A Contrapuntal Reading of President Macron's Declaration on "Audin's Death" (2018): Implications for the Franco-Algerian Reconciliation

Lecture en Contrepoint de la Déclaration du Président Macron sur « la Mort d'Audin»(2018): Implications Sur La Réconciliation Franco-Algérienne

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Abstract:

Utilizing Edward Said's contrapuntal analysis approach, the article seeks to demystify the "univocal" French narrative about the Franco-Algerian relations during and after the Algerian war of independence. Most importantly, the article scrutinizes President Macron declaration on the death of Maurice Audin to demonstrate the unidirectional French historical narrative that assertively excludes any alternative or pluralized perspective to the Franco-Algerian history. It, thus, reveals that the French univocal historical narrative is inherently insufficient to convey the thorough truth.

Key words: Algerian War of Independence; Franco-Algerian rapprochement; Audin's death; Said's contrapuntral reading.

Résumé:

En utilisant l'approche d'analyse en contrepoint d'Edward Said, l'article cherche à démystifier le discours « univoque » français sur les relations franco-algériennes pendant et après la guerre d'indépendance algérienne. Plus précisément, l'article décortique la déclaration du président Macron sur la mort de Maurice Audin pour démontrer que le discours historique français reste résolument unidirectionnel en excluant catégoriquement toute perspective alternative ou pluralisée de l'histoire franco-algérienne.

Mots clés : Guerre d'Indépendance Algérienne ; rapprochement Franco-Algérien ; la Mort d'Audin ; lecture en contrepoint de Said.

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1. INTRODUCTION

> *History isn't what happened. History is just what historians tell us. There was a pattern, a plan, a movement, expansion, the march of democracy; it is a tapestry, a flow of events, a complex narrative, connected, explicable. One good story leads to another. [...] We make up a story to cover up the facts we don't know or can't accept [...]. (Barnes, 1989, 223–246)*
>
> *"what happened is attenuated to disappearance; history as what somebody told about what happened makes up the whole book" (Moseley, 1997, 120).*

The memory contention between France and Algeria is a highly complex and sensitive topic with deep historical ramifications that have evolved over time. Stemming from the two countries' competing and irreconcilable memories about colonization and the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962), rapprochement and reconciliation between the two parties is more than ever challenging (Stora, 2021, 57-61; Stora, 1992, 13). After 60 years of independence, the domineering and the supremacist stance of the French colonial perceptions regarding its occupation, its transgressions in the Algerian War, its univocal historical narrative and its denial of truth still cast their long shadow over post-1962 French successive presidencies from Georges Pompidou to Emmanuel Macron, though at varying degrees.

In the immediate aftermath of the Algerian War of Independence, the French historico-political stage was overwhelmingly dominated by political elite that cultivated a policy of "concealment." This last rested solidly on control over the terminology utilized in narrating colonial history as well as the broad amnesty decreed by French authorities making a *tabula rasa* of all the transgressions and atrocities committed by French forces in Algerian War of Independence (Jansen, 2010, p. 277).

It would not be far-fetched to argue that this "memorializing process," which consists in elaborating and determining the contours of a national memory of war or any other crucial event, with all its lacunas and

mistakes, has a far more pervasive impact on the identity of a nation (Davidson, 1998, 66; Renan, 1947, p. 89). The same process utilizes war (or any other pivotal event) to create the nation itself by defining what it means to be any member of the nation (Davidson 66). Often the process, which is triggered by decolonization, is, as Fanon (1990) argued, underpinned, by an "inevitably violent process between two forces opposed to each other by their very change nature" implying the impossibility of a univocal discourse to capture its dissonance (pp. 27-28).

One core inference to be drawn from the above claims is that what may make peoples and nations clash and disagree are not memories, which are, by nature "multiple," "diversified," "collective" and "pluralized" and "individualized" (Nora, 1984, p. xix). Capturing the gist of Nora's claims in this regard, Said (1994) asserted that "nations themselves are narrations" (p. xiii). What makes peoples clash are histories which are often the selective sanctifications and mythicisation of some memories as embodiments of the official historical experiences of nations and hence conduits for their official discourse (Nora, 1984, xix). As such, the official narrative of the historical experiences of a nation is more often than not the biased and self-serving historicization, and hence legitimization, of some memories to the detriment of others (Nora, 1984, p. xx; Rousso, 1991, p. 4; Geertz, 1973, pp. 312-319).

History's goal and ambition are, in Nora's words "not to exalt but to annihilate what has in reality taken place (xx). Consequently, historians, in Bressler's words (2007), "can never provide us with the truth," as they cannot "give us a totally accurate picture of past events or the worldview of a people. Similar to language, history is but one of the many discourses or ways of viewing the world" (p. 352). For this reason, a contrapuntally oriented approach to IR, in Runia's words (2010), ought to dwell on understanding "what is fictive in all putatively realistic representations of the world, and what is realistic in all manifestly fictive ones" (p. 240).

In a nutshell, this deeply anchored tendency in France to, at best, devaluate existing memories and at worst obliterate discourse about war metamorphosed into a new identity paradigm that decisively sketch out the contours of "Frenchness" (Davidson, 1998, p. 67). This state-sanctioned

paradigm, with "hidden geopolitical determinations," was especially destined to curtail in attempt to give free course to history about the Algerian War of Independence (Spivak, 1988, pp. 271-72). Despite its being deeply ingrained in the laws, the political economy and the ideology of the state, the paradigm stenches with the state's tacit plans to lump up citizens within a "rigidly defined community that reproduces and re-authorizes the center-periphery relationship of the colonial period (pp. 67-68).

Far from delving into the deconstruction and the critique of French official historical narrative, the study at hand posits, through the lens of Said's contrapuntal approach, that both French and Algerian historical narratives have the inalienable right to stake claims to veracity and validity without necessarily being recognized as such by the opponent. Having mobilized his intellectual capital in his seminal book "Culture and Imperialism" (1994) to address the inevitably bifurcated nature of the history of imperialism, Said's emphasized the necessity to "formulate an alternative both to a politics of blame and to the even more destructive politics of confrontation and hostility" (p. 18).

Forcefully supportive of the assumption that perspectives and meanings are inherently multi-voiced, polyphonic and dialogic, Bakhtin relentlessly asserted that understanding the complexity of tensions that characterize postcolonial memory and imaginary where a miscellany of muted voices struggle for emancipation from a domineering and homogenizing narrative requires the emphasis of a "dialogic counterpoint" (Dialogic Imagination, p. 325). For Bakhtin, the narratives of nations should not be by any means reduced to a common denominator and they have to be kept open to a multiplicity of voices. "[T]wo voices are the minimum for life, the minimum for existence," argued Bakhtin (1984, p. 252). It, thus emerges this line of reasoning that different, conflicting and antagonistic ideological perspectives are but necessary components for the understanding of same historical experience as all narratives enclose a plurality of "independent" and free voices endowed with the unfettered right to stake claims to validity (Clark & Holquist, 1984, p. 242).

Looking eye to eye with Bakhtin, in his contrapuntality theory, Said placed a premium on the need to resist harmony and compromise between

visions. For him, multiple voices competing for the narrativization of historical experiences do not need to be reconciled. On the contrary, Said's vision values cacophony which instead of discouraging and silencing diversity, it enhances multiplicity by exhorting suppressed voices to cry out their difference high and loud (Said and Viswanathan, 2001, p. 366).

Post-Independence French political elite largely continued to perceive of independent Algeria through the lens of the proponents of "French Algeria" ("Algerie Française") in addition to its recalcitrant denial of the reality of France's war through the use of euphemistic phrases like "events of Algeria" and "police operations" and "measures to maintain order" (Sheppard, 2006, p. 11; Stora, 2021, p. 41; Stora, 1992, pp. 13-14). These and another memory issues such as the questions of the disappeared, systemic torture, the archives, repentance, reparations and apology still constitute major hindrances on the face any solid Franco-Algerian rapprochement and reconciliation.

Each French president has approached this issue differently based on domestic and international conjunctures and in accordance with their different perspectives. Under the presidency of George Pompidou, Franco-Algerian relations were at their lowest ebb mainly due to former Algerian President Houari Boumedien's decision to nationalize most of the gas and oil resources in 1971.

Making the first official French visit to post-Independence Algeria, former president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing arrived to Algiers in April 1975. Like his predecessor, Giscard d'Estaing invested too little, if any, political capital to improve relations with Algeria. Boumedien's Algeria was further irritated by the Élysée Palace's siding with the Moroccans regarding the issue of the independence of Western Sahara.

The arrival of the Left to power in 1981 with the election François Mitterrand as the new French president set the process in motion. President Mitterrand conceded the need to address the legacy of the Algerian War of Independence and took daring steps towards reconciliation. He shepherded the ratification of a number of cooperation agreements but the memory issue was kept aside (Stora, 2023, p. 53). Most importantly, Mitterrand

recognized the suffering caused by colonialism and expressed his regrets for some of the actions taken during that time.

The official substitution of “the events of Algeria” by the “War of Algeria” by virtue of the law of December 10, 1999, constituted a new turning point in the conflict of memories between France and Algeria. Most importantly, the formulation “War of Algeria” instead of “War in Algeria” represents an implicit rejection to acknowledge occupation and the persistent denial of considering the War of Independence as being the revolt of a colonized people against a colonizer (Stora, 2021, pp. 41-42). This deliberate obfuscation of occupation with inter-state wars reflects French fervent tenacity to re-invent the colonial history in Algeria in ways that could exonerate it from its legal and moral responsibilities for the transgressions and the atrocities committed against Algerians.

This line of reasoning was voiced and promoted in the early stages of French occupation by a host of French intellectuals, historians and politicians such as Alexis de Tocqueville. In his “*Democracy in America*” (1835), Tocqueville, who clearly steered away from the widely spread tendency of framing colonialism in terms of “civilizing mission” and the “infantilization” of other, depicted France and Algeria “as two distinct nations in competition for power and control of the country, without reciprocal obligation or any shared notion of right” (p. 142). In more specific terms, in Tocqueville’s logic of “r*ealpolitik”* that casts French colonization to Algeria in terms of “war between nations” all sorts of violence and devastation become more or less justified within “war’s law” (pp. 142-143).

These specious claims adduced by the French political elite and its acolytes were often paralleled by another narrative destined for domestic consumption. To defuse tension and divert the attention of French public opinion away from domestic failures and challenges, the French political elite tended to tie up colonization in North Africa in general and Algeria in particular to French national security and prosperity. According to historians like Nicolas Blancel, Éric Deroo and Antoine Champeaux, the process of colonization, to reprise the words of Nicolas Blancel, "objectified, rationalized and eventually inscribed the colonization of

Algeria within the narrative of French nation-building" (Blancel, 2005, p. 87; Deroo et Champeaux 2013, pp. 72-88; Ezra, 1996, p. 50).

Giving further credence to these claims, Tocqueville's justificatory discourse asserted that French occupation was instrumental in enlivening domestic political life and bolstering France's national image in the eyes of the international community (p. 135). Arguing almost in similar lines, Fallex and Gilbert posited that, in its colonization of Algeria, France was strongly impelled by geographical, political, social, economic and moral considerations (Fallex and Golbert, 1933, p. 451; Loughlin, 1993, p. 153; Fanon, 1965, p. 39; Césaire, 1950, p. 46).

President Jacques Chirac, however, took the issue a step further by acknowledging the responsibility of the French state for "the war tragedy" and the atrocities committed during the Algerian War of Independence and expressed sincere apologies for those actions in 2001. He equally admitted the suffering of the Algerians during colonialism.

President Nicholas Sarkozy, on his side, acknowledged past mistakes but did not issue any formal apology though denounced colonialism. He, even though, placed a premium on ushering in a novel era for cooperation in educational and economic issues between France and Algeria. Most importantly, President Sarkozy granted the Algerian state the plan of the 11 million anti-personnel landmines planted by the French army during the Algerian War of Independence (Stora, 2023, p. 54).

The inauguration of the Holland presidency marked the embrace of the memory contention with the French president's plain recognition that French colonialism was a profoundly "unjust" and "brutal" system inflicted upon Algerians (p. 54). Notwithstanding his recognition of the complexity of the issue and his emphasis on the importance of historical truth and remembrance, he fell short of issuing a formal apology.

The current French president, Emmanuel Macron, went to great lengths in addressing this memory contention by placing his entire political capital and weight in the issue. In 2017, campaigning for the presidency, Macron admitted that France had actually committed "crimes against humanity" during the Algerian War of Independence. Most importantly, President Macron ordered a comprehensive review of France's actions

during that period and called for a new chapter of Franco-Algerian relations based on truth, transparency, and reconciliation.

It is noteworthy in this regard that each president's approach has been influenced by a vast array of factors ranging from historical context, public opinion, and political considerations that were largely bequeathed by colonial "bureaucracies," "colonial styles" and imperial hubris crystallizing in what Said labeled "Western discourse about the Other" (Bernstein, 1971, p. 49). This invasive memory of imperialism has been perpetuated through multiple ways comprising, among others, the collection, classification of knowledge about indigenous people before being "represented in various ways back to the West, and then, through the eyes of the West, back to those who have been colonized (Smith, 1999, pp. 1-2).

Resolving the memory contention between France and Algeria is an ongoing process and subject to various interpretations and debates that cannot by any means confined to exclusive and univocal French historical narrative. This challenging undertaking implies, among others, the emphasis of what is silent or marginally present in the history of French-Algerian encounter and experience.

2. Methodology

The core thrust of Said's contrapuntal approach hinges on the importance of engaging with historical experiences contrapuntally rather univocally. For him, the reading and analysis of the "metropolitan" history is inherently insufficient to provide the reader with a full-fledged picture of what effectively occurred unless supplemented with the histories of those against whom (and together with whom) the discourse wielder interacted (Said, 1994, p. 51). For Said and Barsamian (1994), imperialism ought to be construed as "an intrinsically 'contested and joint experience': domination and resistance are co-constituent parts of a whole" (pp. 71-73).

Metropolitan history, as Said argued, draws its ostensible truthfulness and validity from an "incorporative," "universalizing" and "totalizing" molds and codes that narrate history and depict experiences from an exclusively Eurocentric perspective of colonizing, imperializing and globalizing powers. Examining experiences contrapuntally, thus,

centers on highlighting injustice and standing up for the voiceless who was deprived of agency and indicted of being incapable of representing himself which gave the dominant imperializer an *imprimatur* to construct him as a malleable and controllable "Other" (Said, 1996, p. 1; Marx, 2019, p. 573). It also implies the enmeshing and entwinement of "discrepant" and "dissonant" experiences and narratives and counter-narratives of domination and resistance regardless of the peculiarities of their internal formations, their internal coherence and their ostensibly commonsensical truthfulness into an imbricated version that welcomes their dual claim to reality and legitimacy (Said, 1994, pp. 18-32; Said and Barsamian, 1994, pp. 71-73).

Most importantly, Said's contrapuntal approach permits to address the power dynamics inherent in the memory issue. It allows to question certain narratives have been privileged or excluded. In so doing, it enables us to move beyond a one-sided, and hence lop-sided, understanding of the France-Algeria contentious memory issue. By so doing, it purports to open paths for a more inclusive, more nuanced and more comprehensive analysis of this historical and memory issue. Most importantly, this implies, in George M. Wilson's words (1994), "[[reading the narrative of the colonizers alongside those of the colonized, thus examining opposite and intertwined histories" by juxtaposing "the claims of internal or intrinsic readings of a work," and "the claims of various forms of external critique (p. 265).

Said's concept of contrapuntal reading encourages us to examine a miscellany of perspectives and narratives simultaneously, allowing for a more nuances understanding of complex historical events. More specifically, Said's idea that "the legacy of imperialism gives shape to the present" impels historians and researchers to "read the great canonical texts, and perhaps also the entire archive of modern and pre-modern European and American culture, with an effort to draw out, extend, give emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented n such works (p. 67).

In the case of France and Algeria, both countries have different interpretations and memories of the colonial past, which continue to shape

their relationship. By appealing to a contrapuntal approach, we can explore the interconnectedness and the imbrications of these perspectives. This implies engaging not just with the dominant French narratives, but also the Algerian perspectives that have often been marginalized and muted. Elaborating on this line of reasoning, Benjamin Stora asserted that the objective behind the idea countering Western-centric historical narrative is not to write a common history nor to explain together the colonial event nor to believe that the issue could be resolved by making a definite verdict (Stora, 2023, p. 102).

The bottom line of Stora's perspective to history-memory conflict between France and Algeria lies above all in how to steer clearly between the two extreme choices of a "shared memory" ("mémoire communautarisée") and a closed memory (mémoire cloisonnée"). For Stora, colonialism is often presented and represented in ways that bear no link to history. Colonialism, argued Stora, must not be presented as a block-to-block history, without interstices, without any mode of contact, without any possible hybridization and without nuances (p. 102). Arguing in similar lines, Pierre Nora, in his seminal work "Les Lieux de Memoire" (1997) laid out a groundbreaking paradigm that sought to foster a "pluralistic" and an "inclusive" vision to French history. Nora's paradigmatic novelty centered on the proposal of "non-nationalist history" of the French nation in which an "empathetic understanding" of French passions, with the reasons that they may conjure, imply no complacency or connivance with the blunders of the past (p. 115).

This concern largely justifies the choice of Said's approach of contrapuntality as the pivotal tool through which the issue is scrutinized. Said's approach squarely rests on the principle of resisting the "insularity," "provincialism" and "parochialism" of Western-centric cultures and histories (Said, 1995, p. 43). In this venue, Said emphasizes that the process of identity formations are to be conceived of as "contrapuntal ensembles" rather than "essentializations" because identities draw significance and substance from their interactions with oppositions and resistance. This equally implies the importance of broadening the reading of the text to

encompass even what was marginalized, overlooked or excluded (Said, 1994, pp. 66-67).

The projection of this perspective on the memory issue in the Franco-Algerian relations prompts readers, analysts and historians to handle the issue in a holistic and inclusive way by focusing not only on how France narrates its history and depicts its experiences that relate to its relation with Algeria especially during the War of Independence (1954-1962) but also on how the Algerians narrate their history and depict their experiences that relate to their relation with France. Most importantly, this implies the shattering of barriers erected by imperialism and infusing the dominating logic of imperialism with the resistance outside of it, pointing to "transformative relationships that are profoundly relational, dialogical, and agonistic" (Strömbom and Bramsen, 2022, p. 3).

However, mainstream French history is confined to the representation and the interpretation of its experiences and the events related to France's occupation of Algeria and more specifically the Algerian War of Independence in ways that clearly reflect the Eurocentric tradition of blocking off other possible interpretations emanating from Algerian experiences with the same events (Said, 1993, p. 178). Shedding light on the genesis and the functioning of the "unique if not univocal referential system" that excludes all particular forms of individuation, Daho Djerbal (2013) contended that in narratives related to the colonial epoch, "there is only one subject who elaborates, who defines and activates the past, the present and the future" (p. 348). For Djerbal, "the colonized," "the dominated" and "the subaltern" is relegated by dint of the same referential system to a mere "shadow" or a "symbol of otherness" (p. 348).

Emphasizing both "disjuncture" and the inescapable interdependence of cultures as many experiences could not be fully captured and apprehended unless firewalls between cultures are surmounted through a contrapuntal reading of texts and narratives that may entwine and interlace narratives of the "centre" and the "peripheries" (Said, 1993, pp.194, 259). Giving a supplementary credence to this assumption, Williams posited that "texts are not finished objects" and that they do not only "create their own precedents but also their successors" (p. 259).

One major implication of these claims is that experiences and events are massive and rich continua of thoughts, feelings, actions and reactions that could simply be construed, represented and interpreted in a miscellany of ways. It is, thus, a self-defeating and futile enterprise to think about their possible straitjacketing within one single, univocal reading. As a direct result of this insularity and the insistence to conceive of French history and experience with the Algerian War of Independence in isolation from Algerian perceptions and experiences would be that experiences of the dominator-dominated relationship remains "artificially and falsely separated" (Said, 1994, p. 259).

For Trouillot (1995), who stressed the entanglement between historicity and power, "any historical narrative is as "a bundle of silences" from which what is unthinkable is suppressed" (p. 27). Having managed to fasten their economic and military clasp over their former colonies, Western European powers extended their domination to the knowledge sphere by imposing an "epistemically racist" regime that muted, marginalized and excluded all knowledge emanating from the peripheries. This process that consisted in elevating their own knowledge to the status of non-negotiable and commonsensical truth was paralleled by the relegation of the knowledge produced by the peripheries to the status of the unknown and the unknowable trying desperately to grab attention from the West's windowsill (Said, 1994, p. 259).

Examined through an "integrative" or contrapuntal lens, the histories and experiences of the colonizer/colonized, imperializer/imperialized and the dominator/dominated are found to be inherently woven and intertwined together with common belonging and affiliation. This implies that the experience and the history of France's self-perception as a civilized Western democracy that conquered Algeria to civilize it and to develop its economic infrastructure must be narrated in tandem with Algeria's experience with French military policies of expropriation, displacement, unprovoked attacks on civilians, torture as an "atonal ensemble" that draws upon a compilation of simultaneous but dissonant experiences –a "polyphonic composition in Said's words--that contribute to form a common history (p. 318).

Stressing the importance of valuing and emancipating "dissonant" tones or narratives and rejecting the false hierarchization of perceptions and narratives, a contrapuntal reading of Franco-Algerian history and experiences during the Algerian War of Independence entails meticulously accounting for all practices that contribute to the "complex and uneven topography" of their relations (p. 318).

3. Data of the Study

The data of the study come from President Emmanuel Macron's declaration about the death of Maurice Audin on September 13, 2018. In a visit to the wife of Maurice, Josette Audin, whose husband disappeared in the midst of the Algerian War of Independence, President Macron acknowledged the French state's responsibility for the disappearance and torture of the young mathematician and member in the Algerian Communist Party (ACP).

4. Results and Discussion

Considering the unprecedented courage that President Macron showed in handling the tangled issue of history, identity and memory that relate the former colonize, France with the former colony, Algeria, the declaration made on the death of Maurice Audin carried a special importance. In comparison with the stances and the initiatives of former French presidents from Jacques Chirac to Nicholas Sarkozy, the declaration made President Macron signaled, to a large extent, a clear departure from the long-lasting refusal of the Élysée to recognize its responsibility for torture, murder and the disappearance of a great number of Algerian resistance fighters.

The Algerian War of independence was characterized by intense violence and brutality on both sides. Instances of oppression, torture, and massacres were documented, raising questions about the accountability an acknowledgement of these actions. The issue of recognizing French crimes committed during this period remains a point of contention and debate between different parties. For French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1992), there is no possibility for different parties to conceive of or retrieve past events through a common intelligibility grid. For him, "our perceptions

of the past are affected by the mental images we employ to solve present problems, so that collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past in the light of the present" (p. 34). In a nutshell and as Tzvetan Todorov claimed, "there is nothing new even in the claim that everything [about history] is an interpretation, except the euphoria that now surrounds the claim (p. 5).

The recognition of France's responsibility for torture in Algeria by President Macron took place in a specific domestic context. Macron made this acknowledgement during his presidential campaign in 2017 and later as president in 2018. His actions were part of wider efforts to address the historical legacy and consequences of the Algerian War of Independence. However, regardless of the bona fide intentions of the French president, it has to be emphasized that the state, through its official institutions, wields and funnels the historical narrative of individuals through its control over what Halbwachs called "collective memory" (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 33; Johann, 2010, p. 20). Being not necessarily the sum of individual memories, Halbwachs' "collective memory" refers to "the framework through which "present generations become conscious of themselves by counter-posing their present to their own constructed past" (p. 28). This selective perception of past events and experiences through the lens of present situation is what ensures "historical continuity" (p. 33).

Recognition of France's crimes is significant for historical truth and reconciliation. It allows for a deeper understanding of the past, fostering healing and dialogue between the French and Algerian communities. Acknowledgement of wrongdoing can also contribute to addressing the lingering effects colonialism and promoting justice.

However, it is important to note that the perspectives on how to address this issue may vary among different groups and individuals. Some argue for an official apology, official recognition, or reparations, while other emphasize the importance of education, remembrance, and promoting cross-cultural dialogue. All in all, as Lorde (1979) asserted, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."

President Macron's declaration about Maurice Audin's death was of significant importance for a miscellany of reasons. Firstly, it marked a

break from the previous official position held by the French state, which had denied any involvement or responsibility in the death of Maurice Audin during the Algerian War. Macron's acknowledgement of the French state's responsibility stood out as a salient attempt towards addressing the historical injustices, rooted in cultural biases, committed during that period. Emphasizing the daunting power held by certain subjective and idiosyncratic historical narratives that were mythicized and elevated to the status of self-evident and objective history, Barnes (1989) asserted that "We all know objective truth is not obtainable, that when some event occurs we shall have a multiplicity of subjective truths which we assess and then fabulate into history, into some God-eyed version of what 'really' happened" (p. 245).

Secondly, the declaration brought closure and vindication to the Audin family and the broader Algerian community. Maurice Audin's death had been widely held as a symbol of the "state-sanctioned violence" and "repression" that the French colonial forces inflicted upon Algerian civilians during the Algerian War of independence. By recognizing the responsibility of the French state, Macron's declaration acknowledged the suffering endured by Audin's family and recognized the pain meted out upon Algerians during the war (Thomas, 2015, p. 221, 234).

The domestic context in which President Macron made his recognition included factors such as evolving societal attitudes, changing narratives about colonial history, and demands for truth and justice form various groups. France has a significant Algerian population and a history deeply entwined with Algeria due to its colonial past, which contributes to the sensitivity to the topic. In a nutshell, President Macron's declaration about Maurice Audin's death carried a great significance in terms of recognizing historical injustices, providing closure to the Audin family and the Algerian community, and promoting a more nuanced and reconciliatory approach to history.

Analyzing President Macron's declaration about the French state's responsibility for the death of Maurice Audin through Edward Said's contrapuntal approach can provide valuable insights into the layers of power dynamics, historical narratives, and thwarted experiences that

surround the event. President Macron's declaration, which fell short of challenging the univocal official narrative in France, stands out as another symptom of the inconsistency in President Macron's reconciliation policy towards Algeria. As one of the most daring and highly praised undertakings of the current French president, the report of the "memories and truth" commission that President Macron staunchly backed sourly failed in addressing the substantial aspects of the Franco-Algerian memory divergence.

Notwithstanding its emphasis on the need for France to come to terms with its colonial ghosts by prioritizing "truth," "clarity" and "responsibility" in reviewing colonial archives, the recommendations of the report clearly shied away from invoking the issue of "state-sanctioned" and "systemic torture" by French paratroopers. What emerges from the diplomatic prevarications of Macron's France is that the French president is just paying a lip service to Franco-Algerian reconciliation and his promise to address the memory issues related to torture, the disappeared, reparation and apology that bewilder the two nations. President Macron was clearly jockeying for the promotion of French economic interests in Algeria without investing enough to earnestly address the most litigious issues of French state's responsibility for cases of "disappearance," "systemic torture," "repentance" and "apology" (Thomas, 2015, pp. 229-230).

The incapacity of the French officials, including the current president Emmanuel Macron, in surmounting the canonical could only give further credence to Said's assumptions. Underscoring the impossibility for the present culture of the West to free itself from the tight clasp of its imperial past, Said "the meaning of imperial past is not totally contained within the past policies of the West." It has, in Said's words, pervaded the tiniest details of the present life of Western peoples and it still wields an immeasurable influence on their "shared memory," "highly conflictual texture of culture," "ideology" and "policy (Said, 1994, p. 11).

It is undeniably true that no French president since the War of Independence could go as far as Emmanuel Macron in denouncing France's "crimes against humanity," but he clearly fell short of handling the sensitive issues mentioned above due to the hefty pressure and the tight restrictions

imposed on any genuine endeavor to question French longstanding, official narrative of its colonial history in Algeria by the far right and the radicals in French politics. Ranging from government to parliament passing by the opposition, the detractors of rapprochement and genuine reconciliation with Algeria argued that France should cease its policy of self-flagellation and apology for radical Islamism and terrorism as former French Prime Minister Jean Castex opined.

The fierce opposition faced by President Macron also came especially from the far-right, with members of Marine Le Pen's National Rally party (former "Front National") denouncing "yet another sign of weakness" and an attempt to declare a "memory war" on the French. Most importantly, Macron's opponents decried his policy of prioritizing diplomatic matters over historical matters, especially after his "secretive" restitution of the 24 skulls of Algerian martyrs to the Algerian state and his attempts to establish a Scientific Advisory Board on restitutions. For Macron's opponents, France must be self-confident and proud of its history and identity and must relinquish its "botched" and "sly" acts of cozying up to the Algerian state (Méheut).

The examination of "narrational and linguistic strategies" of Macron's declaration of "Audin's death" is, in George M. Wilson's words (1994), primordial for examining the external standpoint of the declaration and pinpointing what the declaration excludes, ignores or distorts (p. 266). In this venue, it is worthwhile to emphasize that neither this policy of evasion and denial of truth nor this polarization in French politics are new. As regards, the case of Audin's disappearance and murder by French paratroopers, truth about the direct implication of French state, army, police, administration and justice in "systemic torture" was proven by the well-documented and meticulously conducted studies of historians like Pierre Vidal-Naquet (1958, 1962, 1972), Henri Alleg (1958), Raphäel Branche (2007), Pierre-Henri Simon, Sylvie Thénault (2005, 2017) and Tramor Quemeneur (2017). To Said, issues belonging to the era of French colonialism to Algeria could be comprehensively interpreted by examining them "retrospectively and heterophonically with other histories and traditions counterpointed against them, to read them in the light of

decolonization. In Said's viewpoint, "... it is a much graver mistake to read them stripped of their affiliations with the facts of power which informed and enabled them" (Said, 1994, p. 161).

Being one the most renowned historians who devoted most of their expertise to the issue of torture in Algerian, Vidal-Naquet conducted one of the most well-documented and investigative coverage of the issue of Audin's disappearance and ultimate murder. According to Vidal-Naquet, who accessed official documents of French investigation teams, the French authorities started at first by lulling Audin's family and public opinion to believe that Audin escaped before the emergence of new evidence pointing clearly to the fact that Audin was murdered by some officers in French army.

On basis of the evidence processed by Vidal-Naquet, Audin was murdered by Lieutenant Charbonnier in the midst of a heated interrogation. Later, with the relative release on top secret documents of French army, Vidal-Naquet appealed to the famous Lieutenant Yves Godard papers wherein the French officer stated bluntly about the executor of Audin as being Gérard Garcet who was the aide of General Jacques Massu. Obviously, this claim was somehow questioned by Vidal-Naquet as Lieutenant Yves Godard was known for his loyalty to Commander Paul Aussaresses and his affinity with the Secret Armed Organization (OAS) and hence his animosity with General Massu who was loyal to General de Gaulle who disagreed with the Black Feet (les *Pieds Noirs*) in terms of perpetuating France's presence in Algeria.

Regardless of the true perpetrator of Audin's murder, the responsibility of the French state was proven with documents and testimonies in some of the declassified and the still-to-be-released archives. This implies that the version of the history of Audin's disappearance and murder as it was narrated by President Macron in his declaration of September 13, 2018 was just a perpetuation of France's deep-seated and longstanding but univocal narrative of what happened. The other "marginalized," "unacknowledged" and "submerged" narrative that contest the same "terrain" or the same experience as it is narrated and depicted by historians, academicians and politicians of the "peripheries" often provides

evidence that largely challenge and question the claim the "métropole" to be the custodian of self-evident and commonsensical historical truths (Bhatia, 2017, p. 15).

The truth about what really happened to Maurice Audin could only be fully comprehended and thoroughly interpreted by putting the two narratives side by side exactly like the "two melodic lines that are in counterpoint with each other but maintain their independence" (Said, 1994, p. 78). President Macron's declaration is infused and studded with the French long-running denial and obfuscation about the occurrence of the War *per se*. The War is often cloaked under multiple euphemisms, such as "the events of Algeria," "the fight" "the conflict" etc. Much of these processes of disinformation were pinpointed by French historian and specialist of contemporary Algerian history Benjamin Stora mainly in his book *La Gangrene et l'Oubli* (1992). This kind of historical nebulousness extended to the scholarly and academic sphere where a number of pre-eminent figures like the French journalist François d'Orcival who pithily claimed that:

> [w]e fail to come to an agreement on the memory of the War of Algeria as it remains vivid in the minds of those who experienced it in a way or another. This opposition within ourselves, the national body of the French community, is a kind of mystery of the end of colonization that we still have not fully processed. (Alain et al., 2016)

Faithful to the "iconoclastic" and irreversibly univocal historical narrative of his country, President Macron's declaration clearly contributed to the perpetuation of France' long-running evasive and deluding rhetoric about its responsibility for violations, atrocities and injustices committed during the Algerian War of Independence. For the sake of backgrounding and mystifying the responsibility of French military and political officials who conducted operations of detention, interrogation and torture and murder during the Algerian War of Independence, President Macron couched his presumable recognition and acknowledgement in carefully chosen rhetorical devices.

In fact, President Macron's declaration was cautiously and meticulously worded to conceal the identities and obfuscate the responsibility of actors and shade ugly truths and injustices (Shuster, 2008, p. 16; Rockmore, 2005; O'Halloran, 2003, pp. 253-254). For instance, President Macron's appeal to agentless passivization as a rhetorical device, such as "men and women were arrested," "some are released," others are interned," "still others are put on trial,'" "torture was allowed" and "The Audin file is closed" was instrumental in screening the identities and averting blame for French military and political officials who participated in the "violations," "atrocities" and "injustices" committed during the Algerian War on Independence against civilians, political activists and resistance fighters ("Déclaration du Président de la République…") An explicit and unabashed reference to any of those deleted agents is tantamount to a total reversal of a deep-seated and longstanding French historical narrative that chanted and trumpeted French colonization as positive and benevolent with undeniably civilizing, urbanizing and developing effects.

Due to the tense and daunting political atmosphere and the fierce opposition that President Macron is facing in his attempts to attenuate tension and lay the ground for a genuine rapprochement with Algeria, the French president contented himself with half-facts and cosmetic maneuvers that sought to woo the Algerian state without irritating and provoking his opponents from political parties, associations and memories lobbies. Nowhere did President Macron in his declaration refer to any specific actor (or agent) as being directly or indirectly responsible for the prejudicial acts and practices committed by the military force with respect to the disappearance, and ultimately murder, of Maurice Audin and other presumable opponents to French occupation.

Moreover, refusing to provide any possibly definite explanation to the death of Audin, President Macron presented three different, and somehow antithetical, hypotheses as carrying equal importance and degree veracity. By his mere description of three hypotheses and by putting the evidence presented by historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet, the declaration of the commanding officer Paul Aussaresses and the scenario of the probability of

Audin's death during torture on an equal footing, President Macron simply further fastened the lid on France's violations during Algerian War of Independence. Adding to the opacity that enshrouds his ostensible acknowledgement, President Macron overtly declared that "these disappearances depend on all sides during the conflict" ("Declaration du President de la République…"). Even after having acknowledged the death of Audin, President Macron cloaked it under a circumlocution that made it sound not necessarily the result of torture. "Audin died while being subjected to torture," argued President Macron ("Declaration du President de la République…").

5. Conclusion

The narrational and linguistic analysis of President Macon's declaration on "Audin's death" (September 13, 2018) has revealed the recalcitrant and deeply ingrained cultural restrictions that run deep in French historical narrative. The results of the study have shown that, despite his unprecedentedly historic and daring initiative, President Macron's recognition of France's responsibility for "systemic torture" against civilians and political activists during the Algerian War of Independence, he could neither put the culprits in front of their responsibilities nor could he take the endeavor to the heights of Algerian expectations.

The findings of the study point to the fact that French univocal historical narrative is far from being questioned by President Macron's declaration. Due to its fuzziness and flimsiness, the declaration squarely fits within the long-lasting mainstream French historiography that discards, marginalizes and stigmatizes any alternative narrativization and interpretation of experiences of French colonial history mainly with link to certain unthought-of or suppressed topics.

The utilization of Said's contrapuntal approach to examine issues related to Franco-Algerian reconciliation, such as the French state's responsibility for torture has underscored the importance to consider multiple perspectives and to examine the interplay between dominant and marginalized voices to achieve a comprehensive and a nuanced understanding of the topic.

Most importantly, by having examined the different narratives in dialogue with each other, the study has sought to better grasp the tensions,

contentions, paradoxical visions and biased outlooks that mar any possible reconciliatory undertaking between France and Algeria. Basically, this approach has helped to challenge the binary opposites and essentialized perspectives that tend to sanctify the historical narrative of the "metropole" and to caricaturize and even trivialize historical events and experiences conveyed through the historical discourse of the peripheries.

The study, thus, emphasizes the need for researchers to approach the memory issue in the Franco-Algerian relations with sensitivity, presenting diverse viewpoints, and fostering critical thinking among the practitioners of historical and political issues. By discussing historical events and encouraging open dialogue, it is possible to enhance mutual understanding and resolution of conflict and contentions rooted in the past.

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