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

تداعيات تصريح الرئيس ماكرون حول "وفاة أودان" (2018) على المصالحة الفرنسية الجزائرية: قراءة طباقية

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Abstract: The article utilizes Said's approach of contrapuntal reading, to demystify the "univocal" French official narrative about the Franco-Algerian relations during and after the Algerian war of independence. Most importantly, the article scrutinizes President Macron's declaration on the death of Maurice Audin to demonstrate how French historical narrative assertively excludes any pluralized perspective to the Franco-Algerian history. Appealing to said's idea about intertwined and overlapping histories of the colonizer and colonized, the article, uncovers that French univocal is inherently insufficient to convey the thorough truth about the colonial experience. The study will ultimately open up new paths for the construal of French-Algerian memory conflict and the conclusion of a more durable reconciliation.

Keywords: Algerian War of Independence; Franco-Algerian reconciliation; Macron's presidency; Audin's death; Said's contrapuntality approach.

ملخص:

يعتمد المقال على منهج القراءة الطباقية لإدوارد سعيد، لكشف السردية الرسمية الفرنسية «الأحادية» حول العلاقات الفرنسية الجزائرية أثناء وبعد حرب الاستقلال الجزائرية. تعنى الدراسة تحديدا بفحص تصريح الرئيس ماكرون بشأن و فاة أودان من أجل إبراز الإقصاء الممنهج الذي تتبعه الرواية التاريخية الفرنسية التي تندرج تحت لواء خطاب المركزية الغربية المفعم بالسيطرة و الإستعلاء و الذي يستبعد أي

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سردية موازية. كما تصبو الدراسة إلى إبراز أن الرواية الفرنسية الأحادية حول الدور الفرنسي في الجزائر لا يمكن لها بأي حال أن تنقل الحقيقة الكاملة حول التجربة الإستعمارية. تطمح هذه الدراسة لتفتح مسارات جديدة لفهم صراع الذاكرة بين فرنسا و الجزائر و إرساء قواعد مصالحة دائمة..

الكلمات المفتاحية : حرب الإستقلال الجزائرية؛ المصالحة الفرنسية الجزائرية؛رئاسة ماكرون ؛ وفاة أودان؛ منهج سعيد للقراءة الطباقية.

1. Introduction

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.

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.

With that, recalcitrant "Western discourse about the other" is far from being questioned (Bernstein, 1971, p. 49). This invasive memory of imperialism stands out as a serious hindrance for any possible reconciliation. 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.

The thrust the present study is that accounting for the narratives of both colonizer (i.e. France) and colonized (i.e. Algeria), which implies the embrace of a simultaneous and

dialogical perspective to the colonial experience will unleash a more nuanced version of history. In other words, by recognizing the intertwined histories and perspectives of both colonizer and colonized, French claims about colonial experience will lose their discursively hegemonic dominance by being put on an equal footing with counter-claims and counter-narratives advanced by former colonies. By so doing, former colonizer and former colonies could embark on a more fruitful and more constructive debate that may ultimately result in a durable reconciliation.

2. Methods

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).

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).

2.1. Operationalisation of Said's Contrapuntal Reading

Based on the renderings of the aforementioned experts about the relativity of historical narratives and the pervasive role of power in determining regimes of truth, the current study utilizes Said's contrapuntality approach to underscore the inherently imperfect historical account of France as it manifested itself in Macron's narrative. The study critically analyzes Macron's declaration on Audin's death by uncovering how it embedded and encoded a purely French regime of truth that excludes the feelings, actions and reactions of those against whom the colonial policies were directed. By highlighting the subjective and exclusive nature of French historical account, the study introduces evidence, arguments and illustrations of how Algerians, differently from the French, lives the colonial experience and it shows both experiences counterpoint to give sense to an experience that enmeshed the colonizer and the colonized in an inseparable destiny.

Countering France's univocal and exclusive historical account about the colonial experience, as it is shown in Macron's narrative, is operated by mobilizing evidence and factual accounts gathered by eminent historians and experts such as Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Henri Alleg, Benjamin Stora and Franz Fanon about France's policies of illegal detention, systematic torture and extra-judicial killings. The intertwinement and the imbrication of what the French thought, believed and did with how the Algerians felt and how they reacted to France's actions is what French colonial experience in Algeria was truly about.

3. 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 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."

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.

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).

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).

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.

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…").

4. Conclusion

The study has shown that French historical account parochially and exclusively imposed a univocal perspective to the colonial experience in Algeria. By so doing, it bluntly muted and marginalized Algerians' account of the same experience which gives a more comprehensive and more holistic meaning to French historical narrative. The study has shown that French historical account parochially and exclusively imposed a univocal perspective to the colonial experience in Algeria. By so doing, it bluntly muted and marginalized Algerians' account of the same experience which gives a more comprehensive and more holistic meaning to French historical narrative. 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 periphery.

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