle or, frankly, trouble the observer. However, these two seemingly contrary thoughts reveal France's difficulty in maintaining a shared national past while acting on the moral obligation to make amends for past crimes.

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[54] Chirac, *Allocation de M. Jacques CHIRAC Président de la République prononcée lors des ceremonies commémorant la grande rafle de 16 et 17 juillet 1942.*

[55] Chirac, *Allocation de M. Jacques CHIRAC Président de la République prononcée lors des ceremonies commémorant la grande rafle de 16 et 17 juillet 1942.*

France also initiated tentative efforts to break its self-imposed silence about the Algerian War and confront its dark role in the conflict. The Republic first recognized the contribution of its soldiers in the Algerian War. In 1977, the French State transported an unknown soldier killed in the conflict to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier located under the Arc de Triomphe.[56] This act certainly possessed a symbolic importance, as this soldier had now been laid to rest in a space occupied by those who gave their lives in recognized conflicts. In this sense, the interment of this soldier extended the nation's recognition and implicit legitimization of the conflict. Nevertheless, French ambivalence over the Algerian War remained, and it would not be until 1999 that the Republic acknowledged that this event was indeed a war. Renewed discourse over the use of torture followed this concession. Both William Cohen and David Prochaska have noted that former FLN militant and torture victim Louisette Ighilahriz's 2000 interview in *Le Monde* compelled French generals Massu and Aussaresses to recognize the army's use of torture in the Algerian War.[57] France's newfound ability to admit and discuss openly the crimes and traumas of the Algerian War corresponded with a growing sympathy for its victims. Public discourse regarding torture indicated that many possessed the opinion that the Republic needed to perform an act of public repentance.[58]

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[56] William B. Cohen, "The Algerian War, the French State, and Official Memory", 225.

[57] David Prochaska. "The Return of the Repressed," in *Algeria & France, 1800-2000: Identity, Memory, Nostalgia*. Patricia Lorcin ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 257-275, 261; William B. Cohen. The Algerian War and the Revision of France's Overseas Missions," *French Colonial History*, no. 4 (2003): 227-239, 231-233. and "The Sudden Memory of Torture: Algeria in French Discourse, 2000-2001," *French Politics, Culture, and Society* 19, no. 3 (2001): 82-94, 86-87.

[58] William Cohen cites a 2002 public opinion poll that indicated that 50% of the French public approved of some act of public repentance for torture in Algeria. William B. Cohen. The Algerian War and the Revision of France's Overseas Missions," *French Colonial History*, no. 4 (2003): 227-239, 233.

France's halting efforts to recognize its involvement in the Algerian War and complicity with torture extended to the nation's treatment of the *harkis*. As previously mentioned, upon their arrival in France, the *harkis* encountered apathy and neglect from the French State. Little effort to integrate them into the fabric of republican society took place. Unlike their *pieds-noirs* counterparts, the *harkis* had tremendous difficulty proving their attachment and loyalty to France. *Harkis'* frustration at the inability to access the national community exploded in the 1970's. Angered *harkis* used a variety of protest methods, ranging from public interviews, hunger strikes, holding public officials hostage, to youth rioting.[59] These civil disturbances forced the Republic to reevaluate its policies regarding the *harkis*. The National Assembly passed a series of reforms, namely the recognition of *harkis* veteran rights in 1974 and the provision of financial aid in 1984, 1987, 1994, and 1995.[60] The legislators hoped that these reforms would neutralize the sources of *harkis* dissatisfaction and integrate them into the national community that had previously alienated them.

The campaign to bring the *harkis* into the national community also relied on memorial initiatives. In June 1994, the National Assembly passed a law that "…extended her recognition towards the *rapatriés*, former members of assimilated auxiliary forces, and victims of captivity in Algeria for the sacrifices that they have made."[61] This law's acknowledgment of the *harkis*' hardships under the broad category of *rapatriés* sought to

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[59] William B. Cohen, "The *Harkis*: History and Memory", 174.

[60] William B. Cohen, "The *Harkis*: History and Memory", 176.

[61] French Parlement. *LOI no 94-488 du 11 juin 1994 relative aux rapatriés anciens membres des formations supplétives et assimilés ou victimes de la captivité en Algérie*. JORF n°136. June 14, 1994. Legifrance, http://www.legifrance.org/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000184000&fastPos=1&fastReqId=1024844744&categorieLien=id&oldAction=rechTexte (Accessed April 24, 2010).

include this aggrieved community within the official national past. In spite of this gesture, the *harkis* communities living in France began to demand direct acknowledgment of their hardships in the late 1990's and early twenty first century. Why this renewed outbreak of anger despite impressive legal gains and financial compensations? The *harkis* had likely observed the French State's public admissions of guilt and contrition in its role in the Holocaust and, as William Cohen suggests, "…came to expect a parallel remedy for their ills: a state apologia and the sanction of courts to bring to justice the authors of their misfortunes and to redress the historic record."[62] The *harkis* also demanded that their traumatic past be recognized by the government and that those responsible for their suffering be brought to justice. In 2001, a *harkis* advocacy group attempted to file a lawsuit against the Republic for crimes against humanity, due to the conditions that surrounded their initial abandonment by the Fifth Republic.[63] Furthermore, evidence of alienation and hostility among the *harkis*' children became more and more apparent. In 2001, the first French-Algerian soccer game had to be cancelled due to Franco-Algerian youth booing the Marseillaise and throwing projectiles onto the field.[64] By the early 2000's, the French Republic found itself confronted by a community vigorously demanding that its place in national history be fully recognized.

E. *Lois Mémorielles*: the Rise of the Legislated Past

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[62] William B. Cohen, "The *Harkis*: History and Memory", 178.

[63] William B. Cohen, "The *Harkis*: History and Memory", 178.

[64] Richard L. Derderian. "Confronting the Past: The Memory Work of Second-Generation Algerians in France," in *Algeria & France, 1800-2000: Identity, Memory, Nostalgia*. Patricia Lorcin ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 247.

The Republic's goal to confront past crimes and address the grievances of aggrieved communities informed domestic policy in France in the 1990's and 2000's. The French State turned to *lois mémorielles* in order to accomplish this goal. The 1991 *loi Gayssot* edited the penal code to make "those who contest [...] the existence of one or many crimes against humanity[...] that may have been committed by members of a recognized criminal organization or by a person guilty of such crimes…"[65] subject to legal prosecution. This legislation effectively criminalized the printed or verbal denial of documented crimes against humanity, which included historical revisionism of the Holocaust. French historian Robert Faurisson, a longtime Holocaust denier, found himself arrested, tried, and convicted for hate speech under the statues of this law.[66] Certain memorial laws extended beyond legal penalties and endorsed distinct interpretations of the national past over others. The *loi Taubira* acknowledged the trans-Atlantic slave trade as a crime against humanity on the part of the French State and required that this reality be recognized publicly, stating that "…school curriculum and research programs will accord the slave trade and slavery the place that they deserve."[67]

One would think that these laws would be welcomed. After all, these laws aimed to recognize past wrongs and rectify their effects in French society. Nevertheless, certain

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[65] French Parlement. *LOI no 90-615 du 13 juillet 1990 tendant à réprimer tout acte raciste, antisémite ou xenophobe (1)*. JORF n°162 du 14 juillet 1990, 8333. Legifrance. http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do;jsessionid=D62BDE5E4CE1C0DF37F568147E70E118.tpdjo11v_2?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000532990&categorieLien=id (Accessed April 28, 2010).

[66] " "Pour contestation de crimes contre l'humanité " M. Robert Faurisson est condamné à 100, 000 francs d'amende avec sursis," *Le Monde*, April 20, 1991.

[67] French National Assembly. *LOI no 2001-434 du 21 mai 2001 tendant à la reconnaissance de la traite et de l'esclavage en tant que crime contre l'humanité (1)* . JORF n°119 du 23 mai 2001, 8175. Legifrance,http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do;jsessionid=5581F7E7C79B3159BCA8AC4C3714638D.tpdjo06v_3?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000405369&categorieLien=id (Accessed April 28, 2010).

historians and intellectuals watched this legislative method of historical accounting with considerable reservations. They believed that this growing revision of the national past fundamentally weakened France's political will and moral authority. For example, Pascal Bruckner, in his book *La Tyrannie de la penitence: Essai sur le masochisme occidental*,[68] argued that the French desire for repentance represented a perverse form of masochism that prevented France and, in general, Europe from functioning as world leaders. Bruckner expressed considerable frustration with France's seemingly new penchant for focusing on its past errors and crimes at the exclusion of its contribution to human liberty.[69] Alain-Gérard Slama also expressed similar frustration with France's new penchant for confession and contrition. He wrote in his 2006 book *Le siècle de monsieur Pétain: Essai sur la passion identitaire*,[70] that the Republic's move to make amends for its past may produce an inability to defend the basic tenets of republican society. Slama identified France's desire for compromise with its traumatic past and avoidance of future conflicts as responsible for the nation's social ills.[71] The perceived proliferation of aggrieved communities and their growing demands for reparation originated from the Republic's inability to firmly accept the national past and move beyond.

This anxiety over the social consequences of divisive histories and memories spawned an intellectual opposition to this legislative movement. This opposition labeled

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[68] Bruckner, Pascal. *La Tyrannie de la Pénitence: Essai sur le masochisme occidental*. (Paris: Grasset, 2006).

[69] Bruckner, Pascal. *La Tyrannie de la Pénitence: Essai sur le masochisme occidental*. (Paris: Grasset, 2006), 45.

[70] Alain-Gérard Slama. *Le siècle de monsieur Pétain: Essai sur la passion identitaire*. (Paris: Perrin, 2005).

[71] Slama. *Le siècle de monsieur Pétain,* 13-14.

the general movement for confronting traumatic memories of past as *communitarianisme*, which, according to Nathan Bracher's definition, breaks France down into exclusive communities grounded in regional, ethnic, or religious attachments.[72] The repeated act of contrition on the part of the French State, they stated, disillusioned the common citizen to the realities of the Republic and encouraged him to embrace previous identities that Republic had successfully kept subordinated. The result has been, according to these intellectuals, chaos. At the heart of their protest lay the desire to move beyond the routine acknowledgement of past crimes. When does a nation have the right to forget? To put aside its past? Jeffrey Blustein, for example, has argued that nations have the obligation to recognize past moral failings in its past and remember them.[73] Nevertheless, this imperative to remember leaves little room for considerations on its impact on the present. Does a nation have the obligation to remember its past, particularly when it appears to destabilize the present? These are exactly the questions that France would confront during its debate over the *loi du 23 février 2005*.

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[72] Bracher, Nathan. "Bruckner and the Politics of Memory: Repentance and Resistance in Contemporary France," *South Central Review*. Vol. 24, No. 2 (2007), 54-70, 56.

[73] Jeffrey Blustein. The Moral Demands of Memory. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

CHAPTER 3

THE *LOI DU 23 FÉVRIER 2005* AND OPPOSITION TO LEGISLATED HISTORY

The apparent right of the French State to legislate history and endorse particular narratives over others did not arouse widespread national dissent until the National Assembly passed the *loi du 23 février 2005*. What was it about this law that provoked such a ferocious denial of this type of legislation? Why did French historians and educators choose this moment to launch their opposition? The controversy that surrounded the *loi du 23 février 2005* related not only to the historical narrative allegedly endorsed by the law. Outcry against the *loi du 23 février 2005* also came from mounting anxieties about professional autonomy and free speech in select circles of French historians and educators. The National Assembly's brazen mandate that teachers respect the "rôle positif" of French colonization prompted numerous scholars to protest the French State's growing influence over scholarship and education. In response, historians organized into two advocacy groups to combat the proliferation of *lois mémorielles*. Both advocated an objective account of French history capable of accommodating multiple narratives. Surprisingly, this vision of a common national history shared considerable ground with the Republic's. Still, the heart of the controversy dealt with the issue of what authority the French State possessed in the matter of writing history and, more broadly, its right to endorse particular interpretations of the national past over others.

A. The *Loi du 23 février 2005:* A Panacea for *Harkis* and *Pieds-Noirs* Suffering?

When Minister Hamlaoui Mekachéra introduced the law to the floor of the National Assembly on June 11th 2004, he likely did not foresee the considerable

opposition that would later emerge in 2005. His presentation of the bill to the National Assembly looked little like the nostalgic colonialism that the law's opponents later accused it of being. Rather, Mekachéra portrayed the bill as the capstone to the previously mentioned series of laws designed to indemnify the *rapatriés*, the broad category of French citizens and colonial subjects who had fled to France in the wake of the breakup of the Empire, and facilitate their integration into French society.[74] However, Mekachéra did not stop at financial and social compensation for this aggrieved community. The effort to fully integrate the *rapatriés* into the fabric of the French nation would be accomplished through both financial reparation and inclusion within the national historical narrative. To Mekachéra, the *rapatrié*s had proven their loyalty to France through suffering and sacrifice and had thus secured their right to inclusion within the Republic's history. The Minister conveyed his point at the rostrum by highlighting the stark contrast between the social marginalization that the *rapatrié* community had suffered and the merited recognition for their passionate contribution to the *patrie*.

> The government proposes today to render justice to the beauty and grandeur of our compatriots who have fought outside of France, as well as their suffering and hardships, as well as their loyalty to the *patrie* and to the Republic [...] Often caricatured, sometimes slandered, the work of the French should be a source of pride for the Nation; that which we have built with passion and courage should be nevertheless recognized alongside the dramatic circumstances of the separation from those territories so loved and served.[75]

The Minister defended the *rapatriés* and insisted that they be given the proper respect for

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[74] French National Assembly. *Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel: Session ordinaire de 2003-2004 - 103ème jour de séance, 253ème séance, 1ère Séance du Vendredi 11Juin 2004*. National Assembly. June 11, 2004. http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/12/cra/2003-2004/253.asp#P38_325 (Accessed April 29, 2010).

[75] *Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel: Session ordinaire de 2003-2004 - 103ème jour de séance, 253ème séance, 1ère Séance du Vendredi 11Juin 2004*.

their contributions to the building of the Republic. Nevertheless, Mekachéra's statement, intentionally or not, did extend approval of the colonial project that these individuals had once participated in. The tacit connection made between the experience of decolonization and the recognition of the passionate devotion of the *rapatrié*s certainly contributed to the fierce contestation of France's colonial past that followed this law's passing.

Monetary reparations and privileged access to social services did not necessarily constitute contested avenues of social integration. The French Republic has provided various forms of social assistance to its citizens in the past. What made this law different from previous acts of indemnification was the French State's willingness actively to use national history as a component of the *rapatriés'* integration into the fabric of Republican society.[76] Mekachéra's support of the proposed law indicated his belief that only the national acknowledgment of the traumas experienced in the *rapatriés'* past could provide the salve to assuage their physical and emotional wounds, prove the Republic's interest in their community, and bridge the perceived gap between the greater national community and their own. The aggressive demands of the *harkis* for national recognition likely inspired this deviation. That would certainly explain Mekachéra's presentation of the proposed law as a corrective measure, one that readjusted the public memory of the national past in ways similar to the *loi Taubira.* He aimed to rescue the history of the *rapatriés* from the silence that had been imposed upon it, stating that:

> This text is therefore not devoid of a historical thrust: it will be one in which the nation proclaims the efforts that she owes to give in favor of the rapatriés, victims

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[76]*Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel: Session ordinaire de 2003-2004 - 103ème jour de séance, 253ème séance, 1ère Séance du Vendredi 11Juin 2004.*

> of the inexorable march of history which, too often, writes itself with the blood and the tears of those it forgets.[77]

Recovery from the traumas of decolonization could be possible only by rescuing and restoring the "forgotten" history of the *rapatriés*. Only once France recognized the physical and mental anguish of that community could it truly move on.

The desire of the Minister and those Assemblymen partial to the law did not reflect a purely humanitarian gesture. They also articulated a distinct concern that the *rapatriés* needed to be quickly integrated into the framework of French society before the opportunity had passed. This fear reflected the historical republican anxieties over the presence of communities living outside the social confines of the Republic. If these communities' existence persisted, republicans feared that they would compete for the loyalties of their citizens and undermine republican rule. Patrick Delnatte, an UMP delegate, succinctly captured this age-old fear, saying:

> They know a true identity crisis and poorly tolerate their exclusion. Often assimilated into the immigrant population, they are victims themselves of unacceptable behavior that becomes tied to their names, appearance, or neighborhood.[78]

What truly frightened Delnatte and, by extension, his fellow members of the UMP was the possibility that the *rapatriés*, in spite of their proofs of loyalty to the Republic, would ultimately dissolve that bond and embrace in its place an affiliation to what was perceived as a defiantly unassimilated and hostile community of immigrants. This fear of the

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[77] *Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel: Session ordinaire de 2003-2004 - 103ème jour de séance, 253ème séance, 1ère Séance du Vendredi 11Juin 2004.*

[78] *Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel: Session ordinaire de 2003-2004 - 103ème jour de séance, 253ème séance, 1ère Séance du Vendredi 11Juin 2004.*

growing immigrant community within France later bubbled over in the tumultuous experience of the 2005 riots in the Parisian *banlieues*. This is not to suggest that the French assemblymen considered the *rapatrié* community to be an immediate threat. In fact, Delnatte considered the *rapatriés* as victims, whose initial social exclusion at their arrival to the metropole had been further exacerbated by their poor choice of friends. Therefore, in order to break the *rapatriés* association with this alien and threatening community of immigrants and bring them back into the folds of the national community, the Assemblymen determined that both the *rapatriés* and the general public needed to be taught a history that highlighted their common bonds to the French Republic. This act of public recognition of the *rapatriés*' history aimed at fostering national reconciliation and neutralizing a potentially hostile community living within the Republic.

This desire to simultaneously to recognize the exceptional narrative of the *rapatriés* in French history and integrate those experiences into the fabric of national memory enjoyed considerable currency among right-wing and centrist deputies. For these delegates, the alleged ignorance of the general public concerning the history of the *rapatriés* represented a grievous social and moral fault. Christian Kert, UMP delegate and member of the *Commission des affaires culturelles*, observed that forgetting the experiences of the *rapatriés* represented a political failure as well as an historical one, declaring that "(i)n history and in politics, there are some heritages which one cannot renounce." [79] How did the legislators hope to stem the tides of public forgetfulness? They intended to transmit the history of the *rapatriés* through historical instruction in schools.

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[79] *Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel: Session ordinaire de 2003-2004 - 103ème jour de séance, 253ème séance, 1ère Séance du Vendredi 11Juin 2004.*

French youth would be the bearers of this new memory, which would then germinate in their hearts and minds and be passed down to their offspring. Of course, this effort entailed a significant revision of France's colonial past. Lionnel Luca, a UMP delegate, insisted that French schools need to teach that "…that France had not been colonialist, but rather a colonizer, and that she had transmitted republican values to the elites that today now lead those people.[80] Luca's vision of the French past demanded a complete revision of the colonial adventure. In order for the *rapatriés*, a product of France's colonial past, to be considered worthy of membership in the Republic, the French State had to encourage a selective forgetting of the colonial past. This reimagination cast the colonial adventure as a humanitarian effort that effectively transmitted republicanism to the political elite of colonized territories. This embrace of the *mission civilisatrice* may appear to be nostalgia for the days of empire. Nonetheless, Luca's espousal of the *mission civilisatrice* and the benevolent character of French colonization offered a means to erase the historical stigma attached to the *rapatriés* and the circumstances of their return to France. The return of the *rapatriés* to France no longer represented the shameful failure of empire and complicity with a violent and oppressive regime. Instead, the *rapatriés* became emissaries of the *lumières* of French civilization, republican pilgrims returning home from their travels. In order to achieve this, UMP delegates hinted at a direct intervention in the classroom. UMP delegate Cecile Gallez voiced this possibility, stating, "(i)t is also necessary that textbooks rightfully accord the history of France and its

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[80] *Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel: Session ordinaire de 2003-2004 - 103ème jour de séance, 253ème séance, 1ère Séance du Vendredi 11Juin 2004.*

overseas territories a complete and impartial history."[81] Thus, the introduction of the benevolent effects of French colonialism represented a corrective measure designed to restore an objective account of history. In this light, the *loi du 23 février 2005* had much in common with the *loi Taubira*'s declaration in that they both aimed to restore lost narratives to national consciousness.

The French Left did little to counter this particular piece of legislation. Indeed, the delegates of the *Parti Socialiste* and the *Parti Communiste* expressed few reservations in regards to the language that framed the Right's arguments for the restoration of the benevolent narrative of the colonial adventure. Certainly, the sparse number of left-wing delegates may explain the absence of a contentious rebuttal to the UMP delegates.[82] Nevertheless, it must be noted that the delegates of the *PS* and the *PCF* all expressed their deep respect for the suffering that the *rapatriés* had undergone in the name of their loyalty to France. At the crux of the matter, the Right and the Left's understanding of the *loi du 23 février 2005* possessed few divergences. What truly distinguished the Left's contribution to the law was the issue of historical responsibility and blame. Like the Right, the Left identified the *rapatriés* as victims. François Liberti, a Communist delegate, referred to the *rapatriés* as "…victims for forty-two years of a true denial of

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[81] *Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel: Session ordinaire de 2003-2004 - 103ème jour de séance, 253ème séance, 1ère Séance du Vendredi 11Juin 2004.*

[82] Assemblymen Gérard Bapt alludes to this, although makes no reference to the number present. *Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel: Session ordinaire de 2003-2004 - 103ème jour de séance, 253ème séance, 1ère Séance du Vendredi 11Juin 2004.*

justice." [83] However, this perceived victimization compelled the left-wing delegates to demand that the law deliver justice through a full accounting of the historical circumstances that had brought the *rapatriés* to France's shores in the first place. They demanded that the previously mentioned institute charged with the study and commemoration of French activities overseas also investigate the conditions responsible for the *rapatriés'* migration and subsequent suffering. Jacques Bascou, a radical socialist, requested that the proposed law establish an inquiry commission to determine the responsible parties for "…the events that followed the cease-fire, the abandonment of petitioners and harkis, the massacres and deportations, the shootings of March 26th, 1962 and the following massacre of July 5th." [84] The French Left was not satisfied that the law indemnify the *rapatriés* with material compensation and historical validation. The left-wing delegates also desired a complete moral accounting of the past. To the left-wing delegates of the National Assembly, the determination of guilt made the possibility of national atonement attainable. Only once the Republic admitted its complicity in this situation could true justice be obtained for the *rapatriés* and their integration into French society made possible. Jacques Bascou, a socialist deputy, spoke passionately in favor of such an action, shrewdly comparing the need to identify guilty parties to that in past investigations of the Vichy State.

> Everyone recognizes the work of the French overseas. But this recognition must also entail responsibility, who has the right to reparations, as we had done for

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[83] *Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel: Session ordinaire de 2003-2004 - 103ème jour de séance, 253ème séance, 1ère Séance du Vendredi 11Juin 2004.*

[84] *Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel: Session ordinaire de 2003-2004 - 103ème jour de séance, 253ème séance, 1ère Séance du Vendredi 11Juin 2004.*

> Vichy. That is why we have asked for an investigation to establish the responsible parties and accept our history.[85]

In spite of their insistence, the Left found their demands rebuffed by the Right. This rebuff did not represent any form of "tit-for-tat" politicking. Rather, the Right's refusal to comply with the demand for an inquisitive commission revealed the delicate balance of remembrance and forgetting that they hoped to establish in their revised historical narrative of French colonialism. In order for the *rapatriés* to be integrated into the Republic, they needed to be reconceptualized as participants in the Republic's historical mission of spreading political and cultural enlightenment. Their suffering would be explained through the framework of an undying devotion to that historical mission synonymous with the modern French state. The discussion of responsibility for past sufferings, particularly in regard to France's response to the immediate violence that took place in Algeria after the signing of the Evian Accords, would only complicate this narrative. Ironically, the *rapatriés* could become fully integrated into the French nation only through the deliberate remembrance of their suffering and the intentional forgetting of the circumstances that caused that suffering.

These disagreements continued as the National Assembly extended its debate into early February 2005. The French Left still pushed vigorously for an acknowledgment of France's historical responsibility in regards to the creation of the *rapatrié* community. François Liberti insisted on this point and he was not afraid to raise the shadows of their colonial past to make his point. For Liberti, this public acknowledgment of responsibility

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[85]French National Assemby. *Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel: Session ordinaire de 2003-2004 - 103ème jour de séance, 253ème séance, 2ème Séance du Vendredi 11Juin 2004.* National Assembly, February 10, 2005, http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/12/cra/2003-2004/254.asp#P44_501 (Accessed April 29, 2010).

did not mean that France officially repent for its past. Rather, this act would serve as a strong refutation of the colonial policies that produced the *rapatrié* community and, therefore, forge an unbreakable bond between it and the Republic. Liberti framed this argument as a historical and moral imperative for the nation, stating:

> Esteemed Minister, there are meetings with history that one must not miss. The French State has a responsibility in regards to these people and their descendants. These Frenchmen born in Algeria, their children, the war orphans, and the war widows living in France do not demand charity, even less our repentance, but condemnation of the politics that plunged an entire people into misfortune and a respect for their rights as citizens. [86]

France did not need to apologize but instead should renounce its past in order to mend its wounds. The desired integration of the *rapatriés* would not be achieved until France rejected the undesirable elements of her past that had caused this problem in the first place.

Ultimately, centrist and conservative assemblymen blocked any effort to discuss responsibility on the grounds that there was simply not enough historical evidence to pass judgment over the guilty parties. Assemblyman Christian Kert completely rejected any pretensions to historical authority that the National Assembly might claim, stating that historians had not yet uncovered all the facts necessary for talk of responsibility.[87] In short, the conservatives declared that the delegates of the National Assembly could recognize the fact that something had happened but could go no farther. Any historical or moral judgment fell to the historian, who was properly trained to determine these facts

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[86] French National Assembly. *Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel: Session ordinaire de 2004-2005 - 60ème jour de séance, 146ème séance, 2ème Séance du jeudi 10 Février 2005*. National Assembly, February 10, 2005. http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/12/cra/2004-2005/146.asp#P44_492 (Accessed May 7, 2010).

[87] *Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel: Session ordinaire de 2004-2005 - 60ème jour de séance, 146ème séance, 2ème Séance du jeudi 10 Février 2005.*

through careful inquiry and examination. Clearly, this position had a practical advantage. The formal acknowledgment of an irrefutable historical fact imposed very little political or social obligation to reflect on the national past. Any legislation of historical responsibility would have required assigning blame to specific parties, which would likely be followed by lengthy demands for public apology. Neither the Center nor the Right desired a protracted and complicated discussion of the national past, and that is why they laid the responsibility to investigate the details of the French past on historians.

Why this abrupt deference to the historian? These assemblymen likely thought that, by banishing traumatic and controversial memories out of the public sphere and into the academic realm of the historian, they could neutralize these troublesome issues from surfacing in public discourse. The historian relieved these politicians from having to confront and negotiate with the difficult aspects of their past. Any potentially divisive memory would be the historian's responsibility. With that, the *loi du 23 février 2005* was passed.

B. Historians and Educators React Against Legislated History

The initial months following the law's ratification saw the first stirrings of opposition. Those who did come forward first against the law typically did not express any particular onus against the historical narrative that it sought to establish. Instead, these individuals usually belonged to the professional class of historians, researchers, and educators who felt threatened by the law's potential consequences for the integrity of their profession. Even before the passage of the *loi du 23 février 2005*, certain scholars expressed their concerns. Benoît Falaize and Françoise Lantheaume, researchers at the *Institut national de recherche pédagogique*, published an article in *Liberation* that

outlined the standard argument against the law. According to the article, the *loi du 23 février 2005* made two mistaken assumptions that needed to be corrected. First, the authors criticized the National Assembly's perceived interference in the design and implementation of national curriculum. They took particular issue with the legislators' apparent "...understanding of the act of teaching as a simple and mechanical application of curriculum."[88] The implicit statement made here was that the teaching of history comprised more than the memorization and recitation of historical "facts." Rather, both authors presented historical education as a complex activity dependent on the unencumbered translation of recent developments in historical research into the classroom.[89] According to Falaize and Lantheaume, this vital exchange between historians and educators provided educators an approach to history capable of overcoming any racial, ethnic, or familial biases that the student possessed and conveying an objective narrative that acknowledged the complexities and contradictions of the French national past.[90] Like their legislators, French scholars desired a complex and nuanced historical narrative in French schools that could neutralize contentious and divergent memories and incorporate all citizens into the historic national community. This common desire, as strange as it may seem to the American reader, likely derived from the politicians' and scholars' common education at the elite schools of France. Furthermore, the historians and educators' reliance on the Republic for certification and financial

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[88] Benoît Falaize and Françoise Lantheaume. "Enseigner une histoire commune," *Libération*, February 12, 2005, http://www.liberation.fr/tribune/0101549840-enseigner-une-histoire-commune (Accessed April 29, 2010).

[89] Falaize and Lantheaume.

[90] Falaize and Lantheaume.

support may also have influenced how they framed their arguments. Regardless of their commonalties, scholars passionately disagreed with the Right's vision of the national past and argued that social unity could be achieved only through a history that openly acknowledged all of France's historical complexities and contradictions.

The second mistake allegedly made by the National Assembly dealt squarely with the legislators' accusation that the history of French colonialism taught in schools focused disproportionately on its negative aspects. According to Falaize and Lantheaume, the idea that French schools taught only the negative consequences of colonialism represented a misportrayal of current curriculum.[91] Although they did not cite any particular evidence to back up that claim, the authors quickly voiced their fears of the impact the perceived nostalgia for the *mission civilisatrice* might have on French society. Politicians, editors, and teachers, they wrote, might now consider downplaying or ignoring the racist and exploitative character of France's presence overseas.[92] Like the French Left, these authors refused to accept a national past that glossed over the causes of various sufferings endured in French history. They too suggested that a full accounting of the past could furnish the Republic with a common history:

> To say this history in class, in all its complexity, far from any moral judgment, founded on the latest scientific methods, analyzes the colonial encounter and its effects on past and contemporary French society, here and overseas, is to contribute to the fabrication of a common history and a sentiment of sharing, which is also one of the missions of historical education.[93]

This outlined method of historical teaching too, the authors claimed, could provide a

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[91] Falaize and Lantheaume.

[92] Falaize and Lantheaume.

[93] Falaize and Lantheaume.

common history for the French Republic through a complete and unbiased recitation of the national past. Nevertheless, this particular expression of historical pedagogy relied heavily on claims of scientific neutrality and objectivity. Therefore, in order to fulfill their intended duties, French historians and educators needed to be free of any type of government intrusion that might compromise their complex and objective narrative to the general public.

French scholars' desire to preserve professional autonomy and objectivity compelled them to organize. At first, the effort against the law lacked direction. On April 14th, 2005, French historians gave a press conference outside the *Ligue des droits de l'homme* in protest to the *loi du 23 février* 2005's enforcement of an "official" history of French colonialism.[94] As the months passed by, the tenor of the historian's criticisms became more and more strident and energetic. What had raised the stakes? The likely cause for the historians' escalated involvement in this public criticism of the *loi du 23 février 2005* can be found in a related controversy concerning French history.[95] By the summer of 2005, French historians got a glimpse of the potential future of France if this genre of memorial legislation continued. On June 12th, the Antillean-Guyanian-Reunionian Collective filed a lawsuit against historian Olivier Petre-Grenouilleau for his rejection of the trans-Atlantic slave trade as a crime against humanity, an illegal denial of a recognized crime against humanity under the *loi Taubira* and the *loi Gayssot*.[96] The

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[94] Arnaud Didier. "Des historiens en guerre contre la colonisation «positive»," *Libération*. April 14 2005, http://www.liberation.fr/societe/0101525763-des-historiens-en-guerre-contre-la-colonisation-positive (Accessed April 29, 2010).

[95] Pierre Nora makes this point clear in his testimony given in the Accoyer Report.

[96] Eric Conan. *"Encore aujourd'hui; Esclavage," L'Express,N□ 861, pg. 22, May 4, 2006.*

application of these two laws likely instilled a distinct feeling of vulnerability because French historians published a national petition that firmly rejected the memory wars raging in the country and any equivalency between history and memory on December 12, 2005. The signatories of this petition, including Pierre Nora, Mona Ozouf, Jean-Pierre Azéma, Réné Rémond, and Marc Ferro, deliberately subordinated memory to the virtues of historical research, bluntly writing:

> History is not memory. The historian, in a scientific procedure, collects the memories of individuals, compares them with each other, examines them next to documents, objects, traces, and establishes the facts. History takes memory into account; it is not memory.[97]

Like the authors of the early *Liberation* article, the drafters of December 12 Petition viewed the *loi du 23 février 2005* as a serious threat to the scientific methodology that preserved historical objectivity. For these historians, memory did possess a role in the study of history but only insofar as potential evidence equivalent to other artifacts from the past. Many of these signatories would later become members of *Liberté pour l'histoire*, an advocacy group that demanded complete intellectual freedom for the historian. In order to secure that freedom, the petition demanded the complete abrogation of the *loi Gayssot,* the *loi Taubira*, the *Loi du 29 janvier 2001 relative à la reconnaissance du génocide arménien de 1915*, and the *loi du 23 février 2005*.[98] The elimination of the threat against historians and their research required that they not be subject to laws that could potentially censor their publications. This position drew the implicit conclusion that the memory wars in France would be resolved by the Republic's

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[97] "L'appel du 12 decembre 2005," Liberté pour l'histoire, http://www.lph-asso.fr/index.php ?option=com_content&view=article&id=2&Itemid=13&lang=fr (Accessed April 29, 2010).

[98] "L'appel du 12 decembre 2005"

abandonment of all legislative efforts to dictate the content and character of the national past.

Not all historians shared this uncompromising position of the *Liberté pour l'histoire* movement. The *Comité du Vigilance face aux usages publics de l'histoire* (CVUH) also formed to confront the perceived threat of the *lois mémorielles* to the integrity of historical research in June 2005. Nevertheless, unlike their peers in *Liberté pour l'histoire*, the adherents of the CVUH focused more on the social consequences of the *lois mémorielles*. The CVUH's manifest attributed to the *lois mémorielles* a destabilizing influence in French society. According to the manifest, these laws encouraged an unhealthy competition between aggrieved communities for national recognition, which grossly distorted the general public's understanding of the national past.[99] The CVUH framed the growing obsession with the crimes of the past in medical terms, pointing out that national discourse on memory had become "…more and more unhealthy."[100] The prescription for alleviating this frenzy of remembrance was not a dose of forgetfulness. Unlike the French State, the CVUH did not believe that the restoration of social unity could be accomplished through the careful combination of official recognition and forgetfulness. Instead, the CVUH proposed that social cohesiveness could be restored through the full and accurate recitation of the national past. This all-encompassing historical narrative would prevent future memorial conflicts by presenting all the complexities and contradictions of the French past to the citizen.[101]

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[99] "Manifeste du Comité de Vigilance face aux usages publics de l'histoire" CVUH. June 17, 2005, http://cvuh.free.fr/spip.php?article5 (Accessed April 29, 2010).

[100] " Manifeste du Comité de Vigilance face aux usages publics de l'histoire".

Furthermore, the CVUH envisioned a much broader social role for the historian. According to this organization, the historian would become the agent responsible for the transmission of this complex and methodologically sound vision of the national past to the general public.[102] The CVUH did not echo *Liberté pour l'histoire's* demands for scholarly detachment from society and insisted that the historian must occupy a central position in any public discourse devoted to the subject of the past in order to facilitate a better understanding of history to all French citizens. Historians, the CVUH claimed, "…must try hard to put at disposal all the knowledge and touchy questions to encourage a better comprehension of history, in a manner to nourish the critical faculties of citizens."[103] Only the historian could provide the citizenry with the proper information to fully appreciate the complexity of the national past and overcome their communal biases. This component of public mentoring stood in direct opposition to *Liberté pour l'histoire*'s belief in the historian's strict isolation from society. This social activism expressed by the CVUH likely explained their refusal to call into question the existence of the *loi Gayssot*.[104] The *loi Gayssot*'s guarantee against historical revisionism and racist verbal or physical attacks served a vital social function, one that some historians were not willing to challenge.

French educators too expressed hostility towards the *loi du 23 février 2005*, especially for its fourth article which required that educators respect the "rôle positif" of

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[101] " Manifeste du Comité de Vigilance face aux usages publics de l'histoire".

[102] " Manifeste du Comité de Vigilance face aux usages publics de l'histoire".

[103] "Manifeste du Comité de Vigilance face aux usages publics de l'histoire".

[104] Bruno Belhoste. "Lettre adressée le 14 décembre 2005 à un signataire de l'appel des 19 historiens,"CVUH. December 14, 2005, http://cvuh.free.fr/spip.php?article62 (April 29, 2010).

colonization in French history. Teachers deeply resented the National Assembly's perceived intrusion into the realm of pedagogy, and their advocacy groups moved to articulate that anger. Like French historians, educators expressed an acute anxiety that the law ignored contemporary historical research and scholarly consensus and imposed an absolute interpretation of the past with no room for dissent. An article published by the SNES, the *syndicat national de l'enseignement du seconde dégré*, went further than many opposing historians and accused that "…the official 'truth' declared here- 'the positive role of French presence overseas'- is a partisan truth, clearly linked to the ideology of the partisans of colonization who try today to take their revenge on history."[105] The French educators' resistance to the law derived not only from their desire for professional autonomy. Accusations of prejudice and calls for objectivity framed the outlined the criticism of the law. Unlike most opposing historians, French educators did not hesitate to accuse their legislators of being colonial partisans eager to remake history in their own image. For educators, this alleged bias invalidated these legislators' claims to authority in historical matters. They believed that this rehabilitation of the colonial past had dire consequences for the republican values that schools were meant to instill in their students. Legislated history came at the cost of "…the liberty of thought, inadmissible in a democracy and in a bastion of *laïcité* and grave at a moment where certain individuals are not afraid to racialize social tensions and inequalities."[106] French educators considered any endorsed history contrary to *laïcité*, the republican policy that prevents the display or transmission of sectarian symbols or discourse in public spaces. The violation of free

[105] Hélène Latger and Dominique Comelli, "Vers une histoire officielle?," Site du SNES, http://www.snes.edu/Vers-une-histoire-officielle.html (Accessed April 29, 2010).

[106] Latger and Comelli.

thought in French schools likely resonated strongly at this moment for numerous reasons. First of all, 2005 saw the centennial anniversary of the 1905 law, which firmly implanted the policy of *laïcité* into republican society and established its secular character. Furthermore, the *loi du 15 mars 2004* firmly established the school as a neutral space, free of any sign of religious affiliation.[107] By portraying themselves as the defenders of *laïcité* and republican egalitarianism, French educators framed their devotion to scientific historical inquiry with republican civic-mindedness.

Public intellectuals took this particular idea expressed by the SNES and expounded upon it at length in their writings. In an article in *Le Figaro*, Alain-Gérard Slama stated that the National Assembly had "...no qualifications to indicate the ideological orientation of that curriculum."[108] Slama's major criticism of the government's legislation had to do with its apparent lack of neutrality. The Republic's neutrality in public affairs needed to be preserved in order to maintain social equality, and the National Assembly had clearly failed in that duty by their endorsement of a particular historical narrative. Slama's indictment of right-wing and centrist legislators who ratified the law also extended to their left-wing opponents. He accused the Left of attempting to counter the Right's official history with its own, especially in the matter of slavery.[109] Slama most opposed the absolute historical narratives offered by the Right and Left's respective

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[107] French National Assembly. *LOI n° 2004-228 du 15 mars 2004 encadrant, en application du principe de laïcité, le port de signes ou de tenues manifestant une appartenance religieuse dans les écoles, collèges et lycées publics*. JORF n°65, Legifrance. March 15, 2004. http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr /affichTexte.do;jsessionid=66D8E5B1FD45CBFFA8D250324FC0C07A.tpdjo06v_1?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000417977&categorieLien=id (Accessed May 9, 2010).

[108] Alain-Gérard Slama. "L'histoire en otage: La Chronique d'Alain-Gérard Slama," *Le Figaro*, April 18, 2005, N° 18880, Débats et Opinions, pg. 13.

[109] Slama. "L'histoire en otage: La Chronique d'Alain-Gérard Slama".

partisans that sought to elevate one particular community's memory over another. To him, the Right's embrace of former colonial collaborators and the Left's stolid defense of the colonized represented dangerously divisive accounts the national past. Above all, Slama abhorred the communitarian impulse behind the *loi du 23 février 2005*, stating:

> Since the Republic has given way to the pressure of ethnic and religious communities to recognize particular rights and material concessions, we have thus seen the decline of the demand to forget and the rules of proscription that Renan judged necessary to the maintenance of civil peace and national solidarity.[110]

This frenzied accounting of the national past provoked by the demands of certain communities within the Republic had brought traumatic memories of the past back to the surface of national consciousness. Instead of putting aside and forgetting these memories in the goal of forging a common nation, French citizens supposedly now relived ancient feuds and conflicts in an effort to attain formal recognition of their contribution or sufferings.

This mistrust of any type of competing memorial narratives found another voice in the historian Max Gallo. Gallo expressed similar concerns in *Le Figaro*, writing that "(t)he controversy over colonization is nothing more than a lever to discriminate by ethnic origins and construct communities hostile to the Republic by a colonial past that would explain existing inequalities between French citizens."[111] For Gallo, the *loi du 23 février 2005* acted as a political and social wedge that tore asunder threads of national attachment and reframed national identity along ethnic lines. Worse, these newly formed communities were hostile to the Republic due to the fact that they portrayed

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[110] Slama."L'histoire en otage: La Chronique d'Alain-Gérard Slama".

[111] Max Gallo, "Colonisation: la tentation de pénitence," *Le Figaro*, November 30, 2005, N° 19074, Débats et Opinions, pg. 18.

contemporary inequalities in French society to be the historical product of the colonial past.[112] In this light, the French Republic transformed into an entity synonymous with racism and oppression, fundamentally incapable of reform. Interestingly, Gallo did not advise forgetfulness or silence to heal the wounds reopened by this contest between visions of the national past. Instead, Gallo proposed a general openness in French society in regard to the diversity of the national past and sternly reminded his readers that human suffering was not monopolized by one particular community within the Republic. He made this point particularly clear by noting that "(i)f colonized people retain the wound of the colonial period, the French living in the metropole, notably the *pieds-noirs*, have an open wound deep down also."[113] In order to reestablish a common, objective account of France's past, Gallo insisted that the French public be willing to accept and honor all components of its history, even those that they may not share or approve.

C. The National Assembly is Forced to Reconsider the *loi du 23 février 2005*

By December 2005, the controversy that the assemblymen had desired to avoid erupted. As previously discussed, public outcry focused on the fourth article of the *loi du 23 février 2005* which required that the "rôle positif" of French colonisation receive the appropriate attention in the French classroom and in academia. The law had also unleashed a storm of international protest. President of Algeria Abdelaziz Bouteflika angrily denounced the law, accusing it of historical revisionism.[114] The outpouring of

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[112] Gallo. "Colonisation: la tentation de pénitence".

[113] Gallo. "Colonisation: la tentation de pénitence".

[114] Florence Beaugé. "La résurgence du passé colonial jette un froid entre Paris et Alger; Une loi française, promulguée le 23 février 2005 pour indemnister les rapatriés et les harkis, indigne les autorités algériennes. Adoptée dans l'indifférence à Paris, l'une des disposition de ce texte fait référence au "role positif" de la colonisation française," *Le Monde*, International, June 11, 2005.

protest compelled *Parti Socialist* to petition the National Assembly to consider the abrogation of the offending article. The French Left had incorporated much of the language used by historians and educators to frame their opposition to the law, particularly in its assertion that the Assembly had exceeded its authority. Bernard Derosier, left-wing delegate and spokesman for the *Commission des Affaires Culturelles,* argued that the National Assembly had circumvented the duties of the Ministry of Education by going outside the purview of the legislative duties and dictating what could and could not be taught in schools, saying:

> As legislators, our task is to create laws and not to participate in the writing of history because we do not have the training of the sociologist, the philosopher, or the historian to assume that responsibility [...] In any case, it does not belong to the legislator to judge colonial history but rather encourage its study and memory in order that the lessons taken from it improve our present and future behavior. [115]

Derosier described a clear divide between the spheres of activity of the legislator and the historian, which was the clear result of a difference in professional training. The history written by legislators could not be considered valid because it ultimately lacked the scientific methodology and the intellectual discipline that assured the neutrality and objectivity of the academic's conclusions. Derosier even went so far as to assert that the State had no right to use history as a means to ameliorate social injustices. Regardless of the National Assembly's intentions, the goal to restore national unity through an official history had only exacerbated social cleavages.[116] At the heart of this assertion laid the

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[115] French National Assembly *Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel: Session ordinaire de 2005-2006 36ème jour de séance, 81ème séance, 1ère Séance du Mardi 29 Novembre 2005*. National Assembly, November 29, 2005, http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/12/cra/2005-2006/081.asp (Accessed April 29 2010).

[116] *Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel: Session ordinaire de 2005-2006 - 36ème jour de séance, 81ème séance, 1ère Séance du Mardi 29 Novembre 2005.*

fierce desire to preserve the *laïque* character of the Fifth Republic, which echoed statements made by the CVUH, the SNES, and Alain-Gérard Slama. For many Leftist delegates, the National Assembly's efforts to recognize, repent, or renounce the past, could only fragment society into an array of competing narratives and counter-narratives.

The most vocal opponents of the *loi du 23 février 2005* did not couch their arguments in the lofty principles of government neutrality. Instead, other members of the French Left expressed their opposition to the law on the grounds that it ignored or effaced compromising behavior in French history. These delegates took particular issue with the positive narrative that the law imposed on the education of colonialism. Hélène Mignon, a Socialist delegate, unleashed a scathing condemnation of this alleged benevolent character of the French colonial presence, stating that:

> To colonize is to annex territories often by violence or sometimes by ruse. It is to impose the will of the colonizer upon all, ignoring custom, the social and economic environment, and the rules that govern the daily lives of the colonized.[117]

This definition of colonialism and its consequences for the colonized made the recognition of the positive aspects of French colonial rule difficult, if not impossible. Certainly, this refusal by the Left to acknowledge any achievements made during colonial rule was informed by its ideological position as anti-colonialist. To admit the positive aspects of colonization would compromise one of the basic tenets of contemporary socialism and communism. The multiculturalism espoused by the Left had no room for the implicit ethnocentrism present in the Right's positive portrayal of the French Empire. Victorin Lurel, the Guyanne delegate of the Socialist Party, feared that the law threatened

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[117] *Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel: Session ordinaire de 2005-2006 - 36ème jour de séance, 81ème séance, 1ère Séance du Mardi 29 Novembre 2005.*

to efface difference from the national consciousness and even alluded to the disastrous 2005 Paris riots to make his point.[118] According to this logic, the multicultural reality of France required the abrogation of a law that, through its endorsement of the *mission civilisatrice,* revived an outdated social and cultural hierarchy. The compulsory vision of France's benevolent empire would make it impossible for the nation to recognize and respect the importance difference in the national past and arrive at a common history for the present.

Nevertheless, this brand of somewhat tired opposition to French colonialism certainly did not represent the Left's final word. Jean-Pierre Brard, an independent assemblyman known for his sympathy for the *Parti Communiste,* expressed a nuanced evaluation of the article and the reactions that it had provoked. Like many critics, Brard chafed at the implications that an official history possessed and accused his conservative peers of adopting a tactic contrary to the spirit that they claimed to embody, stating:

> Any desire to write an official history is dangerous and contrary to our republican values. The adoption of this amendment reveals a desire to hold onto a departed past, to reassuring images. A very strange thing, those who preach endlessly openness to a globalized world would like to freeze the history of our country on official visions dating back to the 19th century.[119]

Certainly, like many other leftist delegates, Brard considered any official history of France to represent a dangerous threat to free thought. But Brard's sensitivity made him break away from the anti-colonial faction of the French Left. Brard desired to maintain a balance where the positive and negative consequences of colonialism could coexist in the

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[118] *Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel: Session ordinaire de 2005-2006 - 36ème jour de séance, 81ème séance, 1ère, Séance du Mardi 29 Novembre 2005.*

[119] *Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel: Session ordinaire de 2005-2006 - 36ème jour de séance, 81ème séance, 1ère Séance du Mardi 29 Novembre 2005.*

national past. He expressed particular wariness that, in the rush to rectify the apparent ideological bias in the law, Leftist assemblymen would simply substitute an anti-colonial narrative for a pro-colonial one.[120] He wanted to ensure that the abrogation of the article be done in the spirit of restoring government neutrality and the freedom of thought for historians and educators.

As to be expected, the Right fought back viciously against the effort to abrogate the offending article. Many conservatives were bitter towards the Socialists and Communists, likely because none of their arguments had been raised in the initial debates that preceded the law's passage. In response to the anti-colonial narrative espoused by those like Hélène Mignon, the Right attempted to defend their position by casting the Left as the biased party. Several of the UMP delegates expressed their profound belief that French colonization had indeed brought distinct benefits to the peoples whom they had colonized. Michel Diefenbacher stated that the Empire "…knew shadows and light. The shadows existed, let's not forget that, but the light existed as well and our children should know that."[121] Diefenbacher conceded that the experience of the Empire consisted of considerable violence but insisted that the recognition of the crimes of colonization be balanced by the material benefits that the *mission civilisatrice* brought to the colonized. If the national past needed to be objective, then school curricula could not focus on the crimes of colonialism alone. The restoration of this "lost" narrative to the national past justified the law's intrusion into the classroom.

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[120] *Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel: Session ordinaire de 2005-2006 - 36ème jour de séance, 81ème séance, 1ère Séance du Mardi 29 Novembre 2005.*

[121] *Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel: Session ordinaire de 2005-2006 - 36ème jour de séance, 81ème séance, 1ère Séance du Mardi 29 Novembre 2005.*

Other conservative delegates angrily lashed out at the French Left and sought to present them as an insidious relic of a bygone era. They accused the Left of deliberately undermining the objective recitation of the national past in a self-destructive effort to embrace diversity and appease any aggrieved party that took issue with the Republic. Jean-Claude Guibal derided the Left for their opportunistic opposition, claiming that "(t)he nostaglics of Third-Worldism are always at work and act as if they are not responsible for French misfortune."[122] Guibal condemned the Left for defacing France's past and undermining any effort to feel pride or attachment to the Republic. His tirade revealed that, for certain conservatives, the threat confronting the nation was much more than an unassimilated community of immigrants; self-hating Frenchmen also contributed to the fragmentation of the Republic by criminalizing its past. Michèle Tabarot elaborated on the presence of this fifth column in French society, claiming that many of these unpatriotic Frenchmen had infiltrated the nation's schools. Tabarot explicitly linked the educators' opposition to the law to their political sympathies, claiming that she had

> not forgotten that the teachers who today demand the abrogation of this article under the pretext of objectivity and neutrality are the same ones who came with roses in their hands into our classrooms, May 11th, 1981. *(Exclamation from the Socialist benches)*[123]

To Tabarot, historians and educators who bemoaned the Assembly's lack of objectivity were being disingenuous due to the fact that they themselves were acting on their political beliefs. She accused the Left of being hypocritical, proclaiming that those teachers who

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[122] *Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel: Session ordinaire de 2005-2006 - 36ème jour de séance, 81ème séance, 1ère Séance du Mardi 29 Novembre 2005.*

[123] *Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel: Session ordinaire de 2005-2006 - 36ème jour de séance, 81ème séance, 1ère Séance du Mardi 29 Novembre 2005.*

demanded the teaching of France's racist and colonial past had been those who had lauded the virtues of Communism in the 1960's.[124] A complicated body of long-standing grievances and past insults simmered and bubbled over into the National Assembly's deliberations on the controversial law.

D. Imposing Silence: Resorting to Constitutional Annulment

The conservative majority of the National Assembly ultimately denied the petition to abrogate the fourth article of the *loi du 23 février 2005*, which only sparked further controversy. Anger in the Antilles compelled renowned poet Aimé Cesaire to cancel his meeting with Minister of the Interior Nicholas Sarkozy.[125] The animosity unleashed by the law forced President Jacques Chirac to demand the offending amendment's abrogation on December 9thth, appointing Jean-Louis Debré, President of the National Assembly, to organize a parliamentary effort to fulfill that wish.[126] Chirac used words of reconciliation, likely in effort to calm all parties. Like his conservative compatriots in the UMP, Chirac refused to speak in terms of repentance or responsibility. He waxed proudly on the character of the French nation in terms that both the Right and the Left could agree upon, saying:

> France is a great nation. Her past is glorious. She possesses universal values that cast its light on the entire world, values of liberty, justice, rights. She is marked by

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[124] *Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel: Session ordinaire de 2005-2006 - 36ème jour de séance, 81ème séance, 1ère Séance du Mardi 29 Novembre 2005.*

[125] Yves Thread. "Sarkozy et l'inutile psychodrame," *Le Figaro*, December 8, 2005, N° 19081, Débats et Opinions, pg. 15. and Marianne Payot. "Antilles: les racines d'un refus," *L'Express*, December 15, 2005, N° 2841, France; Enquête, Pg. 62.

[126] Jacques Chirac. *Déclaration de M. Jacques CHIRAC, Président de la République, à propos de la loi du 23 février 2005.* Présidence de la République: Archives de la Présidence de Jacques Chirac, 1995-2007, December 9th, 2005. http://www.elysee.fr/elysee/elysee.fr/francais_archives/interventions/interviews_articles_de_presse_et_interventions_televisees/2005/decembre/declaration_du_president_de_la_republique_a_propos_de_la_loi_du_23_fevrier_2005.35202.html (Accessed April 29, 2010).

> the diversity of men and lands that represent her strength and also her richness. This history is our country, our identity, our future and we should be proud of it.[127]

Chirac maintained the historical narrative desired by his fellow conservatives by emphasizing the proud and glorious character of the French past. Nevertheless, this narrative presented by the French president possessed sufficient room to incorporate ethnic and geographic diversity into this universal and eternal France.

This inclusive narrative proposed by Chirac also possessed enough memorial flexibility to include the darker elements of the national past. He admitted that the memories of the national past featured many traumas inflicted on family, friends, and communities that today constituted a major component of contemporary identity. [128] Still, the President's words revealed the integral tension existing within the Republic's desire to remember its past. Like many others, Chirac acknowledged that the national past played a significant role in the construction of national identity. Nevertheless, he recognized that history could also be a disordering agent in civil society, observing that "(h)istory is the key to national cohesion. But it accomplishes little for history to become an object of division, that the passions ignite and the wounds of the past reopen.[129] History was a construct of opposing forces, working to both bind and divide the nation. Neither remembrance nor amnesia could work to arrest this controversy. Therefore, the French State turned to silence.

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[127] Chirac. *Déclaration de M. Jacques CHIRAC, Président de la République, à propos de la loi du 23 février 2005.*

[128] Chirac. *Déclaration de M. Jacques CHIRAC, Président de la République, à propos de la loi du 23 février 2005.*

[129] Chirac. *Déclaration de M. Jacques CHIRAC, Président de la République, à propos de la loi du 23 février 2005.*

In the end, the entire affair ended somewhat anti-climatically. There was no grand stand-off in the chambers of the National Assembly, no great confrontation in which all partisans would meet in a final battle. Instead, President Chirac and Jean-Louis Debré decided to remove the offending article from the law by a decree issued by the Constitutional Council under Article 37, Paragraph 2 of the Fifth Republic's constitution on the grounds that it did not have any bearing on the proper regulation of civil functions in French society.[130] This effectively eliminated any need for the National Assembly to deliberate further on the matter. This seemed to be the point of this political manuever. Heated discussion within and without the Assembly could now end, avoiding any public loss of face or long-term ill feelings or resentments.[131] This imposed silence sought to put the contentious issue to rest. Debré expressed a great desire that this decision would ultimately assure all parties of the legitimacy of their positions. He framed the act as an attempt at national reconciliation, stating that "…my wish is that there may be no humiliation, no renouncement, no rejection, nor repentance. Each person has his truth."[132] This statement expressed a keen desire to avoid any further discussion of the matter at hand by essentially agreeing to disagree. Each party retained the right to its particular memory of the colonial experience and no judgment would be past on anyone. The tortured discourse over the character of France's colonial adventure overseas would have to be delayed indefinitely, effectively silenced. Ironically, this abrupt termination of

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[130] Patrick Roger. "J'assume, et j'assume seul, la responsabilité de cette suppression; JEAN-LOUIS DEBRÉ, PRÉSIDENT DE L'ASSEMBLÉE NATIONALE ENTRETIEN AVEC," *Le Monde*, January 27, 2006. Politque.

[131] Béatrice Gurrrey and Jean-Baptiste de Montvalon. "Colonisation: Chirac évite un débat au Parlement; HISTOIRE L'article sur le "role positif" de la présence française outre-mer sera supprimé par décret," *Le Monde*, January 27, 2006. Politique.

[132] Roger.

discourse was the only way the French government could find to prevent further disruption in the Republic. An imposed silence was the only way to banish these troubling memories.

CHAPTER 4

THE GUY MÔQUET COMMEMORATION

The annulment of the inflammatory fourth article of the *loi du 23 février 2005* may have put to rest the immediate controversy, but it did little to nothing to resolve the key issue of the French government's place in constructing and promoting historical narratives. Chirac's preemptive excision of the offending clause through constitutional redress prevented any further discussion, which ensured that the issue would resurface at a latter time. Concerns over the politicization of the national past resurfaced in the initial months of the 2007 presidential election and culminated in newly elected President Nicolas Sarkozy's controversial commemoration of Guy Môquet. Why did the newly elected president choose to make French history an integral component of his rhetoric during the presidential campaign? Why did he later make the commemoration of a young communist the first official act of his presidency? Sarkozy's fascination with France's past reflected his desire to construct a national history capable of accommodating all communities living within the Republic without dwelling on traumatic or divisive moments. The newly inaugurated president sought to use Guy Môquet as an example of youthful patriotism and self-sacrifice worthy of emulation for French youth. However, instead of reviving national attachment among French youth, Sarkozy's *fait du prince* (presidential fiat) reopened the heated debate over the Republic's right to define and endorse certain historical narratives over others. Angry Leftist politicians, historians, and educators cried foul over the proposed commemoration and once again rose up to stand against the alleged instrumentalization of the national past.

A. Politics, Hysteria, and Nicolas Sarkozy's *histoire bling-bling*

Unlike the discourse that surrounded the *loi du 23 février 2005*, a peculiar atmosphere of hysteria and circus permeated the opposition's argument. One may be reminded of Marx's observation that history occurs first as a tragedy and then repeats itself as a farce.[133] Although it may be tempting to dismiss the sometimes hysterical tone of the opposition as irrational and unfounded, I believe that one needs to understand the power of Nicolas Sarkozy as a political symbol. Sarkozy, the President of the UMP and Minister of the Interior, had remained relatively quiet during the tumultuous debates over the *loi du 23 février 2005*. His silence, however, did not protect him from being dragged into the controversy. As previously mentioned, popular protests and Aimé Césaire's refusal to meet with him forced Sarkozy to cancel his scheduled trip to the Antilles. The Antilles' vehement protest over Sarkozy's visit appeared to be linked to his tacit involvement in the Parisian suburb riots that had taken place only a month before.[134] Sarkozy's promise to root out *racaille* or "scum" from those neighborhoods and the fact that his party had sponsored the *loi du 23 février 2005* made him the symbol of revived conservatism and nationalism in France. Historians, educators, and Leftist politicians transformed Sarkozy into the epitome of what they opposed, ready to be conjured at a moment's notice to be damned, dissected, and dismissed. The fact that the Guy Môquet commemoration was intimately tied to the person of Nicolas Sarkozy likely contributed to his opposition's intimate and hysterical tone.

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[133] Karl Marx. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*. (New York: Cosimo Inc, 2008), 1.

[134] Yves Threard. "Sarkozy et l'inutile psychodrama."

Although he contributed very little of substance to the debate over the *loi du 23 février 2005*, Nicolas Sarkozy embraced the Republic's endeavor to construct a common past during his presidential campaign. The incorporation of this rhetoric into his political program became more and more noticeable as his presidential ambitions became apparent. During the campaign, he frequently alluded to historical figures that belonged to the treasured canon of French history. However, Sarkozy did not refer exclusively to heroes of the French Right. Observers noted that he also referred to persons from the Left's canon, like Jean Jaurès and Léon Blum, in an effort to portray himself as a reconciliatory figure devoted to public unity.[135] The effort to situate himself within this conciliatory narrative certainly fit with Sarkozy's broader efforts to construct a vision of the national past that bridged all social and economic divides in French society.

However, Sarkozy's new history did not aim to reconcile a defined community with the Republic. Instead, it targeted French youth for the purpose of bringing them back into the republican fold. The choice of audience can be likely attributed to the tumultuous riots in the *banlieues* in 2005 and the streets of Paris during the CPE debacle of 2006. The immediate threat to the Republic's integrity now appeared to be a dissatisfied French youth, especially those related to the *rapatrié* and immigrant communities. At the 2006 *Université d'été des Jeunes Populaires*, an annual party congress for young UMP militants, Sarkozy first articulated this vision of the past to the nation's youth, indicating his desire to return to a more inclusive history to those present. In this speech, he bemoaned a France could no longer fire the ambitions of its youth and blamed that failure

[135] Sylvie Aprile ed. "L'histoire par Nicolas Sarkozy : le rêve passéiste d'un futur national-libéral," *Comité de vigilance face aux usages publics de l'histoire.* April 30, 2007, http://cvuh.free.fr/spip.php?article82 (Accessed April 29, 2010).

on a fatalism that pervaded French society, warning that this "…fascination for fatalism clips youth's wings."[136] Sarkozy asserted that France owed a great debt to the boundless energies of youth and requested that those present come to the Republic's aid once again. To make this point clear, he linked the marvels and triumphs of French history, the French Revolution, World War I, the Resistance, and the tumultuous upheavals of 1968, to the vitality of the nation's youth.[137] In short, France's preservation and accomplishments transformed into the fruit of its youth's labor. Future empowerment of the Republic required the empowerment of all its youth, even those previously alienated by the national community.

Sarkozy did, however, insist that the national community represented an obligation rather than one option out of many communities to choose allegiance. He warned French youth that liberty was impossible outside of the Republic and expressed his concerns that that liberty was threatened by a social breakdown facilitated by a lack of loyalty to the Republic. He painted a dire portrait of a France without the Republic, saying:

> Don't you mistake it, without the Republic, you will no longer have individual liberty, justice or democracy. You will have *communitarisme*, tribal law, each person sent back to his ethnic origins, his religion, you will have citizenship that changes according to circumstance, you will have more instead of less intolerance. The Republic is not a choice. For each of us, it must be an expectation and a duty.[138]

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[136] Nicolas Sarkozy. "Université d'été des Jeunes Populaires," Université d'été des Jeunes Populaires, Marseille. September 3, 2006. Transcript found at Union Pour Un Mouvement Populaire. http://www.u-m-p.org/site/index.php/ump/s_informer/discours/universite_d_ete_des_jeunes_populaires_marseille_1_2_et_3_septembre_2006 (Accessed May 5, 2009). Due to renovations by the UMP web staff, this article must be accessed by http://archive.org.

[137] Sarkozy, "Université d'été des Jeuenes Populaires.".

[138] Sarkozy, "Université d'été des Jeuenes Populaires.".

In this light, the Republic was the only defense against the competing factional interests that Sarkozy described. Association with the Republic became an imperative to hold these destabilizing forces at bay. Furthermore, Sarkozy voiced considerable regret that French youth did not express their attachment to France more visibly and frequently. He pointed to the example of American youth as the proper example of those who expressed their loyalty faithful to their country. Interestingly, he referred to the polyglot character of the United States as evidence of that nation's success in inculcating national loyalty into its youth, stating;

> The children of the United States, a nation of immigrants, listen to the national anthem and salute the star-spangled banner with their hand over their heart. Why should French youth not be proud of their country until the French soccer team scores a goal? Singing the Marseillaise is not old-fashioned. Being moved before the tricolor is not out of style. Loving one's fatherland is not outdated.[139]

Sarkozy's adulation of U.S. patriotism may appear to be somewhat simplistic and naïve to the American reader. However, there should be no doubt that Sarkozy made these statements with sincerity. These exhortations sought to instill a stronger feeling of obligation and attachment to the Republic in its youth. He intimately linked the young audience's identity with the national identity and made them virtually indistinguishable, saying: "France is your country, your nation, your fatherland, and you have no other, even if your parents are from elsewhere […] Not to love France when you are French is to renounce yourself. Love France! She deserves it."[140]

Sarkozy's repeated requests for patriotic devotion from young citizens and insistence that France deserved that love reflected a significant divergence in French

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[139] Sarkozy, "Université d'été des Jeuenes Populaires.".

[140] Sarkozy, "Université d'été des Jeuenes Populaires.".

memory politics. The Minister's recurrent statements that France did not deserve to be denounced and reviled by her youth revealed the refutation of President Jacques Chirac's tentative moves to officially recognize and repent for past national crimes.[141] According to Sarkozy's vision of the past, France had nothing to apologize for. In fact, the nation could not afford to discuss those divisions found in the national past without causing significant moral damage to its citizens. If France was to face the challenges of the twenty-first century, then it would need to rely on a generation of French youth who possessed a common and positive vision of the national past. Furthermore, the growing number of dissatisfied French youth made this return to a more positive vision of the French past essential. Only by recasting the Republic as an inclusive and empowering entity in history, the Right believed, could it assure the continued loyalty of its youth.

French Historians React Against Sarkozy's *histoire bling-bling*:

Some historians watched the aspiring presidential candidate construct his history of France with considerable dismay and issued solemn warnings of its portents for the future. These historians, especially those associated with the *Comité de vigilance face aux usages publics de l'histoire*, accused Sarkozy of cheapening and trivializing the nation's history. Nicholas Offenstadt would later call this new history "*histoire bling-bling"* or "flashy history," which he identified as "…flashy, loud, not very profound."[142] Offenstadt asserted that Sarkozy consciously ignored the historical context of his referenced figures and consequently committed great harm to the public's understanding of the past. He

[141] Bracher, 59.

[142] Nicolas Offenstadt. "L'histoire bling-bling," CVUH. April 12, 2008. http://cvuh.free.fr/spip.php?article170 (Accessed April 29, 2010).

used metaphors of cheap extravagance and unbridled consumption to frame his criticism of Sarkozy's *histoire bling-bling*, stating that it:

> …is a large blend where everything knocks about like a night club with the neon lights at full blast: the great names (Jaurès or Joan of Arc), great events (the Crusades or the Second World War) mix together without hierarchy, context, or care for explanation […] *L'histoire bling-bling* is a history of consumers, not a history of citizens. *L'histoire bling-bling* shines but it does not enlighten.[143]

Offenstadt mainly disapproved of Sarkozy's haphazard methodology in the construction of this narrative, especially for its uncritical and decontextualized allusions to people and events. His references to consumerism highlighted his contempt for Sarkozy's undisciplined selections, presenting Sarkozy's history as a smorgasbord where the patron takes what he wishes and leaves the rest behind. Oddly, the very same historians schizophrenically insisted that Sarkozy's instrumentalization of history simultaneously represented a shallow ploy empty of substance and evidence of his nefarious designs for political dominance. Sylvie Aprile claimed that Sarkozy's routine historical references to French history were a cheap trick designed to blind the voter. She outlined how this scheme functioned and hinted at a more sinister motivation lying behind it:

> All abandoned or marginalized historical references can work, on the condition of appearing a little shiny enough to create a brief illusion to be sold to the voter. There is, however, a more profound logic to this work, in spite of its incoherent appearance that associates Jean Jaurès and national identity together […] (I)t operates to bring together the margins of the Republic in order to insert them in a grand construct in which Sarkozy would be the only unifying feature.[144]

Like Offendstadt, Aprile complained how Sarkozy's historical narrative relied on the visceral appeal of its content rather than a scientific and rational approach. This glitzy

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[143] Offendstadt.

[144] Sylvie Aprile ed. "L'histoire par Nicolas Sarkozy : le rêve passéiste d'un futur national-libéral,".

history had only a transient existence, acting quickly to ensnare the unsuspecting and fading just as rapidly. Nevertheless, Aprile detected in Sarkozy's vision of the past the clues to a more ominous plot. His broad narrative of French history excluded Napoleon, the Bonapartes, and Pétain, and, according to Aprile, the exclusion of these authoritarian personalities revealed Sarkozy's aspirations to his own form of dictatorship; the dictatorship of the free market![145] She reinforced this claim by insisting that Sarkozy's liberal agenda coexisted with an insidious conservative ideology that drew on the worst parts of French history, namely "…pétainist and bonapartist values: the myth of the savior, the strong man, the conqueror; the ideology of family, work, and fatherland."[146] This conflation of Sarkozy's historical narrative with his perceived social conservatism, merited or not, led historians and educators to launch a confused demand for the prevention of politicized history that drew on history to justify their position.

B. Nicolas Sarkozy's Election and the Origins of the Môquet Commemoration

Nicolas Sarkozy won the presidency in a close campaign against Sègolene Royale in May 2007. Although he won by only a narrow margin, Sarkozy appeared to interpret that election as a popular mandate for his political program, which included the establishment of his vision of French history. At his inauguration on May 16, 2007, Sarkozy expressed his belief that a concerted effort needed to be made in order to secure a common history for the Republic's citizens. He considered the maintenance of French history and identity to be one of his primary duties as president of the Republic, stating

[145] Sylvie Aprile ed. "L'histoire par Nicolas Sarkozy : le rêve passéiste d'un futur national-libéral,".

[146] Sylvie Aprile. "L'histoire par Nicolas Sarkozy : le rêve passéiste d'un futur national-libéral,".

that he would "…defend the independence and the identity of France."[147] Later that evening, Sarkozy continued this line of thought at the Bois de Boulogne, the Parisian forest where resistance members had been ambushed and killed by Nazis during the Occupation's final days. Here, Sarkozy wedded the commemoration of these national martyrs with his desire to secure the loyalty of French youth. Sarkozy mused that the devoted attachment to a free France that he saw in these members of the French resistance would serve as the model for French youth. Sarkozy, as in 2006, intimately linked the youthful character of these resistants to the eternal glory of the Republic and of France, stating:

> The resistants were young. They went to die. But what they embodied was invincible. They said "No", "No" to fatalism, "No" to submission, "No" to dishonor, "No" to what dehumanizes man, and this "No" will continue to be heard well after their death because this "No" is the eternal cry that human liberty offers to all that threaten to enslave it […] This cry I want taught in our schools to our children to hear and to understand.[148]

Once again, Sarkozy emphasized the Republic's rejection of fatalism and embrace of the youthful energy and self-sacrifice of its youth. These virtues, he declared, needed to be taught in French schools through proper historical and moral instruction. Once these virtues had revitalized the nation's youth, they would reintegrate back into the fabric of the Republic and cease their destabilizing protests.

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[147] Nicolas Sarkozy. "Cérémonie d'installation du Président de la République," Inauguration Speech, Inauguration ceremony of the French President. Palais de l'Élysée, Presidence de la République May 16, 2007. http://www.elysee.fr/president/les-actualites/discours/2007/ceremonie-d-installation-du-president-de-la.8232.html?search=C%C3%A9r%C3%A9monie+d%27installation+du+Pr%C3%A9sident+de+la+R%C3%A9publique (Accessed April, 29, 2010).

[148] Nicolas Sarkozy. "Discours pour la Cérémonie d'hommage aux martyrs du bois de Boulogne," Commemoration Speech. May 16, 2007, Presidence de la République http://www.elysee.fr/president/les-actualites/discours/2007/allocution-lors-de-la-ceremonie-d-hommage-aux.8230.html?search=c%C3%A9r%C3%A9monie (Accessed April 29, 2010).

In order to accomplish that goal, Sarkozy issued his first presidential decree; the letter of Guy Môquet would soon be read in every classroom throughout France. Sarkozy likely did not select Môquet on the basis of his historical significance. Rather, the tragic character of Môquet's place in the history of the Occupation served as the primary appeal to the new President's sensibilities. Guy Môquet, a seventeen year old communist arrested for distributing anti-German propaganda and executed in retaliation for the assassination of a German officer, provided that youthful face of patriotism and sacrifice that Sarkozy desired, saying that:

> (I)f I wanted the letter that Guy Môquet had been so movingly written to his parents on the eve of being shot, it is because I believe that it is essential to explain to our children that he was nothing but a young Frenchman, and to show them through the sacrifice of certain anonymous heroes that the history books do not speak of that it was the grandeur of a man who gave himself for a cause greater than himself.[149]

Môquet's letter would serve as the vehicle through which French youth could identify and examine youthful expressions of patriotism and, with hope, learn by example. The choice of the classroom represented the most sensible choice for this patriotic commemoration. Public schools historically had been involved in, if not associated with, the inculcation of acceptable republican values. In this sense, Sarkozy wished to remake the Republic's schools into those of the Third Republic: sites of patriotic and nationalist indoctrination. Only knowledge of their national past and heritage could provide the nation's youth with a defined structure of compulsory and shared beliefs, in short, a national identity.

[149] Sarkozy, "Discours pour la Cérémonie d'hommage aux martyrs du bois de Boulogne.".

C. Grudging Acceptance and Scholarly Ire: Initial Reactions to the Commemoration

Much like the debate on the *loi du 23 février 2005*, opposition to the Môquet commemoration evolved slowly. As before, the French Left initially gave a divided response to the President's efforts to provide French youth a common history grounded in patriotism and sacrifice. The Socialist Party, for the most part, seemed too preoccupied with recouping their losses for the upcoming regional elections.[150] Hollande and Party leaders seemed to prefer rhetoric on the French economy to opposing the new president's commemoration. Others on the Left who gave the commemoration more than a passing glance seemed somewhat open. Laurent Joffrin, *Libération*'s editorial staff director, offered sympathetic support for the President's decree, signaling the opposition to put aside any doubts regarding Sarkozy's motivations. In an article published in *Libération*, Joffrin insisted that the commemoration should not be dismissed as an ephemeral political ploy intended to distract the general public, stating "Political calculation? Perhaps. But one must judge acts more than intentions. Now, the act is right."[151] Furthermore, Joffrin too believed that Môquet deserved special consideration and, somewhat surprisingly, attacked those who asserted that the commemoration compromised historical objectivity due to its reliance on emotion, replying:

> Since when must emotion be banished from the classroom? Whoever has tried to give the smallest history course knows that it has the advantage of capturing attention before developing, explaining, putting in perspective the historical facts

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[150] For a more detailed account of the Socialist Party's priorities, see: François Hollande. "Discours de François Hollande," Party Gathering, Bordeaux, May 23rd, 2007. Le site officiel du parti socialiste. http://discours.parti-socialiste.fr/2007/05/23/dicours-de-francois-hollande-meeting-a-bordeaux/ (Accessed April 29, 2010).

[151] Laurent Joffrin. "Oui, il faut lire la letter de Guy Môquet" *Liberation*, May 24th, 2007, http://www.liberation.fr/tribune/0101103033-oui-il-faut-lire-la-lettre-de-guy-moquet (Accessed April 29, 2010).

> that one wants to teach. Nicolas Sarkozy, as one knows, has not proposed replacing history courses with sessions of collective tears.[152]

Unlike historians and educators who had demanded scholarly objectivity during the *loi du 23 février 2005* controversy, Joffrin proposed that emotion had a place in the classroom and served a pedagogical function. Emotion represented an important tool that could engage the student's human sympathies, securing their attention for the subsequent lesson in history. However, the concept that history was not a purely scientific and objective endeavor did not receive much respect in the months ahead.

The French Communist Party, on the other hand, expressed their wholehearted support for the commemoration. Marie-George Buffet, the National Secretary of the French Communist Party, gave his personal support. In an official statement issued on May 16, 2007, Buffet declared that the reading of Môquet's letter would be a strong message to send to French youth, especially because

> …this young man was a bearer of patriotism by his participation in the resistance, but also because his struggle for human emancipation had a goal; to construct a Republic of rights and liberties in a democracy.[153]

While the French Communist Party shared Sarkozy's desire to perpetuate the heroic memory of Guy Môquet and the Resistance, its core motivation differed vastly. Buffet's statement revealed an important deviation from Sarkozy's historical narrative, namely that Môquet's death represented the continued struggle for the fulfillment of human emancipation and republican equality instead of patriotic obligation and sacrifice. Unlike Sarkozy's previous descriptions of Môquet, Buffet's statement suggested that the young

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[152] Joffrin.

[153] Marie-George Buffet. "Lecture de la letter de Guy Moquet: Un combat pour l'émancipation humaine pleinement d'actualité," May 16, 2007. Site National du PCF, http://www.pcf.fr/spip.php?page=imprimer&id_article=1605 (Accessed April 29, 2010).

communist had worked for the completion of republican goals rather than its preservation. Furthermore, it connected Môquet's internationalist communist sympathies with republican values, wedding communism to the national history and effectively equating communist internationalism with republican universalism.

Still, certain communists expressed reservations concerning the commemoration. Like historians who had studied Sarkozy's political campaign, they were suspicious that the commemoration would downplay or overlook certain historical details in order to transform Môquet into a symbol of the Right. In an article in *L'Humanité,* Rosa Moussaoui accused the Guy Môquet commemoration of conscientiously diminishing Môquet's allegiance to communist internationalism and anti-fascism in order to impose a superficial patriotism onto his memory.[154] For Moussaoui, Môquet needed to retain his internationalism in order to remain communist, and she rejected the patriotic discourse grafted onto his memory as antithetical to the fundamental tenets of Marxist philosophy. This fear that the commemoration deliberately ignored certain historical facts would dominate public discussion over the next few months.

What support for Guy Môquet's commemoration that Sarkozy had won in the initial months of his presidency sharply diminished once the Ministry of Education issued the bulletin that outlined the commemoration's official proceedings. This bulletin, issued August 30th, 2007, provided French educators with a concise outline of the government's expectations. In it, Xavier Darcos, the Minister of Education, proclaimed that the principal goal of the commemoration was:

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[154] Rosa Moussaoui, "Guy Môquet, le courage d'un combat," L'Humanité. May 18, 2007, http://www.humanite.fr/2007-05-18_Politique_Guy-Moquet-le-courage-d-un-combat (Accessed April 29, 2010).

> …to remind high school students of the engagement of young men and women of all regions and social backgrounds who made the choice to resist, often at the cost of their life […] Therefore, all of these young French, their passion clearly attached to liberty to the point of sacrificing their own lives to defend the liberty of others, constitute a formidable example for today's youth.[155]

The purpose of the commemoration had changed very little since Sarkozy had first proposed it at the Bois du Boulogne. Reading Guy Môquet's letter aimed to provide students with examples of patriotic service and sacrifice in order to foster feelings similar feelings of devotion to the Republic. Still, that did not mean that the commemoration would consist of hollow gestures. Instead, the Minister outlined a flexible program that could be easily customized. Darcos declared that the letter would be read aloud to students in the classroom or in an assembly, which would then be followed by a moderated discussion on the history and the memory of World War II.[156] What made the program so interesting is that the Ministry gave French teachers a significant amount of freedom to determine the content and character of their schools' respective commemoration. There was little effort to make the Guy Môquet commemoration completely uniform and, in fact, the Ministry encouraged teachers to develop the general outline provided by the Ministry of Education and make their own contribution. The Ministry bulletin provided them with additional letters written by martyred resistance members and suggested that they contact remaining resistance members and organizations to request their participation.[157] Essentially, the Ministry constructed the

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[155] Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale. *22 Octobre: Commémoration du souvenir de Guy Môquet et de ses 26 compagnons fusillés*. n□□□□□□□ 2007-138 du 2-8-2007. Ministry of Education, August 30, 2007, http://www.education.gouv.fr/bo/2007/30/MENE0701517N.htm (Accessed April 29, 2010).

[156] *22 Octobre: Commémoration du souvenir de Guy Môquet et de ses 26 compagnons fusillés.*

[157] *22 Octobre: Commémoration du souvenir de Guy Môquet et de ses 26 compagnons fusillés.*

event in such a manner that it invited all interested parties invested in the perpetuation and transmission of the history of the Resistance to participate. This inclusive character reflected the need to assure the participation of a broad cross-section of French society. In short, the French State intended the commemoration of Guy Môquet to be an inclusive and universal celebration of patriotic virtue throughout France.

Public responses to Sarkozy's commemoration of Guy Môquet from the French public were mixed, ranging from vivid enthusiasm to skeptical reticence. Former Resistance members reacted favorably to the reading of Môquet's letter in French schools. Raymond Aubrac, one of the founders of *Libération-Sud*, indicated that he was pleased to see a president born in the postwar period expressing interest in perpetuating the memory of the Resistance.[158] However, French historians and educators expressed vehement opposition to the proposed commemoration. These individuals, much as the debate regarding the *loi du 23 février 2005*, expressed grave concern that this government initiative lacked proper respect for historical complexity and context. Educators who taught at the *lycée* Ango told their students' parents that the commemoration compromised the primary pedagogical duty of the classroom by inserting uncritical emotion into a rational discipline.

> Our instruction has nothing to do with an activity that aims to arouse emotion without critical distance, without placing evidence, as poignant as it may be, back in its historical context […] It is precisely because we distinguish between history and memory, practical and moral education, reason and emotion, that we refuse to

[158] "Résistants heureux de la lecture de la letter de Guy Môquet," Libération. May 18, 2007. http://www.liberation.fr/societe/0101102549-resistants-heureux-de-la-lecture-de-la-lettre-de-guy-moquet (Accessed April 29, 2010).

> participate in this commemoration imposed on us without regard to any pedagogical consideration.[159]

They made it quite clear that the introduction of emotion in the classroom ran contrary to the atmosphere of neutrality and objectivity required for proper historical study. Furthermore, they established a strict and inflexible dichotomy between historical instruction and commemoration grounded on rationalism and irrationalism. The introduction of emotion and memory, irrational forces, into the classroom threatened to undermine the scientific methodology appropriate for the study of history.

Educators warned that the introduction of these irrational forces would only confuse any sense of context regarding the history of the French Resistance. The *Syndicat National des enseignements de second degré* (SNES), a national teacher's union, published an article that anxiously mused over the potential damage that the decontextualized use of Môquet's letter would have on the public understanding of the national past.[160] This fear reflected the growing concern that Môquet's letter alone did not provide the necessary historical context to frame properly a discussion about the Occupation and the Resistance. Pierre Schill, a teacher of history and member of the CVUH, complained that the celebration of Guy Môquet as a patriotic martyr made little sense in light of his communist loyalties and warned his readers of the dangers of using historical figures for

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[159] Anonymous. "Pourqoui nous ne lirons pas la lettre de Guy Môquet," Les Informations Dieppoises. October 23 2007. http://www.infos-dieppoises.fr/archives2007/refuslectureguymoquet.htm (Accessed April 29, 2010).

[160] Anonymous. "Histoire(s) et mémoire(s): Lettre de Guy Môquet: Un cas d'école," Site du SNES, October 12, 2007, http://www.snes.edu/LETTRE-DE-GUY-MOQUET-UN-CAS-D.html (Accessed April 29, 2010).

political ends.[161] Schill viewed the commemoration as a cynical appropriation of history designed to further Sarkozy's conservative agenda. French educators did not believe that their pedagogical responsibilities included the coordination of commemorative exercises designed to furnish their students with examples of civic morality. Once again, the fervent belief that history needed to be devoid of any manifestation of memory or emotion manifested itself in France's scholarly elite.

These arguments against the Môquet commemoration contained the general spirit of the past opposition to the *loi du 23 février 2005*: the obligation to preserve professional autonomy in the classroom, the need to respect the neutral and objective methodology of history, and the imperative to avoid politicized history. However, some educators turned to other arguments, revealing a startling contempt for their pupils and the general public. In an article appearing in *Le Figaro* on May 19th, 2007, one anonymous teacher claiming to teach in an economically underprivileged junior high school complained that his students who read the letter "…would certainly be incapable of comprehending its profoundness and even understanding the words."[162] Students, he said, would be better served by practical and useful instruction rather than government commemorations.[163] Although the anonymous teacher raised relevant concerns over the ability of students to understand and appreciate the historical and moral significance of the letter, this skeptical attitude regarding the general public's capacity to think historically and interact with that

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[161] Pierre Schill. "Pourquoi je ne lirai pas la letter de Guy Môquet à mes élèves à la rentrée," Liberation, May 22, 2007, http://www.liberation.fr/tribune/0101102822-pourquoi-je-ne-lirai-pas-la-lettre-de-guy-moquet-a-mes-eleves-a-la-rentree (Accessed April 29, 2010).

[162] Anonymous. "Pourquoi je ne lirai pas la lettre de Guy Môquet," Le Figaro. May 19, 2007. http://www.lefigaro.fr/debats/20070519.FIG000001202_pourquoi_je_ne_lirai_pas_la_lettre_de_guy_moquet.html (Accessed March 3, 2009).

[163] Anonymous. "Pourquoi je ne lirai pas la lettre de Guy Môquet,".

history grew to scandalous proportions. Others expressed considerable dismay at their growing inability to control public discussions of national history. Thierry Desanti, a history teacher, expressed shock that Guy Môquet's letter had been read at the rugby match between France and Argentina that September, darkly conjecturing at its implications.[164] Paranoid that the French government was consciously trying to undermine the integrity of their profession and horrified by unsupervised public expressions of memory, French educators raised opposition to a hysterical pitch. In spite of the benevolent intentions of French educators, the Môquet commemoration revealed a strain of latent arrogance and contempt for the general public.

How to explain this maelstrom of anger, arrogance, and resentment on the part of French educators? Much of the anger directed at Sarkozy and the government appeared to stem from the President's *Lettre Aux Éducateurs*, which outlined his vision of republican education and intended reforms for the educational system.[165] Certainly, French teachers had responded negatively to the government's involvement in the formation of course curriculum during the *loi du 23 février 2005* and, thus, it is unsurprising that Sarkozy's intrusion provoked alarm and harsh responses. However, Sarkozy's apparent desire to revise the classroom's structure as well as its curriculum made his intrusion appear much more threatening. Many teachers viewed the proposed reforms as a direct threat to their livelihoods. The SNES particularly attacked his proposal to cut back on the number of

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[164] Theirry Desanti. "Se Souvenir de Guy Môquet…Mais sans Sarkozy," Site du SNES Dijon, Octobre 15th, 2007, http://www.dijon.snes.edu/spip/spip.php?article2271 (Accessed April 29, 2010).

[165] For further reading, see: Nicolas Sarkozy, *Lettre Aux Éducateurs*. Documentation Française, September 4, 2007, http://media.education.gouv.fr/file/41/3/6413.pdf (Accessed April 29, 2010).

teachers in the classroom and reduce school hours.[166] Still, shallow self-interest alone did not motivate the opposition. The SNES found these reforms inconsistent with the shared goal of making French schools more inclusive and integrate all students into the social body of the Republic. The organization attacked Sarkozy for failing to address the critical issue of continued social inequality in French education and his proposed elimination of the *carte scolaire*[167], a social program that allowed French parents to request specific schools for their children based on their physical and educational needs.[168] Overall, educators conflated the President's commemoration and proposed reforms as the herald of a vast institutional revision that directly threatened their profession and careers. In response, the SNES passed a motion on September 12th, 2007, that called on every teacher to protest the commemoration of Guy Môquet and resist any official pressures to participate.[169]

Some French historians also began to voice their misgivings. The CVUH, already wary of Sarkozy's use of French history in his campaign rhetoric, expressed grave reservations about the commemoration of Guy Môquet in French schools. Much like their peers in secondary education, these historians feared that the commemoration did not provide adequate information or historical context necessary for fully understanding the

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[166] Catherine Remermier and Marie-Agnès Monnier. "Sept. 2007 Nous n'attendrons pas 2008 pour agir!", Site du SNES . September 7, 2007. http://www.snes.edu/spip.php?article2376 (Accessed April 29, 2010).

[167] SNES. "Lettre aux Enseignants de Nicolas Sarkozy," Site de SNES, September 15, 2007. http://www.snes.edu/Lettre-aux-educateurs-de-Nicolas.html (Accessed May 8, 2010)

[168] Ministère de l'Education Nationale. "Assouplissement de la carte scolaire," *Ministère de l'Education Nationale*. March 2010. http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid5509/assouplissement-de-la-carte-scolaire.html (Accessed October 20, 2010).

[169] Conseil National du SNES. "Motion du SNES relative à la lecture de la lettre de Guy Môquet," Site du SNES, September 12, 2007, http://www.snes.edu/spip.php?article5501 (Accessed April 29, 2010).

Occupation and Resistance. They were particularly worried about the simplification of Môquet's role in the history of the Occupation and the subsequent reduction of that entire history to a single theme of sacrifice.[170] Furthermore, the CVUH accused the President of manipulating the life of Guy Môquet for political ends, particularly in regard to the evacuation of much of the letter's historical context from the commemoration. According to the historians, Guy Môquet's letter alone did not sufficiently convey the historical complexities that surrounded his life and death.[171] Focusing on the letter's contents avoided more difficult and troubling questions about the French struggle and complicity with the Occupation. However, for all their demands for objectivity, historians could not resist the urge to draw on history for support. For example, Laurence De Cock-Pierrepont mused that the values that Sarkozy hoped to instill in French youth had a disturbing resonance with those of Vichy: *Famille, Travail, Patrie*.[172] His observation had the implicit aim of subverting the Sarkozy's commemoration by comparing the President and his government to the enemies of the French Republic and Resistance. Ironically, Sarkozy's efforts to revive French youth's attachment to the Republic had only reopened old wounds that still lingered in national memory.

D. The Commemoration Appears to Fall Apart

This drama played out bitterly in the weeks prior to the commemoration. By the fall of 2007, the French Left had abandoned its earlier enthusiasm for the project. The

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[170] Comité de Vigilance face aux usages publics de l'histoire. "Guy Môquet, et après? Effacement de l'histoire et culte mémoriel," CVUH, October 7, 2007. http://cvuh.free.fr/spip.php?article131 (Accessed April 29, 2010).

[171] Comité de Vigilance face aux usages publics de l'histoire. "Guy Môquet, et après? Effacement de l'histoire et culte mémoriel,"

[172] Laurence De Cock-Pierrepont. "Des usages étatiques de la letter de Guy Môquet".

Communists were outraged that Sarkozy and the Ministry of Education had decided to play down the communist allegiances of Môquet and the twenty-six others executed alongside him. In a statement issued on October 16th, Communist Party spokesman Olivier Dartigolles issued a strong condemnation of Minister Darcos, who had "…transformed the communist militants into 'companions'."[173] The Communist Party deeply resented the depoliticization of these young men. The political affiliation of Guy Môquet and his fellows represented an essential part of communist memory and their vision of the struggle to obtain a Republic. Thus, the Party had a vested interest in the preservation of Guy Môquet's memory as a communist agitator and it was not willing to idly allow the Right to efface that memory.

The Right came to the defense of their president's project, armed with a familiar embittered narrative. Ivan Rioufol, a conservative writer and essayist, scathingly condemned French teachers and communists for transforming the Môquet commemoration into a platform to launch a political attack on Sarkozy. In an article in *Le Figaro*, Rioufol accused French teachers of placing multicultural narratives above the national narrative at a time where increased immigration required the integration of these new arrivals into the national community.[174] Rioufol's argument echoed Michelle's Tabarot's passionate denunciation of French teachers and the Left during the *loi du 23 février 2005* controversy. Their apparent refusal to participate in the construction of a shared history only weakened the Republic's ability to inspire a feeling of belonging

[173] Olivier Dartigolles. "À propos de la celebrations autour de Guy Môquet: Déclaration d'Olivier Dartigolles (PCF)," *Site national du PCF*, October 17th, 2007, http://www.pcf.fr/spip.php?article 2043 (Accessed April 29, 2010).

[174] Ivan Rioufol. "Exercices de mémoire," *Le Figaro*, October 26, 2007, N° 19668, Pg. 15.

amongst its citizens. Counteraccusations of bias and historical myopia also occurred. Rioufol argued that the Communist Party's self-righteous objections to the government's commemoration of Guy Môquet were made in bad faith. He pointed out that the Communists' vision of Môquet as a hero of the French Communist Party made little sense because Môquet had participated in resistance activities against the Communist Party's orders, as its superiors were nominally allied with the Germans.[175] Instead of fostering national unity and consensus, the Guy Môquet commemoration had resurrected old feuds and divided France over who had truly fought for the Republic.

With this hysteria taking place, it is little surprise that the French government made significant concessions in order to salvage the commemoration and diminish public hostility. In spite of fervent objection from some officials within the French government, Xavier Darcos declared that the government had not intended to and would not force teachers to read the letter, reiterating that teachers had the authority to decide for themselves how to participate.[176] These assurances may have been responsible for the surprising level of participation in schools across France. According to the French government, roughly 93% of French schools participated in the reading of Guy Môquet's letter.[177] However, this statistic does not reveal how French teachers conducted the commemoration. Certain teachers may very well have used the reading of the letter to provide a more contextualized history of the Resistance or illustrate how history can be

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[175] Rioufol.

[176] For further reading on this division within the French government, see Anne-Noémie Dorion. "Henri Guaino ravive la polémique sur Guy Môquet; le conseiller du president n'admet pas le refus de certains enseignants de lire la lettre du jeune fusillé communiste," *Le Figaro*, October 20, 2007, No. 19663, Pg. 9.

[177] Marie-Estelle Pech. "La Journée Guy Môquet deviendra celle de la Résistance," *Le Figaro*, October 26, 2007, N° 19668, Pg. 10.

politicized, in spite of the admonition of their peers to refusal to participate.[178] Unfortunately, there is little way to determine easily how many teachers actually participated in the event and what forms the commemoration took on in the classroom.

E. Why the Controversy?

Why did the commemorative reading of Guy Môquet become so controversial? Several factors contributed to the explosive response to Sarkozy's commemoration. First of all, the circumstances that concluded the controversy of the *loi du 23 février 2005* had left critical issues unresolved, namely the government's right to participate in the making of history. Furthermore, the *loi du 23 février 2005* had encouraged educators and historians to organize and be wary of any state attempt to revise or promote particular narratives in national history. Without this critical past experience, I do not believe that the opposition to the Môquet commemoration would have been able to present a unified front. Furthermore, the political passions still boiling in the wake of a fierce presidential election also made opposition so fierce. Sarkozy's victory had emboldened him to implement zealously his program and encouraged the vanquished Left to oppose anything that the new President and his party proposed. The personality and political beliefs of the French president also fed his opponents. Sarkozy's political career had been built on the principles of social and cultural order, which encouraged his opponents to interpret the commemoration of Guy Môquet as the beginning of an unprecedented wave of conservative reform that needed to be opposed. The alienation of French teachers and Communists likely made the controversy unavoidable. If the political stakes had not

[178] Cardoso, Alice. "Lettre de Guy Môquet: initiative controversée," Site du SNES, June 15th, 2007, http://www.snes.edu/spip.php?article9485 (Accessed April 29, 2010).

seemed so high, the reading of Guy Môquet's letter would likely have not produced such stormy debate.

The methodological sensitivities of French historians and educators also posed a formidable obstacle to the commemoration. These individuals, trained to think critically as historians, found themselves discomforted by the intrusion of an emotionally charged document into the classroom. They once again insisted that history was a neutral and objective discipline that demanded distance from emotion. This emotional approach to history, historians and educators argued, caused the public to miss the various contexts surrounding Guy Môquet's life and death. The repeated demand for complexity and context echoed the previous demands made during the *loi du 23 février 2005* debates. Only that complex history could furnish the diverse citizenry of France with a common national past. Lastly, rumors of reform enflamed educators' fears that their professional would be subordinated to the whims of the executive. Their hysterical claims of public ignorance and incompetence reflected the desperate desire to justify their existence in French society. Without them, there would be no guardians against the French State's politicization of the national past.

CHAPTER 5

AN (OVER?)ABUNDANCE OF MEMORY

One of my French colleagues, when discussing the differences between the United States and France, readily declared that my country lacked history or, more specifically, a sensitivity for history. Although this stereotype of the American people may be questioned, this expression of French sensitivity to history demonstrates the extent to which the past permeates the daily activities of French society. Indeed, France appears unable to avoid regular confrontations with the traumatic episodes of its national past, be it the commemoration of the *rafle du Vél d'Hiv*, the belated trials of Maurice Papon and Paul Touvier, the *lois Gayssot, Taubira* and the *loi du 23 février 2005*, the lawsuit launched against historian Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau, or the booing of Franco-Algerian youth at the Marseillaise. Even the bicentennial of the French Revolution, intended to be a celebration of the Republic's triumph, could not escape the shadows cast by the Terror and the vicious civil war in the Vendée.[179] How to explain these unremitting manifestations of traumatic memories in France? Henry Rousso has suggested that the occasional outbursts of scandal and aggrieved memories are the product of the tensions, contradictions, and disparities over how various communities have chosen to structure their memories[180]. However, this model does not satisfactorily explain why these memories continue to surface so disruptively in public consciousness. This limitation becomes even more frustrating due to the fact that the majority of the French population

[179] For further reading on the various debates over the meaning of the French Revolution, see: Steven Kaplan. *Farewell, Revolution: Disputed Legacies: France, 1789/1989*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

[180] Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France Since 1944.* 301-302.

today has little direct experience with its most contentious historical moments, be it the Revolution, the Occupation or decolonization. How to explain this alleged obsession with the past, even when the living memory of that past is gone or slowly fading into oblivion?

A. Neurosis and French History: A Satisfying Conceptual Model?

Henry Rousso, the father of the "neurosis" thesis of French memory, has suggested that France's obsessive relationship with the past is the result of unresolved social tensions and grievances that have simmered since the *épuration's* failure to provide closure to the tumultuous experience of Vichy and the Occupation.[181] The framework of Rousso's thesis, the unsuccessful *épuration*, the band-aid of Gaullist Resistance fixed onto national memory, and the ultimate reopening of painful memories in the 1970's, certainly provides the historian an appealing model. David Schalk's article on the alleged "Algerian symptom" and France's efforts to overcome its self-imposed silence on the Algerian War further reinforces this conceptualization of neurotic French memory.[182] This malleable definition of neurotic memory and trauma certainly provides the historian with a narrative capable of linking much of France's social divisions back to these periods. An impressive number of controversial moments, be it François Mitterand's failure to acknowledge the crimes of Vichy or the violent protests of the *harkis* in the 1970's, fit surprisingly well into this model of unresolved trauma, self-flagellation, and repentance.

However, the presence of contested memories does not necessarily indicate that these competing memories will always be anathema to each other. The function of

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[181] Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France Since 1944.* 5.

[182] David L. Schalk. "Has France's Marrying Her Century Cured the Algerian Syndrome?," *Historical Reflections*. Vol. 25, No. 1. (1999), 149-164.

collective memory is to ensure the containment and neutralization of any deviant narratives that threaten to undermine communal cohesiveness. This process of containment seeks to integrate these divisive memories into the national narrative. For example, French conservative and centrist politicians framed the *rapatriés*' historical contribution to the Republic in such a way to diminish their perceived attachment to an alien community and integrate them back into the Republic. This synthetic character of collective memory also does not possess an inherent conservative character. Both the French Right and Left wished to construct a shared history for its citizens that respected their diverse experiences. Issues over what histories to include, not the histories themselves, precipitated disagreement amongst French politicians and the general public.

This negotiation between political and social communities over control of the national past has existed in France long before the traumas instilled by Vichy and decolonization. Robert Gildea's voluminous study of numerous communities appropriating the national past as a means to describe and explain contemporary political and social features in French society demonstrated that this process is not unique to the twentieth century. The various uses of the French national past to convey specific values- be they duty, obligation, sacrifice, and national pride or guilt, contrition, repentance, and multiculturalism- revealed that the *loi du 23 février 2005* and the Guy Môquet Commemoration belonged to a tradition far broader than that of the "Vichy Syndrome." The conceptual model of French memory as an obsessive neurosis may very well need substantial revision. Instead of emphasizing the repetitive and divisive consequences of contested memory, French encounters with the past should be reconceptualized as a long-established and healthy discourse.

I confess that I too have felt the allure to conform to Rousso's model of French memory. The episodic reemergence of troubled memories and the subsequent debate over their place in the national past does resemble neurosis: the unpredictable and sometimes violent swings between lucidity and irrationality. Nevertheless, this model may have done more to hinder scholarly understanding of the function of memory in modern society. The presentation of French memory as a neurosis implies that, although that illness may be treated, France will forever be prone to debilitating paroxysms of remembrance. This approach stymies the historian's ability to recognize new developments in the practices of French remembrance because it presupposes a defined set of behaviors. Continued adherence ensures the indefinite extension of this metaphor, which threatens to trivialize the study of French memory into a permanent couch session. Furthermore, its use suggests that present and, by extension, past interactions with the French national past reveal an unhealthy fixation. There is little room to consider the possibility that these encounters, no matter how passionate and divisive they may be, represent a nation's healthy effort to master its past.

Do the *loi du 23 février 2005* and the Guy Môquet commemoration reinforce or complicate the neurosis thesis? At first glance, they appear to fit in well with Rousso's thesis. Both events possessed similar motivations. Both the *loi du 23 février 2005* and the Guy Môquet commemoration aimed to impose an inclusive vision of the national past onto the national consciousness for the purposes of fostering feelings of national attachment. In this sense, they are much like the Gaullist "resistenticialist" described by Rousso, which sought to bind French society back together in the wake of the

Occupation. Furthermore, both these events, again like De Gaulle's myth of universal resistance, broke down into a fierce contestation of the national past.

At this point, one may be tempted to situate the *loi du 23 février 2005* and the Guy Môquet commemoration within the context of a "Vichy Syndrome" or "Algerian Syndrome," but that would be hasty. Consider that these two events took place after a lengthy process of uncovering traumatic memories. The rediscovery of Jewish memory and the Holocaust in the 1970's, the startling rediscovery of Vichy's complicity with the German Occupiers, the public admission of torture in Algeria, the angry reassertion of *harkis* memory and dignity, and the proliferation of media dedicated to these subjects compelled France to acknowledge its past. France's recognition of its dark past encouraged the Republic to undertake an active campaign to acknowledge past crimes and provided mechanisms to ensure the continued recognition of that past. The *loi du 23 février 2005* aimed to indemnify the *rapatriés* and preserve their memory by the means of public education. The law simultaneously aimed to recognize and neutralize traumatic memory through material reparation and the national assumption of that traumatic past. The trauma of decolonization no longer belonged to the *rapatrié* or *harkis*; it belonged to the nation. Similarly, the Guy Môquet commemoration sought to reframe Môquet, a communist agitator, as a French nationalist and patriot. These two events recognized the traumas of the Occupation and decolonization and, more important, integrated these narratives into the nation's collective memory. Neither event saw a serious denial of the terrible human costs of colonization/decolonization or the moral compromises associated with the Occupation. Instead, the French Republic sought to integrate all divisive and

competing narratives into a unified meta-narrative, favoring certain memories over others.

The controversy that surrounded the *loi du 23 février 2005* and the Guy Môquet commemoration, in reality, dealt much less with the desired acknowledgment of past crimes and much more with which visions of the national past to honor. The *loi du 23 février 2005* affair brought the French Right and Left into a debate over the alleged benefits of colonization and colonial rule. The Guy Môquet commemoration once again brought the French Right and Left to compete for the heart and soul of the Resistance. There were no new discoveries of repressed traumas or the unveiling of new historical evidence that provoked and fueled these debates. Rather, the French Republic and its citizens found themselves engaged in a general debate over which narratives would be incorporated into the national past and which would be silenced.

B. Demanding Rationality: French Historians' Discomfort With Memory

The controversy surrounding the *loi du 23 février 2005* and Guy Môquet commemoration also revealed the assumption of many French historians that the study of the past was a rational endeavor. The continued insistence on the irrational character of memory motivated their denial that it belonged in a serious discussion of national history. However, this belief that the French Republic and its citizens are obsessed with a traumatic past risks the creation of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Henry Rousso and Éric Conan proposed in their recent book, *Vichy: An Ever-present Past*, that media sensationalism and the demands for "proper" remembrance of the French past by

militants have caused the substantial distortion and falsification of French history.[183] Any minor scandal or advocacy group that commanded media attention recycled and revived this introspective drama of French culpability and contrition. To be sure, the commercialization of traumatic memories for mass consumption has made this type of discourse profitable. However, historians have exhibited mounting discomfort at this whirlwind. The manifest of the CVUH rejected the current style of public engagement with the past, accusing the French state and media of creating a public atmosphere in which an unhealthy comparison and competition amongst aggrieved communities had triumphed over the critical analysis of the past.[184] The introduction of value judgments and morality violated the fundamental principles of historical research; neutrality and objectivity. This inability to maintain an emotional detachment in discussing its past provoked the morbid fascination with victimization, which had dire repercussions for the historical clarity and truth.[185]

The *Liberté pour l'histoire* movement also condemned the intrusion of contemporary moral sensibilities into matters of the past. Like the CVUH, *Liberté pour l'histoire* resisted the public's infatuation with trauma and victimization. However, this organization articulated a more adamant rejection of the French State's imposition of an official history, claiming that this approach still involved making moral judgments on the past. It vehemently dismissed this use of history, stating that "(t)he historian does not plaque the sensibilities of today onto past ideological schemas nor introduce them into the

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[183] Henry Rousso and Éric Conan. *Vichy: An Ever-Present Past*. 11-15.

[184] "Manifeste du CVUH".

[185] "Manifeste du CVUH".

events of the past […] History is not an object of the law."[186] In this sense, the national past did not belong to the public or the State. To these two distinct advocacy groups, history belonged to the historian and memory only represented a facet of history.

Within this robust reclamation of history, there existed a tense contradiction. There remained a visible tension between the desire to remain detached from public debate and the other desire to rescue history from irresponsible legislation and alleviate historical distortion in public discourse. Two polar conceptions of the historian's role in society, the detached observer and the active instructor, struggled for dominance. How exactly did historians expect to "reclaim" history without a direct engagement with the general public? Furthermore, how should the historian define the boundaries of memory and history? French historians involved in these two controversies expressed their belief that memory represented only the raw material of history, the primitive foundation of the historian's scientific investigation of the past.[187] Memory tells only a part of the story, they say, and it cannot provide a satisfactory explanation of past events. This may be true, but this definition of memory as a pale simulacrum expresses too much disregard for memory. The possibility of a dialogue with the French public is impossible without a genuine respect for the memories that it possesses. Furthermore, this definition underestimates the emotional power of memory. Historians, I fear, have little real reason to expect that a presentation of a complex narrative of the past will obliterate the cherished memories found in the hearts and minds of the general public.

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[186] "L'appel du 12 Décembre.

[187] Jacques Le Goff also provides an excellent overview of the many historians and philosophers who have subscribed to the notion of history as an objective account of the past. Le Goff, 111-115.

Let us set aside French historians' conflicted position on memory and focus on their resistance to the *lois mémorielles* and recent commemorations. The historians of the CVUH and the *Liberté pour l'histoire* movements did not object to the French State's commemoration of the national past. Both agreed that that is a normal function of the modern nation-state. However, these historians took issue with the Republic's efforts to impose legally an official history that delineated appropriate narratives and criminalized deviating ones. This practice, they warned, could have dire consequences for the functioning of French democracy. Jean-Pierre Azéma expressed considerable apprehension in an interview with *Libération* that these *lois mémorielles* represented a system of political patronage that encouraged politicians to recognize officially the memories of valuable electorates in exchange for support.[188] The use of legislated history to further political careers appeared to trivialize the past and reduce its study to the public referendum and the legislator's pen. Moreover, this politicization of history further distorted the historical record by explicitly endorsing one narrative on the basis of political expediency instead of scholarly merit. Éric Conan noted that the *loi Taubira* established the trans-Atlantic slave trade as a crime against humanity at the exclusion of the African-Arab slave trades.[189] A law that made an exclusive moral judgment on the practice against slavery in the West misrepresented the historical record, which indicated that slavery had been practiced elsewhere in history. This exclusive condemnation tacitly

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[188] For examples of this condemnation see, Antoine de Baecque. "Quand la loi édicte une verité officielle, nous disons "non"," Libération. December 21, 2005, http://www.liberation.fr/evenement /0101551834-quand-la-loi-edicte-une-verite-officielle-nous-disons-non (Accessed April 29, 2010). Alain-Gérard Slama also has some choice words for this memory lobby in his article: Alain-Gérard Slama. "Une Querelle de civilization," *Le Figaro*, September 11, 2006, N□ 19317, P. 15.

[189] Conan, "Encore aujourd'hui; Esclavage".

supported scholarship that possessed considerable anachronisms and unjustified comparisons. Consider the book *Le Crime de Napoleon*,[190] which accused Napoleon of allegedly using poison gas attacks on revolting Haitian slaves and concluded that the Corsican was the ideological predecessor of Hitler. Conan expressed considerable trepidation at this comparison, stating that it made an impossible connection between the treatment of revolting Haitian slaves and the planned, industrial extermination of European Jews. To this end, he questioned what use the application of contemporary terminology, "crime against humanity," served in historical studies.[191] The application of contemporary terminology and values to history could easily degenerate the quality of scholarship.

Aside from obvious concerns over the proliferation of anachronism in scholarly and public knowledge, historians found other reasons to oppose the *lois mémorielles*. The 2005 lawsuit filed against historian Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau for his denial that the trans-Atlantic slave trade was a crime against humanity appeared to threaten intellectual freedom in France. French historians realized that their books could be potentially deemed criminal and their persons brought to trial if their work did not adhere to the history endorsed by French law. Of course, the *loi Gayssot* had brought historians to trial before this. Robert Faurisson, the notorious Holocaust denier and anti-Semite, had been tried and convicted of hate-speech in his writings. However, this case demonstrated that current and future *lois mémorielles*, working in conjunction with each other, could be used to silence or coerce legitimate historians. Some believed that the Republic stood on

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[190] Claude Ribbe. *Le Crime de Napoléon*. (Paris: Privé, 2005).

[191] Conan, "Encore aujourd'hui; Esclavage,".

the verge of a new age of censorship based on official historical narratives endorsed by the French State.[192] The intrusion of memory and legislated history into historical scholarship appeared to undermine scholarly autonomy and coerce scholars to comply with whichever community had successfully won recognition from the Republic.

The fact that this contest of legislated and non-legislated memories took place within the spatial domain of the classroom heightened the stakes each party was playing for. Education, as mentioned earlier, represented one of the fundamental elements of republican society. Since the Third Republic, the French State has vigorously used the classroom to inculcate French youth with democratic and secular values favorable to preservation of the Republic. Ensuring the next generation's loyalty to those values increases the chances of republican society's perpetuation into the future. However, the classroom has never been the private domain of the Republic. Other communities too have an interest in public education and, at times, have successfully overridden the French State's prerogatives. Conservative, Catholic, Jewish, pro-colonial, and anti-colonial communities have all sought to use the classroom as a means of remaking the past in their own image in order to influence the present. French historians and educators, much to the chagrin of these communities, have come to act as a mediator amongst these competing communities. Their sincere belief in *laïcité* has led them to frame the strict neutrality espoused by their professions as the first defense of the Republic and its youth against visions of the past that seek to stymie free thought.

This rejection of historical revisionism by many French historians and educators helps to explain their curt rejection of both political parties' narratives of France's past

[192] Denis Oliviennes. "Un entretien avec Pierre Nora, <<La vérité légale, une pratique des régimes totalitaires>>," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, August 14, 2008. N□ 2284.

during these two events. They realized that these events both represented official meta-narratives that simplified history and overlooked complexity.[193] Although they were by no means friendly to the Right's efforts to impose officially their vision of French history onto the nation, French historians had no desire to embrace the Left's vision either. Above all, they aimed to restore the Republic's neutrality in historical matters. But how was this restoration of neutrality to be achieved? In short, this would be accomplished by the return to traditional republican values. Demands that objectivity and neutrality be restored to the national discussion of the past closely resembled the republican concept of *laïcité*. Therefore, the routine calls for a return to an objective and neutral discussion on national history conformed to professional and republican sympathies.

Of course, one could and correctly argue that history, unlike science, requires an interpretation of information and artifacts that represent the product of human virtues, vices, sympathies, and emotions. Furthermore, the historian's claims to objectivity seem hollow, especially in this case where they are criticizing their society's use of the past. Therefore, this emphasis on neutrality and objectivity must be taken with a grain of salt. These values that historians aspire to embody cannot be reasonably obtained due to their individual experiences and the concerted pressures of the multiple communities that they inhabit. These individuals, in reality, are as much a part of the many communities that comprises the nation of France. The regular insistence that their professional methodologies render them alone competent to assess and evaluate the national past thus rings somewhat false, particularly when one considers their response to the reading of Guy Môquet's letter at the opening game of the 2007 rugby tournament. French historians

[193] Alain-Gérard Slama. "L'histoire en otage: La Chronique d'Alain Gérard Slama," *Le Figaro*, April 18, 2005, N 18880, p. 13.

may be correct in their assessment that greater objectivity needs to be restored in the public discourse regarding the national past. However, professional training alone does not bestow them complete control over the national past. If experience alone does not provide ample foundation for an individual's claim to define his past, than why should "neutral" knowledge alone?

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Is a more "objective" history of France possible? Can the nation overcome its fixation on the traumatic pasts of the Occupation and decolonization? Can the French overcome their allegedly neurotic obsession with the past? I believe that we are witnessing that process taking place today. The silence and repression of these pasts have given way to a serious and sometimes contentious public discourse about the character of France's national history and its meaning for the present. The apparent rejection of consensus history by French politicians and historians and their endorsement of a complex and pluralist history, as different as their definitions may be, indicate that the Republic is attempting to make space available for these multiple historical narratives. The existence of these multiple histories within French society could very well act to achieve national goals of coexistence and repentance without necessarily compromising its citizens' loyalty, as some of its detractors may argue. This outcome may be the end of the "Vichy Syndrome" or "Algeria Syndrome" in France.

Still, some healthy skepticism must be held for this potential outcome. In spite of the insistence of French politicians and historians that the presence of multiple histories will help to alleviate public competitions of memory, these repeated claims say very little about the practical means of how this goal will be accomplished. This proves especially true in the case of the CVUH. These historians give little consideration to the possibility that the general public may not have the time or energy necessary to master the historical evidence and methodology necessary for acknowledging and appreciating history's complexities. The demands of everyday living may not afford the public the proper

conditions to develop the historical sensibility enjoyed by the historian. Furthermore, the assumption that the common citizen will conform to the instruction provided by either the politician or the historian appears somewhat naïve. The general public, especially French students, ultimately will be the arbiters of the national past. The Republic's citizens will determine the character of the national past. Disruptive eruptions of repressed memories and sensationalized media hype may very well be coming to an end. Now, French historians must be willing to trust their fellow citizens and allow them to construct that shared history together.

APPENDIX A

THE TRANSLATED ORIGINAL *LOI DU FÉVRIER 2005*

JORF # 46, February 23 20005, Page 3128
Text # 2

Law 2005-158 February 23, 2005 Bearing on the Nation's Recognition and Aid To French Repatriates.

NOR: DEFX0300218L

The National Assembly and the Senate have adopted,
The President of the Republic proclaims the law whose content reads:

Article 1

The Nation expresses its recognition of the women and men who participated in the work accomplished by France in the former *départements* of Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Indochina, as well as territories once under French sovereignty.

It recognizes the suffering experienced and the sacrifices endured by the Repatriates, the former members of cooperative and assimilated forces, the vanished and civilian and military victims of events linked to the process of independence of these former *départements* and territories, and gives to them, as well as their families, our solemn respect.

Article 2

The Nation includes the Repatriates of North Africa, disappeared persons, and civilian victims of the massacres or violent acts committed during the Algerian War and after March 19, 1962 in violation of the Evian Accords, as well as the civilian victims of combat in Tunisia and Morocco, in the homage rendered on December 5 to combatants who died for France in North Africa.

Article 3

A foundation for the memory of the Algerian War and combat in Morocco and Tunisia is created, with the State's support. The conditions of the creation of this foundation will be fixed by the decree of the Conseil d'État.

Article 4

University research programs will accord to the history of France's presence overseas, especially in North Africa, the place that it deserves.

Scholarly programs will recognize in particular the positive role of France's presence overseas, especially in North Africa, and accord to the history and sacrifices of French combatants born of these territories the rightful place they are entitled to.

Cooperation permitting the gathering of oral and written sources available in France and abroad is encouraged.

Article 5

Are Forbidden:

All injury or defamation committed against a person or group of people because of their true or alleged status as *harkis*, former members of cooperating and assimilated forces;

All apologia for the crimes committed against the *harkis* and the former members of cooperating and assimilated forces after the Evian Accords.

The State assures the enforcement of this law.

Article 6

I. The recipients of the benefits of recognition mentioned by Article 67 of the Law for Rectified Finances of 2002(#2002-1576 December 30, 2002) can opt by choice:

- maintaining benefits whose annual rate will be raised by 2,800 euros, beginning January 1st, 2005
- maintaining benefits at the rate put in place during January 1st, 2004 and the payment of 20,000 euros.
- Payment, in place of benefits, of 30,000 euros.

In case of payment, benefits will be given at the rate established on January 1st, 2004 until the payment is made. As a safeguard, during the interim period, benefits will be paid at the same rate.

In the case of the death of a former veteran and his surviving partner or former partner at the time of this law's passing, as long as they satisfy the conditions fixed by Article 2 of Law 94-488, June 11, 1994 concerning repatriated veterans or victims of the Algerian conflict, a grant will be distributed in equal shares among their children if they possess French citizenship and live within France or a European territory as of January 1st, 2004.

Persons recognized as wards of the state, orphans, of French nationality and living within the France or a state in the European community by January 1st, 2004, whose parents

served as members of *harkis* forces, not discussed in the previous paragraph, will receive a grant of 20,000 euros, which will be split into equal parts to children issuing from the same union.

The means of application for this article, and notably the delay caused by the choice of option as well as the distribution of payments, taking into account the age of the beneficiaries, will be fixed by decree by the Conseil d'Etat.

II. The above indemnities paid are not liable to seizure and do not constitute taxable revenue for local governments or the State.

Article 7

I. In Articles 7,8, and 9 of Law 94-448 of June 11, 2004 Concerning Repatriates, Veterans of the Cooperative and Assimilated Forces, or Victims of Captivity in Algeria, the date "December 31, 2004" is replaced by "December 31, 20009".

II. The second paragraph of Article 7 of the same law is replaced by the two following revised paragraphs:

"This aid awarded to the previously mentioned people destined to be property owners individually or with their children on the condition that they live together on the property acquired."

"It is added to every other form of aid outlined by the Construction and Housing Code."

III. In the first paragraph of Article 9 of the same law, the words "achieved before January 1, 1994" will be replaced by "achieved before January 1, 2005."

Article 8

After the seventh paragraph of Article L. 302-5 of the Construction and Housing Code, a paragraph will be inserted, stating:

"are considered as rented housing, in the sense of the third paragraph, those financed by the State or local collectivities occupied for free, excepting housing for *functionnaires*, or given or acquired by veterans thanks to a subvention made by the State on behalf of the indemnity law."

Article 9

By dispensation at fixed terms to benefit the grant and specific aids for lodging mentioned by Article 6 and 7, the minister charged with the repatriates accords the benefits of these funds to former harkis and veterans of the cooperative and assimilated forces who served in Algeria, to their widows and orphans, repatriates, age 60 and above, who can prove a continued domicile in France or in another member state of the

European Community since January 1, 1973 and who acquired French nationality before January 1, 1995.

This request for dispensation will be presented within a year following the publication of the decree of the application of this article.

Article 10

The children of persons mentioned in the aforementioned Article 6, Law 94-488 of June 11 1994, eligible for national scholarships, can receive aid, of which the amount and means of distribution will be defined by decree.

Article 11

The Government will transmit to Parliament a report appraising the situation of former cooperative soldiers' children one year after the enactment of this law and will take stock of the needs of this population in terms of education, employment, and housing.

Article 12

I. Will be restored to the beneficiaries of the indemnities or, in case of decease, to those having rights to the sums debited on the indemnities by the National Agency for the Indemnisation of Overseas French assigned by the partial or total reimbursement of goods thanks to the following legislation:

1) Article 46 of the Law 70-632 of July 15, 1970 relative to the national aid and indemnisation of French dispossessed of their goods held in territories previously under French sovereignty, protection, or tutelage of the French State.

2) The third, fourth, and fifth paragraphs of Article 3 of Law 78-1 of January 2, 1978 relative to the indemnisation of Overseas French Repatriates dispossessed of their goods.

II. Are also restored to persons having benefited of an indemnisation in application of Article 2 of Law 87-549 of July 16, 1987 relative to the regulation of the indemnisation of the Repatriates or to those having rights to debited sums, in reimbursement of professional goods, to the brute definitive aid accorded by agricultural goods in the cadre of Franco-Tunisian protocols of October 13, 1960 and March 2 1963.

III. The restorations mentioned in I and II cannot be considered taxable by the State or local collectivities. They do not actively enter into the inheritance of beneficiaries in regards to the right of mutation after death.

IV. A decree in the Conseil d'Etat will fix the conditions of application of the present article, notably the methods of payment of the sums to be restored as well as a payment schedule taking into account the age of the beneficiaries.

V. Requests for restitution are to be presented within two years from the day of the publication of the decree mentioned in IV.

Article 13

Those who can request a set indemnisation after the date of the present law are person of French nationality, who, in direct relation with the events in Algeria during the period of October 15, 1954 to July 3, 1962, were the object of condemnations or sanctions that have been amnestied, administrative measures of expulsion, internment or house arrest, whose professional activity was ended by these events, and who do and not figure among the beneficiaries mentioned in Article 1 of Law 82-1021 December 3, 1982 relative to the regulation of certain conditions resulting from the events of North Africa, the War in Indochina, or the Second World War.

The indemnity mentioned in the previous paragraph cannot be taxed by the State or local collectivities.

A decree by the Conseil d'Etat will determine the amount of this indemnity, notably taking into account the duration of justified inactivity as well as the means of payment for these benefits.

This request for indemnity will be presented within a year following the publication of the decree applying this article.

The present law will be executed as a State law.

Written in Paris, February 23, 2005

Jacques Chirac

By President of the Republic

The Prime Minister,
Jean-Pierre Raffarin

The Minister of National Education, Higher Education, and Research,
François Fillon

Minister of Defense,
Michèle Alliot-Marie

Minister of the Economy, Finances, and Industry,
Hervé Gaymard

Minister of the Budget, Bugetary Reform, and Government Spokesman,
Jean-François Copé

Minister of Veterans' Affairs
Hamlaoui Mékachéra

(1) Preparatory Works

National Assembly
Project Law 1499;

Christian Kert's Report, made on behalf of the Commission of Cultural Affairs, #1660;

Discussion and Adoption of June 11 2004.

Senate:

Project of Law, adopted by the National Assembly, #356 (2003-2004);

Alain Gournac's Report, on behalf of the Commission for Social Affairs, # 104 (2004-2005);

Discussion and Adoption December 16, 2004.

National Assembly:

Project of Law, modified by the Senate, #1994;

Christian Kert's Report, on behalf of the Commission of Cultural Affairs, #1999;

Discussion and Adoption, February 10, 2005.

APPENDIX B

GUY MÔQUET'S LETTER[194]

My darling Mummy, my adored brother, my much loved Daddy, I am going to die! What I ask of you, especially you Mummy, is to be brave. I am, and I want to be, as brave as all those who have gone before me. Of course, I would have preferred to live. But what I wish with all my heart is that my death serves a purpose. I didn't have time to embrace Jean. I embraced my two brothers Roger and Rino (1). As for my real brother, I cannot embrace him, alas! I hope all my clothes will be sent back to you. They might be of use to Serge, I trust he will be proud to wear them one day. To you, my Daddy to whom I have given many worries, as well as to my Mummy, I say goodbye for the last time. Know that I did my best to follow the path that you laid out for me. A last adieu to all my friends, to my brother whom I love very much. May he study hard to become a man later on. Seventeen and a half years, my life has been short, I have no regrets, if only that of leaving you all. I am going to die with Tintin, Michels. Mummy, what I ask you, what I want you to promise me, is to be brave and to overcome your sorrow. I cannot put any more. I am leaving you all, Mummy, Serge, Daddy, I embrace you with all my child's heart. Be brave! Your Guy who loves you.

(1) His Brothers in Arms.

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