

**Non-recognition of the *Dissidence* in the
Second World War**

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Abstract

Thousands of young men and women left the French Antilles (Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guyana) to join the Free French from 1941 to 1944. The contributions made by these *dissidents*, in campaigns in North Africa, France and even on German soil, has for decades been overlooked in both the Antilles and in metropolitan France. Their marginalisation is rooted in both the universalist ideals of the French Republic, which obscure colonial particularities, and the enduring dominance of Eurocentric frameworks that privilege metropolitan forms of resistance. This thesis reveals how such historical omissions shape questions of national identity and belonging in the Antilles, through an analysis of commemorative ceremonies, documentaries, literature, memorials, museums, and school curricula. It interrogates both official and unofficial initiatives, assessing the power dynamics and agency that shape how this history is remembered. It establishes the *Dissidence's* place within national narratives of liberation and resistance, foregrounding the structural limits of commemoration. This thesis asks to what extent the French state integrates the *Dissidence* into existing resistance frameworks or frames them as part of a distinct colonial memory, while interrogating whether these commemorations sustain Eurocentric discourses or offer decolonial perspectives. It also turns to unofficial commemorations, examining whether these reproduce state narratives or succeed in articulating counter-discourses that challenge the commemorative status quo. The thesis ultimately argues that the *Dissidence* continues to occupy a marginal position within French collective memory.

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Introduction

Over the past decade, scholarship has increasingly sought to reassess the role of the French Empire and its soldiers within the Free French Forces (FFL), emphasising colonial contributions. Eric Jennings' *Free French Africa in World War Two* (2015) has been instrumental in highlighting the significant role of African soldiers (North and sub-Saharan Africa).¹ Despite increasing interest, historians have yet to fully re-examine the wartime experiences of the French Empire as a whole, particularly those of the Antilles (French Caribbean). The Second World War, and in particular the Vichy regime (the French collaborationist government, established after the surrender to Nazi Germany in June 1940), constituted a pivotal period in the history of the Antilles. Political oppression, heightened racial discrimination, food shortages, poverty, and a reduction in civic freedoms characterised this period.² However, the lived experiences of this era have often been overshadowed in both scholarly and public discourse by the traumatic legacies of enslavement and colonisation, which continue to dominate local historical narratives. This marginalisation is especially evident in the case of the *Dissidence*, an external resistance movement in which thousands of men and women from Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guyane volunteered to join the Free French from 1941 onwards. These individuals, colonial subjects from the 'old colonies', undertook clandestine journeys from these Vichy-controlled territories to the neighbouring British islands, before travelling onwards to London, or later to Fort-Dix training camp in New Jersey.³ They subsequently served in key military campaigns, including in North Africa, the Provence landings of August 1944, the 1944/45 Liberation of France, and even operations on German soil in 1945. Others contributed through vital logistical roles, including communications, nursing, and transport.

¹ Eric Jennings, *Free French Africa in World War II : the African resistance* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

² Kristen Stromberg Childers, 'The Second World War as a watershed in the French Caribbean', *Atlantic studies*, 9.4 (2012), pp. 409–430 (p. 420).

³ Referencing the territories and possessions that were acquired during the "First French Colonial Empire" which existed from 1534 until 1814.

Despite the significance of these contributions to the Free French war effort, the *Dissidence* has remained underrepresented within academic research and the French commemorative landscape. The political status of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guyane, as overseas *départements* of France since 1946, has contributed to this omission. A French overseas *département* is an integral part of France and the European Union, where French and EU law apply fully, with limited adaptations for local circumstances. *Départements* share the same political institutions, citizenship rights, and social systems as metropolitan France. Therefore, as part of a French Republic committed to universalist ideals (the Republic prioritises common citizenship over recognition of group-based differences), and a dominant metropolitan narrative, these territories lack a national government committed to promoting their distinctive historical experiences. The result has been a prolonged absence of official recognition with the *Dissidence* remaining unacknowledged by the state until June 2009, and marginalised locally as commemorative initiatives have focussed on the internal resistance. Since official recognition in June 2009, commemorative interest has gradually grown, even if it has been uneven and episodic.

This thesis examines the role of agency in both official and unofficial commemorative practices relating to the *Dissidence*, and how such agency functions in the shaping of collective memory and national narratives. It argues that commemorative agency must be understood as a legacy of colonialism, which continues to inform how wartime histories are represented, or omitted. In doing so, this thesis addresses the extent to which recent commemorative initiatives have enabled the *Dissidence* to challenge its historical marginalisation within French collective memory and the narratives of liberation and resistance. It also works to counter the absences detailed within this introduction.

By situating the *Dissidence* within the broader historiography of the French Empire in the Second World War, this study seeks to extend existing scholarship beyond its prevailing African focus, contributing a more comprehensive understanding of the French commemorative landscape. Thus, it interrogates the intersection of Second World War, memory, and decolonial studies, re-assessing the *Dissidence's* place within France's war imaginary.

Academic context

This section begins by outlining key concepts in decolonial thought and their intersection with French commemorative practices, before focusing on how colonial legacies have shaped the Antilles' marginalisation in scholarship. It then considers the treatment of the *Dissidence* in Second World War studies and official memory policies, concluding with the gaps this thesis seeks to address. The concepts addressed are not representative of the entirety of decolonial thought, but have been included due to their relevance to this research project. My methodology will expand on how they have informed my research process.

In recent decades, there has been increasing interest in analysing colonial legacies and questioning the tenets of postcolonial studies.⁴ This critical standpoint reconsiders colonial history from the perspectives of those who suffered its impact and addresses its ongoing legacy.⁵ Scholars like Aníbal Quijano and Walter Mignolo introduced the concept of the 'coloniality of power', arguing that colonialism was not only a historical event but is an ongoing epistemic, economic, and racial hierarchy, moulding our political, economic, and social realities.⁶

Questions around constructions of identity and 'Other' are integral to decolonial studies; research has aimed to address how the 'Other' is viewed, and how through the construction of the 'Other', western identity itself was formed.⁷ Decolonial studies highlight discriminatory practices within society, and how harmful identity constructions can be deconstructed. Research also demonstrates that coloniality continues to structure power relations within former colonies, and between former colonies and the colonisers.⁸ In order to break down this power structure, it must be addressed and understood.

Particularly relevant, tying into discussions around colonial power dynamics, is the aim to challenge privilege and understand whose voices are heard within

⁴ Breny Mendoza, 'Decolonial theories in comparison', *Journal of World Philosophies*, 5.1 (2020), pp. 43-60 (p. 43).

⁵ Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: an historical introduction* (Blackwell, 2001), p. 4.

⁶ Ana Aliverti, *Decolonizing the Criminal Question: Colonial Legacies, Contemporary Problems*, (Oxford University Press, 2023), p. 4; Anibal Quijano, 'Coloniality of power and Eurocentrism in Latin America', *International sociology*, 15.2 (2000), pp. 215-232; Walter Mignolo, 'Coloniality of power and decolonial thinking', *Cultural Studies*, 21 (2007), pp. 2155-2167.

⁷ Gurminder Bhabra, 'Postcolonial and decolonial dialogues', *Postcolonial studies*, 17.2 (2014), pp. 115-121 (p. 118).

⁸ Mendoza, p. 49.

society, both during the colonial period and now. Decolonial studies aim to put in place mechanisms that allow politically minoritised groups (who are often the demographic majority, for example in a colonial situation such as Algeria, Algerian Muslims were the demographic majority but the political minority) to gain an equal share of opportunities to make their voices heard.⁹

Acknowledging the role of public pedagogic spaces in promoting harmful Eurocentric views of coloniality is also a decolonial theme which underpins this thesis. 'To begin decolonial work in museums, the notion of the museum as a neutral space must first be challenged'.¹⁰ We must consider that 'the way exhibitions are constructed usually assumes a white audience and privileges the white gaze.... for many people of colour, collections symbolise historic and ongoing trauma.'¹¹ These works emphasise that decoloniality must be an active, not theoretical approach.

Within the context of the Antilles, Françoise Vergès speaks of how racism, indifference, negligence, and repression are all lasting impacts of colonialism.¹² She argues that colonial discourse has deeply penetrated French society and culture, underlining that 'colonial conquest was undertaken in the very name of republican principals'.¹³ Focusing on Martinique and Guadeloupe, Silyane Larcher's *L'autre citoyen* examines how the abolition of slavery and subsequent integration of former colonies into the French Republic failed to address the deep-rooted inequalities stemming from colonial rule.¹⁴ These societies remain marked by systemic racial discrimination and socio-economic disparities, continuing to impact contemporary relations within the Antilles and the development of society.¹⁵ Larcher further highlights how ex-slaves, despite their formal inclusion as citizens after 1848, were continually perceived through a

⁹ Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern speak?" (Macmillan, 1988).

¹⁰ Leila Aboulela, *The Museum* (1997).

¹¹ Sumaya Kassim, 'The museum will not be decolonised', *Media Diversified*, 15 (2017), pp. 109-22.

¹² Françoise Vergès, 'L'outre-mer, une survivance de l'utopie coloniale républicaine', in *La fracture coloniale*, ed by. Pascal Blanchard, Nicola Bancel and Sandrine Lemaire (La Découverte, 2006), pp. 67-74 (p. 68).

¹³ Françoise Vergès, 'Colonizing, Educating, Guiding: A Republican Duty', in *Colonial Culture in France since the Revolution*, ed by. Pascal Blanchard (Indiana University Press, 2014), pp.250-256 (p. 251).

¹⁴ Silyane Larcher, *L'autre citoyen : l'idéal républicain et les Antilles après l'esclavage* (Armand Colin, 2014).

¹⁵ Bonnie Thomas, *Breadfruit or chestnut?: gender construction in the French Caribbean novel*, (Lexington Books, 2006), p.16.

racialised lens.¹⁶ The United Nations write that ‘the legacy of the social and economic institution of slavery is to be found everywhere within these societies and is particularly dominant in the Caribbean’, persisting as a political feature of the region.¹⁷ Even within metropolitan France, the *Mouvement des indigènes de la République* contend that undeniable continuities exist between contemporary France and the colonial period, maintaining that ‘post-colonial populations in the *banlieues* are treated like colonial natives and relegated to the margins of society’.¹⁸

Understanding colonial legacy and the political, social, and cultural realities of the Antilles is integral to understanding the power dynamics within France’s commemorative landscape. As the first official recognition of the *Dissidence* came under Nicholas Sarkozy’s Presidency (2007-2012), understanding memory policies within this period, which heavily denounced so-called repentance politics, is important to contextualise commemoration of the *Dissidence*.¹⁹ Sarkozy’s discourse on race and national identity has framed recent French politics, with the Right claiming that those demanding recognition of colonial oppression are in fact refusing to integrate, threatening the foundations of the Republic.²⁰ This discourse has propagated further racial inequalities and fear of the ‘other’.²¹ Although this period postdates the 2001 Taubira law, which recognised slavery as a crime against humanity, Sarkozy linked the Republic to abolition in such a way that abolition became synonymous with the state.²² Discussions related to the horror of slavery consign this practice to a non-republican era, thereby ‘exculpating the current state from any duty to take ownership, and repent for, this past’.²³ Memory policies of this period also fail

¹⁶ Larcher, p. 238.

¹⁷ Missouri Sherman-Peter, ‘The Legacy of Slavery in the Caribbean and the Journey Towards Justice’, United Nations, 24 March 2022 < <https://www.un.org/en/un-chronicle/legacy-slavery-caribbean-and-journey-towards-justice> > [accessed 11 August 2025].

¹⁸ Thomas Martin, ‘Anti-racism, Republicanism, and the Sarkozy Years: SOS Racisme and the Mouvement des Indigènes de la République’, *France’s Colonial Legacies: Memory, Identity, and Narrative* (2013), pp. 188-206.

¹⁹ Dónal Hassett, ‘Rupture and reconciliation: the neoliberal logics of Emmanuel Macron’s colonial memory policies’, *Modern & contemporary France*, 31.1 (2024), pp. 31-53 (p. 33).

²⁰ Martin, ‘Anti-racism, Republicanism, and the Sarkozy Years.’

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Kristen Stromberg Childers, ‘Citizenship and Assimilation in Postwar Martinique: The Abolition of Slavery and the Politics of Commemoration’, *The Western Society for French History*, 34 (2006); Nicola Frith, ‘Crime and Penitence in Slavery Commemoration’ in *France’s Colonial Legacies*, ed by. Fiona Barclay (University of Wales Press, 2013).

²³ Frith.

to mention post-abolition forms of colonial exploitation which has continuing legacies today.²⁴

More recent criticism of official commemoration has delved into President Emmanuel Macron's (2017-present) colonial memory policies. Although Dónal Hassett states these policies employ 'greater symbolic acknowledgement of France's role in colonial violence', they have made no real concrete proposals to alter colonial structures of exclusion, and truly impact the lived experiences of those whose pasts and presents are shaped by colonialism.²⁵ Instead, Hassett argues, they serve a wider political agenda which is concerned with improving relations with African governments rather than undoing the enduring legacies of France's colonial past.²⁶

These sources highlight that although in recent years France has begun to grapple with its colonial pasts, it has failed to do so in a way which addresses the real and harmful legacies of colonial rule. The importance of commemorative initiatives which challenge the dominant Eurocentric narrative, and put in place mechanisms which address legacies of colonial rule will be highlighted throughout this thesis. This will be combined with an assessment of how successful both official and non-official commemorative efforts have been.

A central component of this thesis relates to what memory studies have demonstrated: that public opinion and collective memory are powerful tools as the state establishes which memories are to be saved and which are to be rejected, defining a sense of national identity and within this who does and does not belong.²⁷ In a French context, national identity is constituted by various cultural referents such as the Revolution, the Vichy years, the Algerian War (1954-62), and May 1968.²⁸ Although not everyone has direct recollections of these events, they are shared as part of a common knowledge about the past,

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Hassett, p. 39, 40, 45.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 45.

²⁷ Barry Schwartz, 'Rethinking the concept of collective memory', in *The Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies* (Routledge, 2016), pp. 8-21 (p. 11); Carmen Leccardi, 'Memory, time and responsibility', in *The Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies* (Routledge, 2016), pp. 109-120 (p. 110); Diane Barthel-Bouchier, 'Tangible and intangible markers of collective memory', in *The Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies* (Routledge, 2016), pp. 221-232 (p.222).

²⁸ Jeffrey Olick, 'Sites of memory studies', in *The Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies* (Routledge, 2016), pp. 41-52 (p. 48).

through vectors such as education, commemorative events, laws, and museums. Once independent of its tellers and accepted by the collective, cultural memory renders historical information stable, becoming part of the national identity.²⁹ It not only provides a form of shared identity but also acts as a means of communicating this identity to further people.³⁰

In understanding these concepts, the importance of commemoration is recognised. As Barry Schwartz highlights, commemoration ‘distinguishes events and persons believed to be deserving of celebration from those deserving of being merely remembered’.³¹ Commemoration therefore becomes the primary indicator of importance, making it a particularly powerful and selective tool, transmitting a certain past the state wishes to acknowledge.³² In contrast, minority groups’ collective memories run counter to official narratives and, within a French context, are perceived by the state as a threat to national unity.³³ Due to the distribution of political power and this perceived threat, often state actors refuse to hear the voices of minority groups on questions of memory and other societal issues such as discrimination. This underscores the importance of studying counter-commemoration as part of demonstrating wider inequalities within French society that the Republic refuses to address.

Counter-commemorations challenge dominant, often national, narratives; in this case the state-led commemorations of the French Republic which often promote a hexagonal, Eurocentric version of the past.³⁴ In European nation states, state-endorsed memorialisation tends to omit the more problematic aspects of their history, meaning often local communities aim to fill this commemorative gap.³⁵ In the context of the Antilles, many activists and scholars are committed to ensuring that Caribbean communities’ memories are not obscured by a white metropolitan lens.³⁶ Using the specific context of

²⁹ Ann Rigney, ‘Cultural memory studies: Mediation, narrative, and the aesthetic’, in *The Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies* (Routledge, 2016), pp. 65-76 (p. 65); Schwartz, p. 13.

³⁰ Antonia Wimbush, ‘The Windrush and the BUMIDOM: The memorialization of Caribbean migration’, *Memory studies*, 16.5 (2023), pp.1328–1342.

³¹ Schwartz, p. 11.

³² Schwartz, p. 19; Zachary Metz, ‘Bone, steel and stone: Reification and transformation in Holocaust memorials’, in *The Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies* (Routledge, 2016), pp. 288–310 (p. 288).

³³ Barthel-Bouchier, p. 222.

³⁴ Wimbush, 2023.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

enslavement commemoration, we can investigate the role of counter-commemoration as a means to contest the abolitionist memorial discourse. Although enslavement narratives only began to belong to French narratives of identity post-2006, this does not consider local commemorative policies.³⁷ The absence of state-led commemoration despite ‘the heavy psychological burden of slavery [which] continues to weigh on the collective Caribbean imaginary’ meant that the Antillean populations (both within the Antilles and the diaspora in metropolitan France) had to develop their own commemorative discourse.³⁸ This aimed to commemorate Black heroes, rather than the white abolitionists, and highlight anti-slavery struggles within an Antillean context.³⁹ One such example is the 23 May 1998 silent march that gathered 40,000 people in Paris, mobilised to demand recognition of slavery as a crime against humanity, making this date a commemorative ritual for the diaspora in Paris.⁴⁰ Through understanding the role of counter-commemoration, these discussions have highlighted the need to not only research state-led commemoration of the *Dissidence*, but also unofficial commemoration, in order to understand memorial narratives and their impact.

A notable gap in existing scholarship is that Second World War colonial historiography has largely centred on African colonies (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Chad, French Congo), leaving the role of the Antilles comparatively underexplored.⁴¹ The African nations in question are now independent from France, whereas the Antilles, colonised during the first wave of French expansion, maintain a markedly different relationship with the Metropole. This divergence can be interpreted in several ways: for instance, the strong focus on Africa’s post-colonial legacy has contributed to a well-developed discourse around ‘otherness’, a theme less examined in the Antilles but nonetheless central to movements discussed within decolonial studies and literature, such as Pan-Africanism. In the broader field of Francophone decolonial studies, the Algerian War of Independence (1954-62) has commanded particular attention, largely due to the conflict’s violent nature and the enduring challenges it poses

³⁷ Johann Michel, ‘A Study of the Collective Memory and Public Memory of Slavery in France’, *African Studies* (Johannesburg), 75.3 (2016), pp. 395–416 (p. 397), doi:10.1080/00020184.2016.1193381.

³⁸ Vergès, 2006, pp. 70-71; Wimbush, 2023.

³⁹ Michel, p. 402.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 406-407.

⁴¹ Jennings, 2015; Julien Fargettas, *Les tirailleurs sénégalais: Les soldats noirs entre légendes et réalités 1939-1945* (Tallandier, 2012).

for the French state. In the context of the Second World War, the 'centrality of Africanness of Free France' and the pivotal role of Central Africa in de Gaulle's early movement have reinforced the focus on Africa within (de)colonial wartime studies, often to the exclusion of the Antilles.⁴² As a result, the Antilles are sometimes treated as a niche subject within Francophone studies, attracting fewer dedicated resources and publications than African, and especially North-African, decolonial scholarship.

The academic text *colonisations, notre histoire*, emphasises the extent to which the Dissidence is marginalised.⁴³ In this book, Pierre Singaravélou argues that French scholars have failed to incorporate the colonial and imperial dimensions of France's history within both the academic and public sphere, stating that colonial history is French history.⁴⁴ This work therefore proposes to cover all areas of French colonisation, with 265 commissioned articles from various historians. Despite the vast number of articles, only eight centre entirely on the Antilles, three of which focus on enslavement.⁴⁵ Out of seven articles relating to the colonial dimensions of the Second World War, none mention the *Dissidence*, with no use of the term throughout the entire book.⁴⁶ This demonstrates the peripheral nature of the *Dissidence*, even within (de)colonial studies.

To emphasise the lack of academic focus on this topic, studies of the September 1944 Provence landings (an event in which the *Dissidence* played a key role), fail to mention the Antilles. Instead, they underline the role of the USA and promote a western-centric narrative, or focus on the importance of North African countries, recognising the association of colonialism in the way that these landings have followed in the shadow of the June 1944 Normandy landings.⁴⁷ The emphasis placed on Africa demonstrates the lack of interest in the Antilles and how these islands have been 'cast aside', even in colonial commemoration; a gap this thesis hopes to contest.⁴⁸

⁴² Jennings, 2015, p. 2, 7.

⁴³ Pierre Singaravélou, *Colonisations - Notre Histoire*, (Editions du Seuil, 2023).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Claire Miot and Julie Le Gac, 'À LA JEUNESSE D'AFRIQUE ». LA COMMÉMORATION DU 70e ANNIVERSAIRE DU DÉBARQUEMENT EN PROVENCE LE 15 AOÛT 2014', *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 276 (2019), pp. 87–98 (p.87, 89); Philippe Masson, 'Le débarquement de Provence', *Revue historique de l'armée*, 196.3 (1994), pp.15–21.

⁴⁸ Vergès, 2006, p. 72.

Although some historians have offered an overview of the role of the *Dissidence* in the Second World War, they have primarily focussed on the motivations to engage and experiences under Vichy.⁴⁹ Eric Jennings discusses the authoritarian Vichy system which was transposed into a colonial framework, and how resistance grew in various forms.⁵⁰ Although some Antilleans expressed their hostility in discreet ways, such as handing out Gaullist leaflets and honking out V for victory in Morse code, from 1940 to 1943, between 4000 and 5000 Antilleans risked their lives to reach the neighbouring British islands and join the Free French Forces.⁵¹

In discussing the motivations to join the *Dissidence*, most historians quote pride and patriotism as the primary motivator, with hostility to a racist authoritarian system a further key factor.⁵² Compared to other French colonies, inhabitants of the Antilles 'stood to lose more from Vichy's abrogation of civil liberties and voting rights' as unlike other colonies, they had these rights, igniting further opposition.⁵³ Severe food shortages and increased poverty provided additional reasons.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the implementation of the Vichy regime and society under slavery have been equated as harsh measures that reinstated the predominance of the *békés* (an Antillean Creole term to describe a descendant of the early European, usually French, settlers in the Antilles, many of whom are descendants of slaveowners) were implemented, such as unequal rights between races, as well as renewed and intensified racism.⁵⁵ The relevance of the

⁴⁹ Eric Jennings, *Escape from Vichy: The Refugee Exodus to the French Caribbean*, (Harvard University Press, 2018); Eric Jennings, 'La dissidence aux Antilles (1940-1943)', *Vingtième siècle* (Paris. 1984), 68 (2000), p. 55; Kristen Stromberg Childers, *Seeking Imperialism's Embrace – National Identity, Decolonisation, and Assimilation in the French Caribbean* (Oxford University Press, 2016); Sylvain Demange, Sylvie Meslien and Eliane Sempaire, 1940-1943 : résistances et dissidences aux Antilles et en Guyane : mémoires de guerre - mémoires de vie (Orphie, 2023).

⁵⁰ Jennings, 2000, p. 55-56.

⁵¹ Jennings, 2000, p. 60; Jennings, 2018, p. 132; Stromberg Childers, 2016, p. 29.

⁵² Félix Germain, *Decolonizing the Republic: African and Caribbean Migrants in Postwar Paris, 1946-1974*, (Michigan State University Press, 2016); Gros sur mon cœur, dir. by Chloe Glotin (France, 2011); Julien Toureille, 'La dissidence dans les Antilles françaises : une mémoire à préserver (1945-2011)', *Revue historique des armées*, 270 (2013), pp.68-78; 'La Dissidence des jeunes Guadeloupéennes contre Pétain.', *Autant en emporte l'Histoire*, RadioFrance, 30 September 2023, podcast, Franceinter, < <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/podcasts/autant-en-emporte-l-histoire/autant-en-emporte-l-histoire-du-samedi-30-septembre-2023-2750868>> [accessed 10 February 2025]; Eliane Sempaire, *La dissidence an tan Sorin, 1940-1943 : au nom de la Patrie*, (Editions Jator, 1989); Stromberg Childers, 2016, p. 15.

⁵³ Jennings, 2018, p. 131.

⁵⁴ Stromberg Childers, 2016, p. 34.

⁵⁵ Jennings, 2000, p. 56; Jennings, 2018, p. 125; Léo Elisabeth, *Vichy aux Antilles et en Guyane : 1940-1943*, (Ostre-mers, 2004), p. 164; Stromberg Childers, 2016, p. 29.

Vichy period extends beyond its immediate historical circumstances; scholars argue that the *dissidents'* voyages to neighbouring islands were perceived as 'a continuation of their maroon ancestors' flight from slavery'.⁵⁶ Parallels are drawn to *marronage*, a term referring to the process of fleeing the plantation to settle and create new communities, as historians have argued that the imposition of Vichy rule reinstated racist measures unseen since the Second Empire, meaning many Antilleans felt that these measures and the fear of slavery being reinstated pushed them to escape, as their descendants had done decades ago.⁵⁷

It is evident that while significant scholarship exists on colonial legacies, decolonial thought, and French memory politics, the Antillean experience, particularly in relation to the *Dissidence*, remains markedly underexplored. Recent (de)colonial studies have tended to privilege African contexts, reinforcing an Africa-focused wartime narrative that has sidelined the Antilles from broader discussions of colonial resistance and commemoration. The literature reveals a tendency in both official memory policy and academic work to overlook counter-commemorative practices and the ways in which local or diasporic actors contest state-sanctioned histories. These gaps underscore the need for a methodological approach that not only foregrounds Antillean voices and experiences but also critically interrogates the interplay between official and unofficial commemorations. The following section will therefore outline the methodological framework and thesis structure, demonstrating how this study will address these scholarly omissions, situate the Antilles within a wider decolonial and memory studies discourse, and analyse how commemorative practices function to further embed Eurocentrism or contest dominant narratives.

Methodology

My principal objective is to ensure that this project has a genuinely positive impact on members of the minority groups I am researching, as well as society more generally, and explicitly seeks not to (even unwittingly) reproduce the detrimental impacts of colonialism.

⁵⁶ Stromberg Childers, 2016, p. 34.

⁵⁷ Laurent Jalabert, 'Les Antilles de l'amiral Robert', in *L'empire colonial sous Vichy*, ed. by Jacques Cantier and Éric Jennings (Odile Jacob, 2004), pp. 51-68 (p. 61); Stromberg Childers, 2016, p. 29.

The first consideration relates to the sources I have used. In order to ensure a decolonial approach, my methodology centred the narratives around those I researched, emphasising their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences. I therefore aimed to cite inclusively where possible, meaning if people analysed my bibliography, they would be able to see that I have made sure to use a variety of sources which do not only promote the Eurocentric dominant narrative. However, in applying inclusive citation, it is important to remember that not all Antillean sources are necessarily decolonial. Instead, I have applied a practice-led approach to my sources (understanding that ethnicity or geographical location does not guarantee a decolonial narrative). I have made sure to use different ways to find sources and recognise the ways in which this was limiting me. For example, this thesis does not only draw on academic texts, but has relied on podcasts, interviews, Facebook posts, newspaper articles, and other examples of sources which go beyond the library catalogue, in order to offer an in-depth analysis of the commemorative landscape. In doing this I have considered the importance of using non-academic sources, as for many this is the only way to publish their ideas. Within the colonial system, Europeans controlled access to higher education, meaning the colonised had to come to Europe in order to access secondary and tertiary education, keeping research Eurocentric.⁵⁸ Within one source (a non-academic documentary) I consult in my methodology, Euzhan Palcy, manages to apply a decolonial approach; she addresses her positionality clearly (as a Black Martinican), underlines its impact and highlights the personal consequences of colonialism, emphasising the emotions felt by Antilleans.⁵⁹

In engaging with these sources and deepening my understanding of decolonial studies, I have come to recognise the importance of approaching research with intentionality. As a white, British, cisgender woman recognising the considerable privilege that comes with those labels, I do not presume to speak on behalf of, nor diminish the lived experiences of the *dissidents* at the centre of this thesis. The questions I pose throughout the research process shape not only how I conduct the study but also how I present its findings. It is therefore

⁵⁸ Maha Bali, 'Inclusive Citation: How Diverse Are Your References?' Reflecting Allowed <<https://blog.mahabali.me/writing/inclusive-citation-how-diverse-are-your-references/>> [accessed 2 February 2025].

⁵⁹ *Parcours de dissidents*, dir. by Euzhan Palcy (France, 2005).

essential to consider how my chosen methodology influences the direction of the research and the kinds of 'answers' it produces. In exploring the commemoration and recognition of the *Dissidence*, my aim is not only to underscore the consequences of failing to honour this group equitably, but also to expose and challenge the persistent colonial legacies that continue to operate in both the Metropole and the Antilles.

Structure

To address the research questions as outlined previously, chapter one will examine the place the *Dissidence* hold in French collective memory and the national narratives of liberation and resistance. It will do this through consultation of commemorative ceremonies and events, physical sites of commemoration, museums and pedagogic spaces, as well as the school curriculum. In analysing these commemorative initiatives, this chapter will also examine commemorative agency and power dynamics, assessing the extent to which commemoration remains constrained by official narratives.

Chapter two will consider the narratives that official state commemoration promotes. It analyses whether the state attempts to integrate the *Dissidence* within pre-existing liberation and resistance narratives, or whether the *Dissidence* occupies a distinct space within colonial memory. In addressing these questions, this chapter will examine the extent to which the state embeds further Eurocentric discourses, or works to offer a decolonial perspective through *Dissidence* narratives.

Chapter three will build on the discussions of the previous chapter, this time focussing on unofficial (non-state) commemoration and whether it remains constrained by state-led and state-sponsored narratives, or successfully challenges the dominant power structures and therefore the dominant discourses analysed within the previous chapter. In examining these narratives, this chapter demonstrates the extent to which unofficial narratives offer decolonial perspectives of the *Dissidence*, or attempt to fit within French commemorative frameworks as a way to integrate this history within broader commemorative narratives and French collective memory.

This thesis will ultimately argue that the *Dissidence* hold an extremely marginal space within French collective memory and the national liberation and resistance narratives. Ultimately both unofficial and official commemoration (overwhelmingly in the case of official initiatives) fail to contest the dominant Eurocentric narratives within France's commemorative landscape.

Chapter One – Collective Memory and National Narratives

Following the Second World War, the role of the *Dissidence* was unacknowledged, even within the Antilles. Despite numerous commemorative visits from French officials between 1947 and 2009, including General de Gaulle on four occasions, the narrative promoted through state commemorative events centred solely around the FFL, excluding Antillean contributions. It was 2009 before the *Dissidence* was officially recognised for the first time by the French state, whilst in 2014 four *dissidents* were for the first time honoured in the Metropole. Although these commemorations signalled an official acknowledgement after over sixty years of neglect, they have had limited bearing on integrating the *Dissidence* into French understandings of the war. This example is representative of many other commemorative initiatives which have failed to undo years of negligence, and which have continued the marginalisation of the *Dissidence*.

In-depth analysis of these commemorations, and further case studies, aims to answer the following research questions: What place do *dissident* men and women hold in French national collective memory? How has this been reflected in the national liberation and resistance narratives, such as state produced or sponsored textbooks, memorials, and museums? How is this official narrative mobilised in national acts of commemoration? How is memory shaped and who is in control? Are unofficial narratives able to challenge state commemorative frameworks, or do they remain constrained by official discourses?

In order to address these questions, it is imperative to highlight that official state commemoration, education, and museums are powerful and selective tools, transmitting a past the state wishes to acknowledge in order to construct a specific narrative.⁶⁰ Official memory can exist through state sponsored means, on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as through counter or community memory. The mixed-methodological approach through consultation of speeches,

⁶⁰ Zachary Metz, 'Bone, steel and stone: reification and transformation in Holocaust memorials', in *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies* (Routledge, 2016), pp. 288-310 (p. 288).

conference papers, government websites, and official ceremonies, as well as secondary sources such as newspaper and journal articles, allows this chapter to demonstrate the extent to which the *Dissidence* forms part of French collective memory and the national war narrative. This chapter will draw on the sources mentioned above, whilst addressing the influence of unofficial discourses, to understand the extent to which state commemorations have enabled the *Dissidence* to belong to the French war narrative.⁶¹

While growing local engagement and recognition of the *Dissidence* across the Antilles marks a significant advancement, its exclusion from the broader narrative promoted in recent years illustrates the French state's continued framing of the *Dissidence* as an Antillean, rather than a national, history. Without meaningful inclusion through permanent commemorative sites in both the Antilles and the Metropole, integration into the national curriculum, and sustained visibility via public events and exhibitions, the *Dissidence* will remain marginalised within French collective memory and excluded from the national historical narrative. The following second and third chapter will determine what narratives are promoted through both official and non-official commemoration.

State-led ceremonies and events

This section uses ceremonies and events to examine the fragmented and often superficial efforts by the French state to integrate the *Dissidence* into national commemorative narratives. Beginning with President Sarkozy's 2009 homage in Fort-de-France, the following years witnessed a series of state-led gestures that claimed to rectify historical neglect.⁶² Yet, such initiatives frequently lacked visibility and substantive inclusion within France's broader commemorative framework. Analysis of local commemorative events underscore the limitations of centralised state recognition and reveals how peripheral commemorative acts can challenge, but also remain constrained by, the dominant national narrative.

⁶¹ Literature will be explored within the third chapter.

⁶² Nicolas Sarkozy, *Déclaration de M. Nicolas Sarkozy, Président de la République, en hommage aux anciens combattants et résistants antillais de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, à Fort-de-France le 25 juin 2009* (Fort-de-France, 2009) < <https://www.elysee.fr/nicolas-sarkozy/2009/06/25/declaration-de-m-nicolas-sarkozy-president-de-la-republique-en-hommage-aux-anciens-combattants-et-resistants-antillais-de-la-deuxieme-guerre-mondiale-a-fort-de-france-le-25-juin-20099> > [accessed 22 February 2025].

25 June 2009 marked an important date in the efforts to achieve official recognition for the *Dissidence*, with President Sarkozy, following periods of unrest in the Antilles due to the heightened cost of living, visiting the islands. In Martinique he paid homage to the *Dissidence* at the *monument aux morts* in Fort-de-France, highlighting the state's failure to remember their sacrifices and framing his visit as a turning point for recognition that repaired 'une injustice'.⁶³ Despite Sarkozy's emphasis on this recognition symbolising a change in commemoration policies towards the *Dissidence*, it was not until two years later that several *dissidents* were for the first time invited to the Metropole to attend the annual 18 June ceremony at Mont-Valérien.⁶⁴ Due to the lack of publicity, I was unable to find which *dissidents* were invited. This annual event is the most significant ceremony organised by the *l'Ordre de la Libération*, and is attended by the highest state authorities including the French President.⁶⁵ Despite this gesture demonstrating an acknowledgement from the state, and a rupture in previous failures to include the *dissidents* in commemorative events relating to the French Resistance, this event did little to convey the importance of the *Dissidence* to the public. The invitation to this event is an example of superficial commemoration, as despite their attendance, the *dissidents* were not mentioned in the President's speech or featured in the official photographs, thus reducing commemorative impact. Although significant as the first examples of official acknowledgement towards the *dissidents*, due to the limited visibility given to the *dissidents*, both events were ultimately symbolic gestures rather than a genuine commemorative reframing.

Three years later, under President Hollande, the French state formally acknowledged the *Dissidence's* contributions through a ceremony in Paris. Four surviving *dissidents* were awarded the *Légion d'Honneur*, Andoche Antourel, Alexandre Lepasteur, Rémy Oliny and Jeanne Catayée, and a plaque commemorating their sacrifices was installed at Mont-Faron, the site honouring

⁶³ Hélène Ferrarini, 'Plus de soixante-dix ans après, les résistants antillais sortent de l'ombre', *Slate*, 20 August 2015 <<https://www.slate.fr/story/105631/resistance-antilles-dissidence>> [accessed 19 November 2024]; Sarkozy, 2009.

⁶⁴ Used as the main execution site by the German authorities in France during the Second World War; Nina Wardleworth, 'The documentary as a site of commemoration: filming the Free French dissidents from the French Antilles', *European Review of History*, 25.2 (2018), pp. 374-391 (pp. 384-385).

⁶⁵ La cérémonie commémorative de l'appel du 18 juin', *L'ordre de la libération*, n.d. <https://www.ordredelaliberation.fr/fr/la-ceremonie-commemorative-de-lappel-du-18-juin> [accessed 6 August 2025].

the August 1944 Provence Landings, as well as at Les Invalides in Paris.⁶⁶ The significance of this plaque will be discussed later within this chapter.

The day before this event, on 1 June, *Parcours de dissidents* (2006), a documentary honouring the *Dissidence* directed by Euzhan Palcy (this documentary will be analysed in the fourth chapter), was screened at the Elysée Palace;⁶⁷ it was attended by President Hollande, numerous government ministers, and a small number of *dissidents*.⁶⁸ Demonstrating the low profile of these screenings, I was unable to find if there were any organisations, associations or individuals who had been campaigning for these screenings, whether they had experienced any resistance, and ultimately who had decided to give such prominence to the documentary in the commemorative schedule. In addition, I was unable to find any press coverage leading up to the events which mentioned these screenings, demonstrating the limited visibility, both in metropolitan France and the Antilles. Therefore, despite the significance of an event dedicated to the *Dissidence* within metropolitan France, ultimately the ceremony and screening did little to disseminate the history of the *Dissidence* to the public, maintaining it at the peripheries of national resistance and liberation narratives.

On 6 June 2014, the documentary was again screened, this time at a commemorative ceremony in Normandy, at the landing beach of Ouistreham. The screening took place in memory of Guy Cornély, a *dissident* who served on the only French warship to take part in D-Day.⁶⁹ Unlike the previous examples, the presence of numerous world leaders gave the documentary an official, transnational acknowledgement. This high-profile screening also meant that for the first time the *dissidents'* stories were covered by evening news programmes on the three main French television channels.⁷⁰ Each of these reports featured clips from the documentary, showcasing the *dissidents'* individual experiences and maintaining them at the centre of the history. However, in his commemorative speech, President Hollande did not mention the attending *dissidents* by name, nor did he reference the *Dissidence* or the Antilles generally.

⁶⁶ Wardleworth, pp. 384-385.

⁶⁷ *Parcours de dissidents*, dir. by Euzhan Palcy (France, 2005); Wardleworth, pp. 384-385.

⁶⁸ Wardleworth, pp. 384-385.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.385.

This significantly reduced commemorative impact and established the purely symbolic nature of this invitation.⁷¹

The decision to feature this documentary, both within the ceremony, as well as within the news reports, highlights the paucity of images and archives which could be used, as well as the reducing number of *dissidents* to be interviewed. As will be demonstrated throughout this chapter, this evidences the importance of testimonies and documentaries in acting as visual memorials for the *Dissidence*, and in disseminating this forgotten history. It also emphasises the damaging nature of having waited over sixty years to acknowledge the *Dissidence*, with many *dissidents* having passed away, unable to share their experiences and contribute towards further visibility.

Due to the significance of the 2014 commemorations in signalling a recognition of the *Dissidence* in the Metropole, I contacted George Pau-Langevin, the *ministre des Outre-mer* in 2014. Not only did Pau-Langevin lead the 2 June ceremony honouring the *dissidents*, but was given her position as someone from Guadeloupe. However, her response, in which she stated she would be unable to aid my research as the 2014 commemorative events were a while ago, was telling of the disinterest in commemoration related to the *Dissidence*.⁷² Despite the *Dissidence* being essential in understanding the Antilles' war experience, Pau-Langevin's email revealed a key reason why the *Dissidence* continues to be marginalised. This disinterest is also evident in the failure of the French state to integrate the *Dissidence* into the numerous annual ceremonies since 2014: no *dissidents* have attended ceremonies dedicated to the Resistance or the FFL, nor has the term *Dissidence* been widely used.

The 2009 and 2014 official ceremonies were missed chances to embed this history into understandings of the war. By 2009, many *dissidents* had died, making these events rare opportunities to gather survivors to share their stories and seek recognition. With more passing away and younger generations disconnected due to the history's absence from curricula, annual ceremonies

⁷¹ François Hollande, *Déclaration de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, sur le 70e anniversaire du Débarquement de Normandie, à Ouistreham (Calvados) le 06 Juin 2014* (Ouistreham, 2014) < <https://www.elysee.fr/francois-hollande/2014/06/06/declaration-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la-republique-sur-le-70e-anniversaire-du-debarquement-de-normandie-a-ouistreham-calvados-le-06-juin-2014> > [accessed 7 June 2025].

⁷² George Pau-Langevin, email to the author, 9 February 2025.

and the broader commemorative framework face dwindling audiences able to value this history and pressure authorities for genuine commemoration.

A further difficulty facing the *Dissidence* is that although there has been significant efforts to implement recognition of the colonial and imperial dimensions of the war and the role of empire, the emphasis is placed on Africa, especially the value of North Africa to the FFL. Rachid Bouchareb's film *Indigènes* (2006) is an example of cultural work which has acted as a significant virtual site of commemoration to soldiers from North Africa. Although the film does not highlight the role of the FFL, it has successfully promoted awareness of the contribution of a hitherto forgotten contingent of soldiers. A parallel can also be drawn to *Parcours de dissidents*, as on 5 September 2006, President Jacques Chirac attended a private screening of the film in attendance from Bouchareb and the main actor, Jamel Debbouze.⁷³ The film has also led to present-day changes; the closing credits of the film stated that despite a ruling that war pensions should be paid in full, successive French administrations since 2002 failed to honour this. It was only after the film's release that the government policy was changed to bring foreign combatant pensions into line with what French veterans are paid.⁷⁴ A motivation behind the state's decision to place emphasis on North and Sub-Saharan Africa could be in understanding state commemoration as a powerful political tool. As the Antilles remain *départements* of France, the geo-political motivations in building and nourishing relations with ex-African colonies, do not apply to the Antilles. In understanding these motivations, we can recognise the incorporation of colonial and imperial dimensions within the French state's commemorative decisions, which often exclude the role of those from the Antilles, as a way to combat the deterioration of France's relations with its former colonies. This can be exemplified across various 2024 anniversary events, such as that of the August 1944 Provence landings, where various heads of state and representatives from over nine African countries attended.⁷⁵ Despite the

⁷³ Jean-Dominique Merchet, '«Indigènes» fait craquer Chirac', *Libération*, 25 September 2006 < https://www.liberation.fr/evenement/2006/09/25/indigenes-fait-craquer-chirac_52394/> [accessed 18 August 2025].

⁷⁴ John Lichfield, 'Film moves Chirac to back down over war pensions', *The Independent*, 26 September 2006 < <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/film-moves-chirac-to-back-down-over-war-pensions-6231329.html>> [accessed 18 August 2025].

⁷⁵ 'Cérémonies du 80e anniversaire du débarquement de Provence', Élysée, 15 August 2024. < <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2024/08/15/ceremonies-du-80e-anniversaire-du-debarquement-de-provence>> [accessed 21 February 2025].

dissidents' key roles in the Provence landings, since 2014, Africa has been mentioned thirty-five times in key anniversary speeches as opposed to twice for the Antilles.⁷⁶ This includes 2014 where the Antilles were not mentioned once, highlighting the superficial nature of recognition earlier in the year. This exhibits virtuous circles of visibility; once something, for example the role of North African troops following the release of *Indigènes*, gains prominence, that leads to more visibility and incorporation into commemorative initiatives.

Although throughout the 80th anniversary cycle the Antilles are often mentioned in speeches, or on the official state website, there has been scarce use of the term *Dissidence*.⁷⁷ However, one example of recent state acknowledgement of the *Dissidence* came on 8 May 2023, when Patricia Mirallès, *ministre déléguée chargée de la Mémoire et des Anciens Combattants*, spoke of the 'outre-mer [qui] se distinguent dans les trois océans et notamment dans les Antilles et en Guyane par la Dissidence opposée à Vichy'.⁷⁸ A recent article, published on the *Mission Liberation* website also directly mentions the *Dissidence*.⁷⁹ This article discusses in depth the role of the *Dissidence* during the war; however emphasis is placed on how the Vichy regime became a motivator for *dissidents* to join the FFL and their resistance on home soil, rather than their experiences and role in liberating France. In pushing these specific narratives (which will be explored in the following chapter), the state does not disseminate a message which emphasises the importance of the *Dissidence* in liberating France, thereby failing to incorporate this group into the liberation narrative. Although these direct mentions of the *Dissidence* signal a shift in recognition,

⁷⁶ François Hollande, 'Déclaration de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, en hommage aux combattants français et alliés du Débarquement de Provence, au Mont-Faron le 15 août 2014', (Mont-Faron, 2014). < <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/192081-francois-hollande-15082014-hommage-combattants-debarquement-provence> > [accessed 22 February 2025]; Emmanuel Macron, 'Déclaration de M. Emmanuel Macron, Président de la République, en hommage aux combattants du débarquement de Provence du 15 août 1944, à Saint-Raphaël le 15 août 2019', (Saint-Raphaël, 2019). < <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/269594-emmanuel-macron-15082019-debarquement-de-provence> > [accessed 21 February 2025]; Emmanuel Macron, 'Discours du Président de la République lors de la cérémonie des 80 ans de la libération et le débarquement de Provence', (Boulouris, 2024). < <https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-23159-fr.pdf> > [accessed 21 February 2025].

⁷⁷ Macron, '80 ans de la libération et le débarquement de Provence'; 'Cérémonies du 80e anniversaire du débarquement de Provence', Élysée.

⁷⁸ 'Commémoration du 8 mai 1945; Une belle cérémonie pour se souvenir', *Le Petit Journal*, 9 May 2023, < <https://advance.lexis.com/document/?> > [accessed 8 January 2025].

⁷⁹ Géraud Létang, 'La dissidence antillaise, récit de Géraud Létang', *Ministère des Armées*, n.d. < <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/mission-liberation/lespace-enseignants-mission-liberation/regards-dhistoriens-liberation/dissidence-antillaise> > [accessed 13 February 2025].

these two examples do not undo years of state neglect, nor do they incorporate the *Dissidence* into the national resistance and liberation narratives.

Whilst addressing the importance of the current 80th anniversary commemorative cycle, I wish to further highlight the role of commemorative dates in constructing French collective memory and the national narratives. Commemorative dates are key in building collective memory, especially 8 May and 11 November. In France these are national holidays and widely commemorated through events which further increase the visibility of said dates and those the commemorations honour. Despite this established calendar of annual anniversaries, it was not until 18 June 2011 that representatives of the *Dissidence* were invited to an anniversary event in metropolitan France, demonstrating their continued marginalisation. Since this date, within the Metropole, the *Dissidence* has not been an integral aspect of these annual events. These anniversary events have seldom mentioned the *Dissidence*, or emphasised their role in the war, which ensures they remain on the peripheries of French collective memory. Although recent anniversary cycles have highlighted a disparity in (de)colonial studies, emphasising the importance of African colonies, they have failed to properly recognise the significance of the Antilles.

The extent to which the *Dissidence* remains neglected in state-led ceremonies demonstrates the challenges it faces in gaining commemorative space. The state holds commemorative agency, therefore as it continues to employ selective and superficial commemoration, the *Dissidence* struggles to gain visibility.

Local ceremonies

The ceremonies discussed thus far have largely taken place within the Metropole, or organised from Paris. However, the literature review demonstrated the critical nature of local commemorations in pushing forward centralised commemorative policies and recognition. It was primarily following the 2009 official recognition of the *Dissidence* that local authorities in the Antilles began to commemorate the *Dissidence*. However, these ceremonies still remain rare with limited interest.

The following case studies demonstrate local interest as well as the limited visibility of said events. On 28 June 2021, an inaugural of multiple information panels attached to the railings of the Fort-de-France Prefecture took place, featuring *dissident* fact files and an introduction to the *Dissidence*.⁸⁰ A day later, the information and photos featured in these panels were shown in a conference launching this temporary exhibition.⁸¹ Although attaching the panels to the Prefecture increased visibility and enabled the general public to interact with this commemoration, the visibility was confined to a small area of Martinique, with only regional newspapers covering the event. Even within the current 80th anniversary cycle, despite multiple local commemorative events attended by the local authorities and members of the military, the only visibility found of these events is through a limited number of Facebook posts, therefore revealing the challenge in gaining media coverage and ultimately the failure to raise awareness of the *Dissidence*.⁸² Although local commemoration reveals a desire to recognise the *Dissidence*, these examples highlight the confinement of this commemoration to the Antilles which significantly reduces impact and restricts awareness of the *Dissidence* to the local area.

As of 16 August 2024, the Guadeloupe prefecture announced the construction of a memorial dedicated to the *Dissidence* in the town of Trois-Rivières.⁸³ The announcement date coincided with a key date of interest to the *Dissidence* and the war more widely, the 80th anniversary of the Provence landings.⁸⁴ Although

⁸⁰ Daniel Betis, 'L'histoire de la dissidence en Martinique, s'affiche sur les grilles de la préfecture', *Franceinfo*, 8 July 2021 < <https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/martinique/l-histoire-de-la-dissidence-en-martinique-s-affiche-sur-les-grilles-de-la-prefecture-1053121.html> > [accessed 21 February 2025].

⁸¹ Préfet de la Martinique, '#Inauguration | Exposition "Mémoires de Vie - Mémoires de Guerre" réalisée par Sylvain Demange, photographe, et Sylvie Meslien, historienne.', Facebook, 29 June 2021 < <https://www.facebook.com/groups/601095623763664/permalink/1014897149050174/> > [accessed 23 February 2025].

⁸² Jean Claude Lacaille, 'Ce mardi 18 juin, une cérémonie a eu lieu au Morne-Rouge, dans le cadre de l'appel du 18 juin 1940.', Facebook, 18 June 2024 < <https://www.facebook.com/groups/601095623763664/permalink/1677063359500213/> > [accessed 23 February 2025]; Sylvain Demange, '1940-1943 Résistances et dissidences aux Antilles et en Guyane Mémoires de guerre, Mémoires de vie', Facebook, 20 June 2024 < <https://www.facebook.com/groups/601095623763664/permalink/1677032776169938/> > [accessed 23 February 2025].

⁸³ Olivier Lancien and Carole Petit, 'Création d'un mémorial de la dissidence à Trois-Rivières : l'un des derniers dissidents guadeloupéens est décédé jeudi', *Franceinfo*, 16 August 2024 < <https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/guadeloupe/creation-d-un-memorial-de-la-dissidence-a-trois-rivieres-le-dernier-dissident-guadeloupeen-est-decede-hier-1514408.html> > [accessed 4 December 2024].

⁸⁴ Pierre Emmanuel, 'Le 80e anniversaire du débarquement en Provence commémoré en Guadeloupe', *RCI web*, 15 August 2024 < <https://rci.fm/deuxiles/node/5152013> > [accessed 21 February].

this date is not a national holiday, and is less well-known than others related to the Second World War, the choice of date demonstrates the relation of the *Dissidence* and their involvement in these landings, making them a focus point of commemorations within the Antilles. This ceremony was attended by local military and government representatives, with the *Préfet* of Basse-Terre giving a speech highlighting the importance of the *Dissidence* in the liberation of France and their role in the Provence landings.⁸⁵ However, as highlighted throughout this section, the confinement of coverage to the Antilles demonstrates the continued marginalisation of the *Dissidence* within France's commemorative landscape. The impact of the memorial itself will be discussed in the following section.

If state authorities within a region do not recognise their history, this exponentially increases the difficulties in obtaining recognition, locally and nationally. This is the case in Guyane, where despite a small number of *dissidents* originating from this French territory, as well as the shared memory of life under Vichy, the region is uninvolved in *Dissidence* commemoration. This disinterest was highlighted through my contact with Gérald Urso, the ONAC (Office national des anciens combattants) representative in Guyane, who advised me to contact representatives in the Antilles as my research into the *Dissidence* did not relate to Guyane.⁸⁶ As will be emphasised throughout this thesis, the state (including local authorities) maintain commemorative agency, and therefore, without their support, individual discourses struggle to establish themselves within national narratives. This is especially challenging for colonial narratives, which must contend with the state's historic reluctance to frame colonial history as French history.

An example of these challenges can be seen with the decision to cancel the channel *France Ô*, in the summer of 2020.⁸⁷ This was a free-to-air state television channel featuring programming from French overseas departments and territories in metropolitan France. Due to its cancellation, local commemorative events are no longer viewable from within metropolitan France, making it increasingly difficult for the diasporic population to engage with

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Gérald Urso, email to the author, 22 November 2024.

⁸⁷ 'France Ô disparaît des écrans ce dimanche 23 août', *Franceinfo*, 23 August 2020 <<https://la1ere.franceinfo.fr/france-o-disparait-ecrans-ce-dimanche-23-aout-864198.html>> [accessed 5 August 2025].

commemorative events, thereby limiting *Dissidence* visibility further. Sarah Legendry, daughter to Martinican parents who grew up in Paris and now works in Second World War commemoration, links non-awareness to a huge challenge facing the *Dissidence*: a lack of interest and engagement.⁸⁸ She emphasises that 'il faut aussi donner envie aux personnes de venir, de connaître, je pense que vraiment que ce soit ici en métropole, mais même aux Antilles, tu dis le mot Dissidence pour beaucoup on ne sait pas ce que c'est'.⁸⁹ The lack of awareness within metropolitan France, and even locally within the Antilles, is extremely damaging for the *Dissidence* and its struggle to become part of French collective memory.

While recent decades have witnessed incremental steps towards recognising the role of the *Dissidence*, these efforts have remained largely superficial and geographically limited. The restricted nature of these commemorations, often confined to local initiatives, combined with the absence of broader state-led integration into key commemorative dates, reflects an ongoing reluctance to fully embed the *Dissidence* into collective memory.

Physical sites of commemoration

Physical sites of commemoration play a crucial role in shaping collective memory, providing tangible spaces where historical narratives are anchored and disseminated to the public. The first memorial to be dedicated to the *Dissidence* was inaugurated on the British controlled island of Dominica (to which many *dissidents* fled) on 10 August 1947, making the British the only authorities to official recognise the *Dissidence* until President Sarkozy's visit to the Antilles in 2009.⁹⁰

Despite the promise made by Sarkozy in 2009, and in 2014 when George Pau-Langevin announced that a memorial would be constructed on the Quai Henry IV in Paris, before August 2025, there were no memorials dedicated solely to the *Dissidence*, within the Antilles or in metropolitan France.⁹¹ This is

⁸⁸ Sarah Legendry, interview with the author, 25 February 2025.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Antonia Wimbush, 'La Dissidence in Gisèle Pineau's œuvre', *Journal of Romance Studies*, 20.1 (2020), pp. 159-178 (p. 160) <https://doi.org/10.3828/jrs.2020.8>.

⁹¹ Sarkozy, 2009; Wardleworth, pp. 384-385; Wimbush, p. 160.

demonstrative of selective recognition, which in turns disseminates a narrow and limited narrative to the French public (and wider). I employ the term selective recognition throughout this thesis but in using this term, I am also referring to *Dissidence* commemoration as both uneven and superficial; recognition is often uneven as the *Dissidence* is mentioned on some occasions, and then within the same commemorative cycle, is once again ignored. The recognition is also superficial: there have been ceremonies, speeches and plaque inaugurations, but more costly and longer-term projects dedicated to the *Dissidence* that have been promised are yet to come to fruition, with the exception of the Guadeloupe memorial. This is telling of a disinterest in the *Dissidence*, not deemed worthy of a longer-term commitment and considerably more resources.

As discussed, in 2014, the French state formally acknowledged the *Dissidence's* contributions through a ceremony in Paris. Four surviving *dissidents* were awarded the *Légion d'Honneur*, and a plaque commemorating their sacrifices was installed at Mont-Faron, as well as at Les Invalides in Paris.⁹² The small plaque, inaugurated in the courtyard of Les Invalides (France's army museum), reads: 'to the Dissidents of Guadeloupe, of Martinique and Guyane, refusing defeat, they braved the ocean to join the Free French and fought like heroes to save the country'. However, questions remain about the depth and sincerity of this commemorative act. Although the introduction of this plaque, the first addressing the *Dissidence* within the Metropole, acts as a permanent commemorative symbol and inscribes the history of the *Dissidence* onto that of the French army; due to its placement, it remains relatively invisible to the public. Having been installed within the Les Invalides courtyard, members of the public must pay to access the grounds. On accessing this area, the plaque occupies a small corner, thereby significantly reducing its visibility. The peripheral nature of the plaque reduces impact, erasing commemorative potential and continuing the marginalisation of the *Dissidence*. The plaque therefore fails to act as an impactful site of commemoration.

⁹² Wardleworth, pp. 384-385.

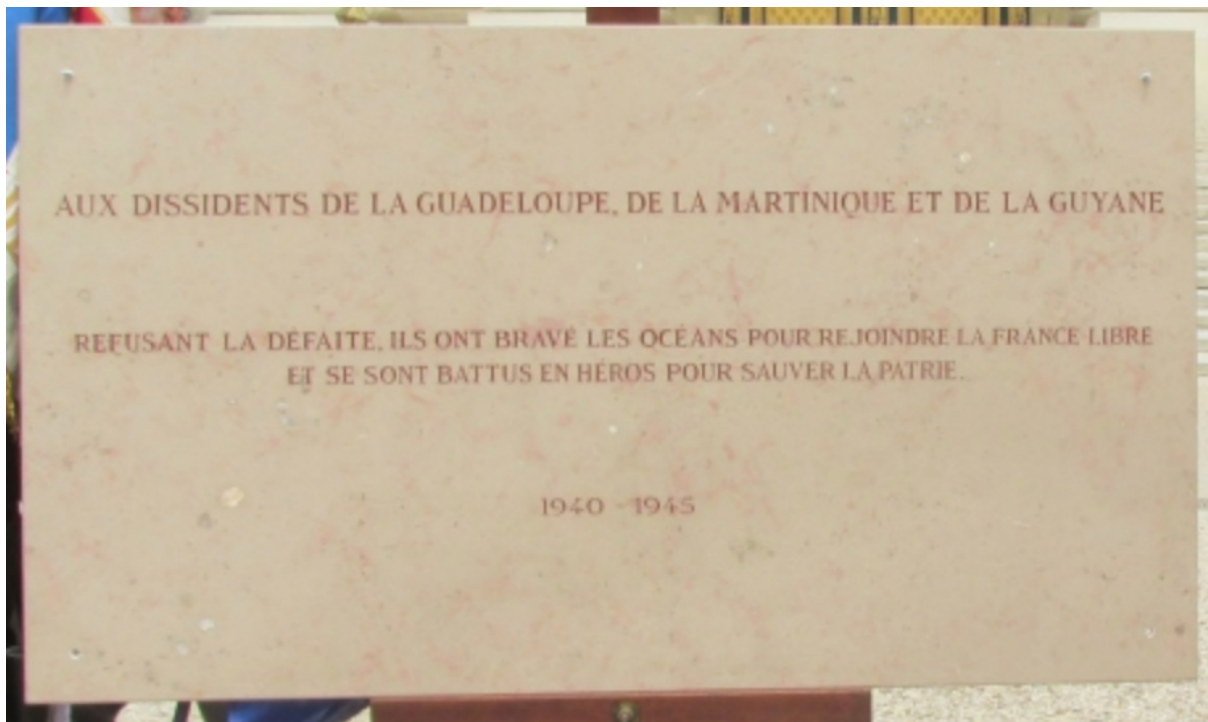


Figure 1 - Les Invalides plaque⁹³

The problematic placing of this plaque draws parallels with the plaque inaugurated on 17 October 2001, forty years after events which led to the 17 Octobre 1961 massacre, resulting in up to 200 deaths of Algerians (the state has formally recognised 90 deaths, but historians estimate between 100 and 200).⁹⁴ Although the plaque acts as formal acknowledgement from the state and inscribes this event onto Paris' landscape, there has been controversy surrounding its placement. In choosing to place the plaque at the opposite side of the bridge to where the French police were during the massacre, the state distances itself from the tragic events in which it played in a key role. The plaque merely states that many Algerians were killed during the violent repression of a peaceful demonstration on October 17, 1961, but by avoiding any mention of the French police or state as the perpetrators, its vague phrasing minimizes responsibility and fails to truly recognise or honour the victims.⁹⁵ While the existence of these plaques is important, simply installing a plaque is

⁹³ 'Les dissidents antillo-guyanais mis à l'honneur pour la première fois à Paris', *Franceinfo*, 2 June 2014, < <https://la1ere.franceinfo.fr/2014/06/02/les-dissidents-antillo-guyanais-mis-l-honneur-pour-la-premiere-fois-paris-157681.html> > [accessed 19 June 2025].

⁹⁴ Jim House and Neil MacMaster, *Paris 1961 : Algerians, state terror, and memory*, (Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 167.

⁹⁵ Christophe Gracieux, 'Inauguration d'une plaque commémorative dédiée aux Algériens tués le 17 octobre 1961', *Lumni*, 17 October 2001 <https://enseignants.lumni.fr/fiche-media/00000001887/inauguration-d-une-plaque-commemorative-dediee-aux-algeriens-tues-le-17-octobre-1961.html> [accessed 30 March 2025].

not evidence that these histories are being remembered and woven into national narratives in a meaningful way.

One example of a local site of commemoration, sponsored in part by the state, is the stele that was inaugurated as a tribute to Martinican *dissidents* on 18 June 2010, in the commune of Trois-Îlets.⁹⁶ The stele represents a meaningful local effort to honour the *Dissidence*, linking the commune's *dissidents* to the broader narrative of resistance, seen through the choice of date. Erected in collaboration with the town's Veterans Association, its placement on the waterfront offers both a site of remembrance and reflection.⁹⁷ The monument highlights several *dissidents* and their wartime experiences, underscoring the town's commitment to preserving this history. Yet its small scale and discreet location limit its visibility and commemorative impact, confining recognition largely to a local audience. Moreover, by honouring only a short list of *dissidents*, it fails to convey the wider scale of the movement. While its influence may not extend nationally, the stele nonetheless marks an important step in memorialising the *Dissidence*.

⁹⁶ Wimbush, p. 160.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*



Figure 2- Trois-Îlets stele⁹⁸

In Martinique, an area titled l'Allée de la Dissidence was inaugurated on 8 May 2022, where three plaques were installed detailing the role of the *Dissidence*, including wartime experience within the Antilles and the decision to join the FFL.⁹⁹ Despite being able to find a Facebook post featuring the inauguration of

⁹⁸ 'Une Stèle à la mémoire des dissidents', *France-Antilles*, 16 June 2010, <
<https://www.martinique.franceantilles.fr/actualite/faitsdivers/une-stele-a-la-memoire-des-dissidents-149023.php>> [accessed 5 July 2025].

⁹⁹ Préfet de la Martinique, 'L'inauguration de l'Allée de la Dissidence', Facebook, 8 May 2022 <
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/601095623763664/permalink/1209476562925564/>> [accessed 5 January 2025].

these plaques, I was unable to find information which showed what these plaques say, again confining their commemorative potential to those who are able to visit in person.¹⁰⁰ Once again, the date chosen for this inauguration is important as it inscribes this commemorative event within the calendar of commemoration celebrated annually across France. The location of this alley is also crucial as, especially in contrast to the plaque inaugurated at Les Invalides or the stele at Trois-Îlets, this is an area that is highly frequented by tourists and locals. The visibility of these plaques enables the stories of the *Dissidence* to become more widely known, even to populations outside the Antilles. It also hopes to engage local populations as a clear act of incorporation into their landscape, thus generating interest locally. However, we must consider that although tourists may read these plaques, the numbers of those outside of the Antilles understanding the importance of the *Dissidence* will remain low, due to the limitations of plaques in embedding historical understanding and engaging those with a disinterest or lack of awareness.

The construction of a memorial dedicated to the *Dissidence* in Trois-Rivières, announced on 16 August 2024 and inaugurated on 27 June 2025 by the Guadeloupe prefecture, marked a significant development in the recognition of this neglected history.¹⁰¹ Supported by the French state through the Ministère des Armées and ONAC, as well as Conseil départemental de la Guadeloupe and la Ville de Trois-Rivières, this initiative signalled a clear local desire to incorporate the *Dissidence* into the physical and commemorative landscape of Guadeloupe to acknowledge the sacrifices of the *dissidents* who left from those shores.¹⁰² At the inauguration, the importance of ‘ce lieu symbolique [qui] gravera dans la mémoire de tous, le souvenir des dissidents partis du bord de mer de Trois-Rivières rejoindre la lutte en Europe’ was acknowledged.¹⁰³ While the memorial serves as an enduring tribute, its location in Trois-Rivières limits its visibility as it is unlikely to attract significant numbers of visitors from outside Guadeloupe, including the Metropole, thus reducing its potential commemorative impact. Nevertheless, by physically embedding the *Dissidence*

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Lancien and Petit; Thierry Philippe and Ludivine Guiolet, ‘Patricia Mirallès entame sa visite en Guadeloupe par l’inauguration du mémorial de la dissidence à Trois-Rivières’, *Franceinfo*, 27 June 2025 <https://la1ere.franceinfo.fr/guadeloupe/patricia-miralles-entame-sa-visite-en-guadeloupe-par-l-inauguration-du-memorial-de-la-dissidence-a-trois-rivieres-1599807.html> [accessed 2 August 2025].

¹⁰² Lancien and Petit.

¹⁰³ Philippe and Guiolet.

into the local landscape, this memorial provides a vital and tangible recognition of their contributions, ensuring a legacy that transcends superficial commemorative events as have been seen thus far.

The failure to address their promises also relates to a lack of lobbying within the Metropole. As discussed throughout this chapter, an interview with Martinican descendent, Sarah Legendry, exemplified the extent to which the Antillean diaspora have little awareness of the *Dissidence*.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, without awareness, this group cannot apply sufficient pressure on public authorities to make good on their promises. Palcy herself recounts that only many years of sustained lobbying meant that government officials were willing to screen her documentary within their ministry or organisation.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, if a public figure (as the first Black woman to win an Oscar as a director) struggled to gain recognition, then the sparse numbers interested within the Metropole would struggle further.

While recent commemorative efforts mark important progress in recognising the contributions of the *Dissidence* and offering a permanent site of recognition within the local landscape, the broader patterns of uneven and superficial commemoration remain evident. The limited visibility and peripheral placement of plaques and smaller local memorials, coupled with unfulfilled state promises for larger-scale projects, continue to restrict the *Dissidence's* integration into France's national war narrative.

Museums and pedagogic spaces

In recent years, there have been increased efforts to incorporate the *Dissidence* into France's commemorative and pedagogic landscape through the addition of plaques, information panels, and exhibitions within existing museums and memorials. While these initiatives reflect a growing acknowledgment of the *Dissidence's* contributions, their placement within broader narratives, often dominated by other colonial or metropolitan perspectives, limits their visibility and, consequently, their impact.

¹⁰⁴ Legendry, interview.

¹⁰⁵ Euzhan Palcy, 'parcours de dissidents', n.d. < <https://www.euzhanpalcy.net/the-journey-of-the-dissidents> > [accessed 23 February 2025].

One example of a museum which, following the 2014 commemoration, added information and a commemorative plaque dedicated to the *Dissidence*, is the Mémorial du Mont-Faron, which commemorates the August 1944 Provence landings.¹⁰⁶ This addition was announced following the screening of *Parcours de dissidents* at the Ministère des Armées in 2011.¹⁰⁷ Although recognition of the *Dissidence* is visible at multiple points around the museum, these additions are telling of the delayed and limited acknowledgement of the *Dissidence* as the memorial was first inaugurated in 1964.¹⁰⁸ Adding them in this way also suggests that their inclusion does not fundamentally change the overall narrative that is being told through these spaces, thus defining the *Dissidence* as a supplementary, rather than integral narrative within this historic event. In the atrium of the museum, President Hollande's 2014 commemoration speech, which cites the term 'Antillean Dissidence', is broadcast.¹⁰⁹ Through testimonies, the stories of various *dissidents* can be heard, with particular emphasis placed on motivations to engage, and the place of women in the war; this is one of the few examples of recognition specific to female members of the *Dissidence*. The *Dissidence* is also presented as part of a guided tour of the museum, as well as mentioned in plaques emphasising the colonial nature of the Provence landings.¹¹⁰ Although these additions demonstrate an acknowledgement of the *Dissidence*, the emphasis placed primarily within the museum's narratives on African colonies, mirrored in all recent commemorations of the Provence landings, reduces visibility and limits impact.¹¹¹ Although these additions establish an increase in commemorative interest of the *Dissidence* and a state acknowledgement, as the museum is not entirely dedicated to the *Dissidence*, nor does it explore other aspects of their wartime experiences, it does not publicise the true importance of the *Dissidence* in the liberation of France.

A further example of state commemoration and attempts to disseminate the role of the *Dissidence* to a wider public is the 2011 ONAC exhibition *La dissidence en Martinique et en Guadeloupe* which was produced following a request from the

¹⁰⁶ Wardleworth, p. 384.

¹⁰⁷ Palcy, <<https://www.euzhanpalcy.net/the-journey-of-the-dissidents>>

¹⁰⁸ Ferrarini.

¹⁰⁹ Rémi Commin, email to the author, 4 December 2024.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Direction de la mémoire du patrimoine et des archives.¹¹² The inauguration of this exhibition coincided with the *L'année des Outre-mer*, a year dedicated to celebrating the culture of France's overseas territories. The exhibition, made up of twenty-three information panels, was circulated across metropolitan France and several overseas territories.¹¹³ While it was 'prêtée gracieusement dans tous les départements français, de métropole et d'outre-mer... [et] est à la disposition de tous sur simple demande (préfectures, mairies, établissements scolaires, associations)', the little-known history of the *Dissidence* meant that many parts of France did not request it, limiting its reach.¹¹⁴ The regions that initially requested the exhibition illustrate where visibility was concentrated:¹¹⁵ Tulle, Orléans, Fort-de-France, Caen, Saint-Étienne, and Rodez.¹¹⁶ Notably, Fort-de-France was the only region to request the exhibition within the Antilles, demonstrating limited local interest. Despite the touring nature of the exhibition increasing visibility, and enabling a wider public to engage, its temporary format meant that a limited number of people would be able to attend within the available dates. As Toureille, in reference to the peripheral nature of the *Dissidence* and the weaknesses of temporary exhibitions, points out, 'le nombre d'entrées reste aléatoire et donc l'impact incertain', therefore making a permanent addition or a museum dedicated solely to the *Dissidence*, a necessary tool for inscribing the group into French collective memory.¹¹⁷

Until 2023, a work promising to be a large-scale synthesis, capable at arousing interest and disseminating a comprehensive account of the importance of the *Dissidence*, was lacking. In 2023, sponsored by the Ministère des armées, two French historians, Sylvie Meslien and Eliane Sempaire, and a French photographer, Sylvain Demange, released a book entitled *1940-1943 : résistances et dissidences aux Antilles et en Guyane : mémoires de guerre - mémoires de vie*. This state-sponsored project promised to act as an important step in the efforts to incorporate the *Dissidence* into the French war narrative. Facebooks posts demonstrate local interest and excitement, showing how many Antilleans feel

¹¹² 'La Dissidence en Martinique et en Guadeloupe 1940-1945 (exposition)', *Fondation de la France libre*, 17 June 2011 <https://www.france-libre.net/dissidence-martinique-guadeloupe/> [accessed 22 February 2025].

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ I was unable to find further information about other regions where the exhibition was perhaps exhibited.

¹¹⁶ 'La Dissidence en Martinique et en Guadeloupe 1940-1945 (exposition)'.

¹¹⁷ Toureille, p. 75.

connected to this history and invested in the prospect of deserved recognition. A local resident talks about how they were ‘très heureux et émus de pouvoir remettre les livres aux dix familles martiniquaises de dissidents!’. However, for multiple reasons, the book fails to demonstrate the importance of the *Dissidence*'s wartime role, and does not appear to have been a project of care. As well as errors throughout (not limited to grammar, repeated paragraphs, lack of consistency in format and missing information from *dissident* fact files), this book, like other official commemorative events, does not highlight the war-time role of the *dissidents*, instead focussing on life under Vichy. Although there is a section detailing individual *dissidents*, unlike the documentaries mentioned previously, the section does not demonstrate personal experiences or emotions in the way that the documentaries succeed in doing, therefore failing to centre the narrative of the *Dissidence* around the *dissidents* themselves. This book therefore forsakes to challenge the dominant liberation and resistance narrative, failing to highlight the impact of the wartime sacrifices of the *dissidents* and their role in liberating France, thus limiting its commemorative potential.

While indicative of growing recognition, these examples ultimately underscore the limitations of such initiatives when they remain peripheral or temporary. The recurring pattern of belated acknowledgements, often integrated into broader narratives, reflects a reluctance to position the *Dissidence* as a central component of France's liberation.

School curriculum

A further tool used by the state to build French collective memory and a national narrative is education. Despite reforms having been made in 2008 and 2010, following substantial pressure to introduce more locally driven themes into the syllabus, the educational program is still heavily metropolitan centric.¹¹⁸ Until the 1980s there was no mention of the *Dissidence* in the French school curriculum, and the few historical accounts of the period which existed did not mention the role of the *Dissidence*, instead focussing on life under Vichy.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Brigitte Brault, ‘L'histoire de Martinique : comment est-elle enseignée’, *Franceinfo*, 11 August 2020 <<https://la1ere.franceinfo.fr/martinique/histoire-martinique-comment-est-elle-enseignee-860194.html>> [accessed 19 April 2025].

¹¹⁹ Toureille, p. 70.

Through school visits from several *dissidents* themselves, young Antillean students have learnt about the *Dissidence*. One example is Edmond Sainsily who in Guadeloupe remembers his visits to the schools of Sainte-Anne, Saint-François, Abymes, Trois-Rivières and Basse-Terre.¹²⁰ Additionally, the preparation of the national competition of the Resistance and Deportation, which was created in 1961 with the goal of ‘perpétuer chez les jeunes Français la mémoire de la Résistance et de la déportation afin de leur permettre de s'en inspirer’, has also led to research on the *Dissidence* that was subsequently disseminated: the most well-known being the 2005 creation by Saint-James high school in Martinique of a website dedicated to a work on the *Dissidence*.¹²¹ Although these steps are integral to involving young people, engagement remains limited to a select number of schools within the local region, confining *Dissidence* commemoration to the Antilles.

Palcy’s sustained lobbying not only meant her documentary was shown in numerous events, but in 2012, the Académie de Paris produced a comprehensive set of teaching resources for secondary-school history teachers, based on her documentary.¹²² On 1 May 2014, the ministère de l’Éducation nationale revised these teaching resources and made them and the documentary freely available to secondary-school teachers, both in metropolitan France and in overseas territories.¹²³ However, these tools, and the screening of the documentary is not a compulsory element of the curriculum, therefore reducing impact and the likelihood that teachers would choose to employ these pedagogic tools. An interview with Sarah Legendry highlighted this unlikelihood and the general lack of awareness of the *Dissidence*.¹²⁴ As someone that works in the Heritage sector and remains connected to Martinican society and culture, yet knows very little about the *Dissidence*, it is demonstrative of the extent to which people are unaware of the *Dissidence*. It also highlights that even in Paris, a region with the highest percentage of

¹²⁰ Toureille, p. 73.

¹²¹ Toureille, p. 73 ; ‘Concours national de la résistance et de la déportation’, n.d. https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concours_national_de_la_r%C3%A9sistance_et_de_la_d%C3%A9portation [accessed 12 May 2025].

¹²² Wardleworth, p. 384.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Legendry, interview.

Antillean diaspora, these resources are clearly not utilised in schools, failing to challenge the continued marginalisation of the *Dissidence*.¹²⁵

Sarah also links this to the challenge facing many families who came to metropolitan France: receiving a high level of education. She told me that within her extended family, it is only her generation that have attended university, making it even more difficult to gain awareness of neglected histories when they are not a compulsory element of the school curriculum.¹²⁶ This also demonstrates the importance of commemorative events and ways to engage a wider audience, such as media coverage. However, due to the lack of commemorative events in the Metropole, and with the cancellation of the channel France Ô, communities within metropolitan France remain unaware of the *Dissidence*. If communities remain unaware, a lack of interest, and therefore a paucity of engagement means insufficient pressure is applied to challenge the state, who ultimately hold the agency in changing commemorative frameworks and national narratives.

The current commemorative cycle to mark the 80th anniversary of the Liberation of France (2023-2025) has seen the state promote engagement with young people through *projets scolaires*. Four relating to the *Dissidence* have taken place within the Antilles (three in Martinique and one in Guadeloupe).¹²⁷ Although these projects feature outreach work with metropolitan France, such as researching the *Dissidence* and teaching metropolitan French pupils from Caen about the history, these projects have limited commemorative impact outside the classroom.¹²⁸ Funding from the state demonstrated a desire to engage young people in the history of the *Dissidence*, but funding primarily came from within the Antilles (local departmental archives, libraries and ONAC), demonstrating a local, rather than national desire.¹²⁹ The importance of Palty's documentary, as seen throughout this chapter, is further highlighted as it is quoted as one of the key pedagogic tools used by these projects, demonstrating the paucity of other resources available.¹³⁰ These projects, rather

¹²⁵ Adlai Murdoch, 'Placing Pointe-à-Pitre in Paris: diaspora and francophone Caribbean postcolonial identity', *Journal of romance studies*, 5.3 (2005), pp.101-113 (p. 110), doi: 10.3167/jrs.2005.050309.

¹²⁶ Legendry, interview.

¹²⁷ Lysiane Le Bihan Buanec, email to the author, 7 April 2025.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

than disseminating this history widely, have enabled a select number of students within the Antilles (and one class of students from the Metropole) to learn about the *Dissidence*. Although this is important in fostering a local understanding, it does little to combat the overall marginalisation of the *Dissidence* within liberation and resistance discourses. These initiatives are an important step, but even within the Antilles, most students ‘leave school with at best a vague idea of the subject’.¹³¹

The failure to incorporate the history of the *Dissidence* into the curriculum in the same way other elements of the war are taught, ensures that despite an increasing number of commemorative events and initiatives, the vast majority of French people remain unaware of their importance and the state’s failure to honour them.

Conclusion

While recent decades have seen gestures toward recognising the *Dissidence* within France’s commemorative practices, these efforts remain largely superficial, geographically confined, and visibly limited. Ceremonies, plaques, temporary exhibitions, and selective media coverage have provided moments of visibility, yet have failed to generate sustained national engagement or significantly challenge the dominant, primarily Eurocentric, narratives. The marginalisation of the *Dissidence* is embedded in structural commemorative power dynamics that continue to dictate whose stories are amplified within national discourses. Local initiatives, such as the memorial at Trois-Rivières, mark important steps in promoting visibility within the Antillean landscape, yet their impact is constrained when broader state-led integration into key commemorative dates and spaces remains absent.

The recurring pattern of peripheral and often temporary commemorations illustrates a reluctance to position the *Dissidence* as a central component of the French liberation and resistance narrative. Museums and pedagogic spaces continue to present the *Dissidence* as a supplementary narrative, integrated as an afterthought within broader colonial or metropolitan frameworks. However, this chapter has demonstrated that certain commemorative initiatives,

¹³¹ Toureille, p. 74.

particularly educational programmes, pedagogic tools, and physical sites of memory, possess more agency in embedding the *Dissidence* within French collective memory and national narratives. Yet, these initiatives remain scattered and inconsistent, reflecting an overarching framework of selective commemoration where the state seemingly retains control over which histories gain prominence.

Most telling of the *Dissidence's* marginalisation is the ongoing exclusion of their history from the national curriculum. A foundational tool in shaping collective memory, as the curriculum continues to sideline the *Dissidence*, it ensures that their contributions remain peripheral within public consciousness. As long as this omission persists, other commemorative initiatives will fail to rectify decades of neglect. Ultimately, the integration of the *Dissidence* into French collective memory requires not only symbolic gestures but a comprehensive commitment across educational, cultural, and commemorative institutions to embed their story within France's liberation and resistance narratives. Until such a commitment materialises, non-official commemorative efforts, however significant, will remain constrained in their capacity to disrupt the dominant state narrative.

Chapter Two – Official Commemoration

The previous chapter examined the extent to which the *Dissidence* has become an integral aspect of the French liberation and resistance discourse. This chapter will build on these discussions by analysing the different narratives presented through state commemoration. The recent state-led inauguration of the memorial to the *Dissidence* in Guadeloupe encapsulates the primary narratives highlighted within official commemoration: patriotic values and the danger of the journey to the neighbouring islands.

In order to examine these narratives, I will pose various questions: is there a specific narrative being highlighted by the state? Does this narrative reach further? Are there still aspects of this history which remain neglected? Is there one coherent narrative, or are there specific narratives around certain dates and anniversaries? What do these narratives tell us? The positioning of the *Dissidence* within the wider framework of resistance remains complex; does it align more closely with metropolitan resistance narratives, or does it occupy a distinct space within French colonial memory? The omission of certain discourses raises a critical question: do existing official narratives occupy so much space that they prevent the inclusion of alternative perspectives? This question connects to previous discussions on the rigidity of dominant state narratives and the state's reluctance to shift established historical frameworks. These questions will be explored throughout the chapter, intertwined within sections split into different dominant narratives.

It is important to highlight that commemoration that fails to incorporate a decolonial approach instead promotes Eurocentric narratives and further embeds colonial discourses within cultural memory. This chapter will therefore also evaluate the extent to which recent commemoration policies have successfully offered alternatives to dominant Eurocentric narratives.

Although many narratives can be extracted from *Dissidence* commemoration, within the remit of this thesis, this chapter will examine seven. These discourses focus on themes of patriotism, the danger of the *dissidents'* journey, the failure to commemorate, enslavement, emphasis on individual heroes, combat

experiences, and female narratives. Examining these narratives will determine the power the state holds in building collective memory, and the consequences for peripheral histories. Discussions relating to these narratives will follow the order of most prominent (in terms of frequency and importance) to least prominent, with links highlighted throughout.

These discourses are created and disseminated through a variety of means such as commemorative events, documentaries, literature, and media. These are created by the state, both directly and through state-sponsorship, as well as by actors not affiliated with the state. This chapter supports the idea that colonialism was not only a historical event but one which has introduced hierarchies, affecting the lived realities of people within both the Metropole and the Antilles. Therefore, over the following two chapters, these narratives will be compared to demonstrate who has power in shaping memory, and whether a coherence exists between these groups and individuals.

The chapter will demonstrate that the state's commemoration of the *Dissidence* is shaped by selective inclusion. By emphasising symbolic journeys, prominent figures, and links to broader national narratives, the state simplifies and subsumes the *Dissidence* into a Eurocentric dominated narrative, masking its complexity and marginalising personal experiences. Recognition is largely symbolic, its significance obscured by surface-level gestures rather than genuine engagement, and overshadowed by enslavement and internal resistance narratives.

Patriotism and duty towards the Republic

One narrative highlighted since official recognition in 2009, is intricately tied to broader narratives of patriotism, duty, and republicanism, often aligning with the official FFL discourse. This discourse was constructed largely by General de Gaulle around the illegitimacy of the Vichy regime in contrast to the values and legitimacy of the French Republic which celebrates freedom, resistance, fraternity, and equality.

Although this chapter focusses on official commemoration, the following example underlines the way in which both the state and non-official discourses (in this example created by an actor with personal links to the Antilles)

construct this narrative. Despite choosing the June 2014 events in metropolitan France as a case study illustrative of this narrative, promotion of patriotic sentiments, and the duty felt by the *dissidents* towards the Republic is not confined to specific anniversaries but is continuously invoked, often during key moments of national significance¹³², to reinforce France's historical identity.¹³³ The state's inclusion of the *Dissidence* into official metropolitan commemorations, such as those of the 6 June Normandy landings, suggests an effort to integrate their contributions into the dominant liberation narrative.¹³⁴ One way the state does this is through emphasis on the patriotism of the *dissidents* and their adherence to republican values. At the ceremony honouring the *Dissidence* on 2 June 2014, the *ministre des Outre-mer* spoke of 'leur bravoure et leur solidarité de sang avec la République', as well as the influence of de Gaulle's 18 June speech 'qu'ils avaient entendu à des milliers de kilomètres de Londres'.¹³⁵ The emphasis placed on their feelings of duty to 'la patrie' as well as the importance of de Gaulle as a key influence for the *dissidents*, links this history to the broader resistance narrative.¹³⁶ As seen recently in the *panthéonisations* of Josephine Baker and Missak Manouchian (2021 and 2024), both key members of the Resistance within metropolitan France, the words 'aimer' and 'amour' are used repeatedly, in the same way they are employed within *Dissidence* commemoration¹³⁷. It is interesting that both figures are spoken about in similar terms despite key differences in their resistance activities and war experiences. This implies that the grey space the *dissidents* occupy is similar to immigrants who, according to these commemorations, felt a patriotic duty, despite not having been born French. Unlike commemorations which focus primarily on white metropolitan troops, in which their patriotism

¹³² 8 May, 18 June, 14 July, 11 November, as part of Presidential campaigns.

¹³³ Ministère des armées, *Hommage national aux anciens combattants issus de la Dissidence*, live broadcast, YouTube, 2 June 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vrd-VYTUDeg&ab_channel=Minist%C3%A8redesArm%C3%A9es> [accessed 19 March 2025].

¹³⁴ Wardleworth, p. 384-385.

¹³⁵ George Pau-Langevin, *Déclaration de Mme George Pau-Langevin, ministre des outre-mer, en hommage à l'action de la Dissidence antillo-guyanaise au cours de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, à Paris le 2 juin 2014* (Paris, 2014) <<https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/191419-declaration-de-mme-george-pau-langevin-ministre-des-outre-mer-en-homma>> [accessed 18 March 2025].

¹³⁶ Parcours de dissidents, 17:40-17:45

¹³⁷ Emmanuel Macron, *Discours du Président de la République à l'occasion de la cérémonie d'entrée de Joséphine Baker au Panthéon* (Paris, 2021) <<https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-18840-fr.pdf>> [accessed 30 May 2025]; Emmanuel Macron, *Discours du Président de la République lors de l'Hommage solennel de la Nation à Missak Manouchian* (Paris, 2024) <<https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-22284-fr.pdf>> [accessed 30 May 2025]; Sarkozy, 2009; Pau-Langevin, 2014.

is not emphasised, patriotic duty as a key motivator is clearly highlighted¹³⁸. Since 2009, in key speeches delivered on the 65th, 70th and 75th anniversaries of the Normandy landings and the 8 May, patriotism is not cited. Instead, these speeches highlight the efforts of the allied forces, as well as the metropolitan Resistance, demonstrating the state's belief in a need to highlight patriotic values when commemorating the *Dissidence*, but not within pre-existing Eurocentric narratives¹³⁹.

Analysis of President Sarkozy's 2010 speech in Alsace, commemorating the Alsatian Resistance, enable us, through comparison, to understand the complex position that the *Dissidence* occupies within historical and contemporary understandings of French identity and the war.¹⁴⁰ Both Sarkozy's 2009 speech in Martinique and in Alsace the following year talk of repairing 'une injustice', acknowledging the state's failure to commemorate each region's war efforts appropriately.¹⁴¹ However, it is only in his speech honouring the *Dissidence* that Sarkozy presents patriotic values as the central motivator. In Alsace, by contrast, he underscores the region's innate French identity, declaring that '*l'Alsace est française, française parce qu'elle l'a voulu, parce que son âme est française*'.¹⁴² This disparity reinforces the perception that the *Dissidence* belongs to Antillean, rather than French, history.

Despite the state differentiating *Dissidence* and metropolitan narratives through emphasis placed on patriotic motivations, the state still seemingly attempts to

¹³⁸ Sarkozy, 2009; Pau-Langevin, 2014.

¹³⁹ François Hollande, *Déclaration de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, sur le 70e anniversaire du Débarquement de Normandie, à Ouistreham (Calvados) le 06 Juin 2014* (Ouistreham, 2014) < <https://www.elysee.fr/francois-hollande/2014/06/06/declaration-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la-republique-sur-le-70e-anniversaire-du-debarquement-de-normandie-a-ouistreham-calvados-le-06-juin-2014> > [accessed 7 June 2025].

¹⁴⁰ Nazi Germany occupied Alsace–Lorraine in 1940 and informally incorporated it into the Reich, aiming to fully Germanize the region. French language and culture were banned. Around 130,000 locals were forcibly conscripted (*malgré-nous*); about a third died on the Eastern Front. In 1944, 1,500 were released from Soviet captivity and joined the Free French in Algiers. After the capture of Kufra, General Leclerc vowed: "I swear not to lay down arms until the day when our colours, our beautiful colours, fly over Strasbourg Cathedral." That oath was fulfilled on 23 November 1944 with the liberation of Strasbourg.

¹⁴¹ Nicolas Sarkozy, *Déclaration de M. Nicolas Sarkozy, Président de la République, en hommage aux anciens combattants morts pour la libération de la France et aux résistants alsaciens, à Colmar le 8 mai 2010* (Colmar, 2010) <https://www.elysee.fr/nicolas-sarkozy/2010/05/08/declaration-de-m-nicolas-sarkozy-president-de-la-republique-en-hommage-aux-anciens-combattants-morts-pour-la-liberation-de-la-france-et-aux-resistants-alsaciens-a-colmar-le-8-mai-2010> [accessed 7 June 2025]; Sarkozy, 2009.

¹⁴² Sarkozy, 2010.

tie this aspect of colonial memory into the prominent resistance and liberation narratives. The decision to invite several *dissidents* to the June 6 2014 ceremony in Ouistreham, attended by various heads of state, representatives of local government, and several veterans who fought in the Normandy campaign, also acts as a way to integrate new narratives into those already existing. This decision allows the state to disseminate pre-existing narratives through new discourses, enabling them to continue celebrations of republican values and specific histories which remain integral to the Republic and notions of French identity, as defined by the state.

This event, shaped in part by non-official discourses, establishes the importance of the work of activists in influencing state-sponsored commemorations and gaining recognition for neglected histories.¹⁴³ The 1 June 2014 screening of *Parcours de dissidents* (2006) at the Elysée Palace, echoes the use of testimonies within other remembrance ceremonies, such as those dedicated to the Shoah and the internal Resistance.¹⁴⁴ For example, the evening ceremony before the *panthéonisation* of Missak Manouchian included a reading of Manouchian's final letter, making his testimony integral to this commemorative event.¹⁴⁵ Manouchian was executed at Mont-Valérien, on the outskirts of Paris, and before had written a letter to his wife. Even within the *panthéonisation* speech itself, President Macron refers to Manouchian's letter.¹⁴⁶ Likewise, in the creation of five documentary-style videos entitled *Les Immortels*, testimonies are a key feature.¹⁴⁷ These documentaries were used in the Mémorial de la Shoah exhibition commemorating the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the camps, released 31 January 2025.¹⁴⁸ These examples demonstrate the way in which recent commemoration has drawn on testimonies as a way to represent certain narratives.

¹⁴³ Wardleworth, p. 384-385.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ministère des armées, *Cérémonie de veillée en hommage à Missak Manouchian et aux membres du groupe de l'Affiche rouge*, live broadcast, YouTube, 20 February 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmkzhegYguU&ab_channel=Minist%C3%A8redesArm%C3%A9es> [accessed 18 May 2025].

¹⁴⁶ Macron, *Discours du Président de la République lors de l'Hommage solennel de la Nation à Missak Manouchian*, 2024.

¹⁴⁷ 'Les Immortels', Mémorial de la Shoah, n.d. <<https://www.memorialdelashoah.org/les-immortels.html#:~:text=Les%20Immortels%20nouveau&text=%C3%80%20l'occasion%20du%2080e,e%20rescap%C3%A9>> [accessed 4 June 2025].

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

Not only does the choice to screen *Parcours de dissidents* warrant examination as it underlines the significant role non-official work can play within state-led initiatives, the choice of Palcy's documentary specifically must be addressed. As the first Black woman to win an Oscar as a director, and the winner of a César, Palcy has a visible presence within the French cultural scene.¹⁴⁹ The choice to incorporate her documentary within these commemorative events therefore increases their visibility. As well as choosing to screen the documentary, Palcy herself is a focal point.¹⁵⁰ Within the 2 June 2014 ceremony, Palcy accompanied the six present *dissidents* (Salinière Segor, Léopold Leon, Remy Oliny, Alexandre Lepasteur, Eugène Jean-Baptiste and Jeanne Catayée), and was personally credited by the *ministre des Outre-mer*, George Pau-Langevin, 'for having remind[ed] us of the sacrifices of the *dissidents*.'¹⁵¹

Following the war, the use of testimonies appeared primarily in private commemorations such as those organised by families or associations.¹⁵² Although this did not significantly shift until the 21st Century, from the 1970s onwards, with evolving attitudes to the Vichy period and national memory, testimonies gradually featured within state commemoration.¹⁵³ One example is that on 27 October 1979, a commemorative plaque honouring Resistance heroine Thérèse Pierre was unveiled at the Collège Thérèse Pierre in Fougères. The ceremony featured a first-hand account from Germaine Guénée, a fellow Resistance member and friend.¹⁵⁴ Guénée recounted Pierre's torture, final words, and death under the Vichy regime, bringing the personal narrative of a female resistance fighter into an officially endorsed setting.

Although links to the wider framework of French resistance narratives remain tenuous, emphasis placed on patriotism and duty to the motherland aligns the *Dissidence* more closely with metropolitan resistance narratives, rather than

¹⁴⁹ In 1984, Palcy became the first woman and first Black director to win an Oscar, and also won a César in the category *meilleure première œuvre*.

¹⁵⁰ Ministère des armées, 2014.

¹⁵¹ Wardleworth, p. 385.

¹⁵² 'From witness to historian: a history of commemoration', *Chemins de mémoire*, n.d.

<https://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr/en/witness-historian-history-commemoration#:~:text=To%20commemorate%20is%20to%20remember,or%20were%20victims%20in%20conflicts> [accessed 21 July 2025].

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Jean-Christophe Collet, 'LA RÉSISTANTE THÉRÈSE PIERRE MEURT LE 26 OCTOBRE 1943', *Rennes info*, 26 October 2023, <https://www.rennes-infos-autrement.fr/la-resistante-therese-pierre-meurt-le-26-octobre-1943/> [accessed 21 July 2025].

occupying a distinct space within colonial memory. However, commemorative work has also placed the *Dissidence* solely within local understandings of the war, meaning it occupies a complex space which neither aligns with pre-existing metropolitan narratives nor strongly resonates locally.

Danger of the journey to join the *Dissidence*

Another integral element of *Dissidence* commemoration which re-enforces the previous narrative, is that of the journey the *dissidents* took to the neighbouring British islands. This narrative is constructed through themes of the danger of the currents, unstable boats, and the Vichy patrols which meant the *dissidents* were forced to leave clandestinely. This section will explore how these themes are used to emphasise the dangers which reenforce patriotic and republican narratives. These discourses are not only the most frequent but also the most powerful within *Dissidence* commemoration.

One example of state-sponsored work written by two local historians is the book titled *1940-1943 : résistances et dissidences aux Antilles et en Guyane : mémoires de guerre - mémoires de vie*, released in 2023.¹⁵⁵ Sylvie Meslien is a specialist in Antillean history from Martinique, with a particular focus on enslavement. Eliane Sempaire is also a French historian, but from Guadeloupe, specialising in local Guadeloupean history. Within this work, which promises to provide a detailed synthesis of the *Dissidence*, the risks the *dissidents* took in clandestinely leaving the islands are clearly highlighted. When explaining the role of the *dissidents*, in multiple accounts, this work highlights how they ‘affrontaient les dangers de la mer et la surveillance maritime’ whilst those who aided the *dissidents*, ‘par patriotisme, risquèrent leur liberté et leur vie’.¹⁵⁶ Through emphasis on these dangers, this narrative highlights the patriotic nature of the *dissidents*, and the importance placed on fighting to reinstate the Republic. Whilst this links to the general resistance narrative which underlines the sacrifices made by resistance fighters in metropolitan France, emphasis placed specifically on their journey is unique to the *Dissidence*. The prominence of these themes works to create a compelling narrative, promoting this book as a viable commercial product. Often understanding decisions behind why

¹⁵⁵ Demange, Meslien and Sempaire.

¹⁵⁶ Demange, Meslien and Sempaire, p. 6 and p. 52.

certain narratives have been explored is a multifaceted approach; not only does highlighting this narrative fit within previous discourses, it also promotes the product commercially, thus generating commemorative impact. This case study also demonstrates that commemorative work created by local populations does not guarantee a decolonial approach. As will be showcased throughout this chapter, individuals and groups are seemingly aware that to gain state support their promoted narratives need to fit within the state's story. The failure to centre the narrative around the *dissidents* themselves highlights the state's control of discourses which remain prominent.

A further example of recent official commemoration which encapsulates this narrative, is the 28 June 2025 inauguration of the memorial in Guadeloupe, the first official physical site of remembrance to the *Dissidence* within French territory. As explored in the previous chapter, this inauguration was attended by local state representatives, relatives of *dissidents*, the local population, as well as the *ministre déléguée chargée de la Mémoire et des Anciens Combattants*, Patricia Mirallès. The memorial itself must be analysed as it has been constructed in the form of a *canot saintois*, a boat specific to the region, which many *dissidents* would have taken. In choosing this form, emphasis is placed on the journey the *dissidents* made, highlighting its unifying nature and representation of the *Dissidence* in its entirety. Although this journey remains unique to the *Dissidence*, the ceremony aimed to tie this history into pre-existing resistance discourses. This was done through emphasis on the risks taken whilst 'chacun portait la flamme de la République', establishing their 'fidélité à la République'. As well as emphasising republican values, the deputy mayor's, Jocelyne Mocka-Rénier, speech spoke of their bravery, the perils of the journey, as well as their experience arriving 'sur les côtes africaines et [rejoignant] la Provence en France métropolitaine où ils allaient combattre'. This reference draws on well-known theatres of war, resonating with the French war imaginary, and building on existing narratives.

The advocacy of this narrative within official discourses highlights the state's desire to promote a resistance narrative premised on the willingness of patriotic men and women to risk their lives for republican values. The state's first official recognition of the *Dissidence* in Fort-de-France on 25 June 2009 constructed a parallel between the *Dissidence* and the history of 'les dix-sept jeunes étudiants qui quittèrent Pau pour embarquer à Bayonne sur un cargo pour

l'Angleterre'.¹⁵⁷ This comparison enabled Sarkozy to tie *Dissidence* recognition into more well-known understandings of the French Resistance. Therefore, in highlighting the patriotic nature of the *dissidents* and their willingness to risk their lives, official discourses continue promotion of pre-existing Eurocentric narratives.

The Ile de Sein history is an example of a pre-existing Eurocentric narrative which also focusses on crossing the sea to join the FFL, and demonstrates the extent to which metropolitan narratives have dominated understandings of the Resistance since the war. On 30 August 1946, de Gaulle declared that 'children will learn about the heroic actions of a good and courageous French island in their history books', enshrining the Ile de Sein in French collective memory and national identity. This quote also demonstrates the importance of integration into the school curriculum, as explored in the previous chapter.¹⁵⁸ Similarly to *Dissidence* commemoration, the journey to join the FFL forms a primary element of the narrative, with maritime vocabulary used in declarations, speeches, and the Companion of the Liberation decree of January 1946, with emphasis placed on their 'champ de bataille familial, l'océan'.¹⁵⁹ However, unlike the *dissidents*, their journey did not necessitate high risks: the waters were calmer waters and although the English Channel was patrolled, the island itself at this point was unpatrolled. Despite 128 inhabitants leaving to join the FFL, a much smaller figure than the 4000-5000 *dissidents*, the Ile de Sein remains the most decorated French commune in relation to the Second World War, having been awarded the Croix de la Libération.¹⁶⁰ From the first group of French people to arrive in London, wanting to join the FFL, 25% were from the Ile de Sein, leading to de Gaulle declaring that the Ile de Sein therefore represented a quarter of France.¹⁶¹ The importance of this narrative even eighty years later is highlighted by President Macron's visit to the island on 18 June 2024, the anniversary of de

¹⁵⁷ Sarkozy, *Déclaration de M. Nicolas Sarkozy*, 2009; a trip which included Daniel Cordier, later Jean Moulin's secretary.

¹⁵⁸ 'Ile de Sein', L'Ordre de la Libération, n.d. <https://www.ordredelaliberation.fr/fr/ile-de-sein> [accessed 6 June 2025].

¹⁵⁹ Emmanuel Macron, *Discours du Président de la République sur l'Ile de Sein à l'occasion du 84e anniversaire de l'Appel du 18 juin* (Ile de Sein, 2024) < <https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-22935-fr.pdf> > [accessed 1 June 2025].

¹⁶⁰ Ile de Sein, L'Ordre de la Libération.

¹⁶¹ "Emmanuel Macron va commémorer l'appel du 18 juin à l'Ile de Sein" par Thomas Snégaroff, *C'est la France*, RadioFrance, 17 June 2024, podcast, Franceinter, <<https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/podcasts/c-est-la-france/13h54-c-est-la-france-du-lundi-17-juin-2024-8749806>> [accessed 9 July 2025].

Gaule's BBC *appel*. Whilst there, Macron repeated the phrase, 'de l'Ile de Sein, de plus loin, de l'âme de la France, dur pays de leur enfance, terre de l'esprit de Résistance'.¹⁶² As well as forming an integral aspect of France's resistance narrative, this discourse remains vital to the island's history and local collective memory, thus ensuring a unified version of the war within the island which has passed down to following generations. Perhaps there is consensus among the Ile de Sein population that this moment is a particularly significant, perhaps the most significant, element of their history. Unlike in the Antilles where enslavement is the prominent local narrative, within the Ile de Sein, this discourse does not have to fight to be heard; it is celebrated both locally and nationally, aided by the state since the end of the war.

A central aspect of *Dissidence* commemoration is the *dissidents'* journey to neighbouring islands, framed through themes of treacherous seas, fragile boats, and clandestine departures under threat from patrols. This narrative has become dominant in official discourses, reinforcing patriotic and republican values by emphasising the bravery and self-sacrifice of those who risked everything to join the FFL. In purely emphasising republican values as the primary motivator, these rhetorics position the *dissidents* within a familiar, Eurocentric frame.

Failure to commemorate

Although the state has since 2009, under Presidents Sarkozy, Hollande, and Macron, finally acknowledged its failure to recognise the *Dissidence*. It now actively reframes the years of non-commemoration to cast its contemporary commemorative decisions in a positive light.

The first official recognition of the *Dissidence* in 2009 exemplifies this framing; in Sarkozy's speech, he speaks of 'une page injustement oubliée' whilst stating 'aujourd'hui nous réparons une injustice', demonstrating that in the eyes of the state, this one act of commemoration has the means to repair this injustice.¹⁶³ However, the previous chapter demonstrated that this is an exaggeration of the commemorative impact state initiatives have had. An example which further

¹⁶² Macron, *Discours du Président de la République sur l'Ile de Sein*.

¹⁶³ Sarkozy, Déclaration de M. Nicolas Sarkozy, 2009.

corroborates this exaggeration is a testimony within *Gros sur mon cœur* (2011).¹⁶⁴ A daughter of a *dissident* (*dissident 3*) states that only a small number of *dissidents* were invited to the 2009 official recognition ceremony in Fort-de-France. On not being one of the select few, her father ‘s’est senti vraiment abandonné’ and was deeply offended, crying on hearing the news.¹⁶⁵ It was only after writing to the President following the ceremony that her father received any kind of recognition (*une carte de combattant volontaire de la résistance*, which acknowledged his wartime service). This therefore highlights that the ceremony, which was framed by the state as a form of recognition which would repair the injustice, in fact failed to suitably honour the *dissidents* and caused further feelings of neglect and betrayal.

Even the state, within the recent June 2025 *Dissidence* commemorations has acknowledged the little-known nature of the *Dissidence*. Patricia Mirallès spoke of ‘les héros ne sont pas toujours ceux dont les noms figurent sur le papier glacé des manuels d’histoire’, highlighting the failure to incorporate the *Dissidence* within the school curricula. However, when referencing local associations and individuals who have worked to spread awareness of the *Dissidence*, she also said ‘ils ont envie de faire des choses pour les Antilles, pour leur histoire familiale qui parfois est un peu oubliée’, downplaying the state’s neglect and confirming that, in the state’s eyes, the *Dissidence* is a local and familial history.

The timing and context of state recognition warrants closer examination. Selective recognition, aligning with specific commemorative events or political moments, raises the possibility that recognition functions less as an admission of historical wrongdoings and more as a strategic reframing. It is a way for the state to position itself in a positive light while minimising deeper engagement with the lasting effects of past neglect. Considering that the first official recognition of the *Dissidence* in 2009 came at a time of political and social unrest within the Antilles, following a series of long strikes over the heightened cost of living, the political motivations behind President Sarkozy’s visit and commemorative decision are clear.¹⁶⁶ In reference to Sarkozy’s visit, Elie

¹⁶⁴ *Gros sur mon cœur*, dir. by Chloe Glotin (France, 2011).

¹⁶⁵ *Gros sur mon cœur*, 40.39-41.31.

¹⁶⁶ Bruno Jeudy, ‘Sarkozy arrive aux Antilles en «rassembleur»’, *Le Figaro*, 26 June 2009, <<https://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/2009/06/26/01002-20090626ARTFIG00004-aux-antilles-sarkozyse-veut-rassembleur-.php>> [accessed 19 February 2025].

Domota, head of Liyannaj Kont Pwofitasyon (umbrella organisation for over fifty trade unions within Guadeloupe), stated that Sarkozy's visit was a symbolic gesture to the Antilles and would have little impact on the pressures and challenges facing the local population.¹⁶⁷ Furthermore, most state commemorative decisions, such as those seen during anniversaries of the Provence landings, fit within a timeframe of national war discourses, linking to other war narratives, thus undermining any potential opportunity for change.¹⁶⁸

The symbolic act of recognition, though significant, cannot retroactively undo the marginalisation experienced by those involved in the *Dissidence*, nor the communities connected to this history. It can, however, act as a step towards more meaningful recognition which would engage a wider audience and pave the way for inclusion into permanent expressions of recognition and commemoration. The state's recognition, while seemingly progressive, may serve more to reshape its own image than to truly address the structural exclusion of colonial histories from French collective memory.

Enslavement discourse

Like the *Dissidence*, enslavement is a story of delayed recognition, having only been recognised as a crime against humanity in 2001 under the Taubira law.¹⁶⁹ Although, enslavement remains integral to local collective memory and identity in the Antilles, unlike the *Dissidence*.¹⁷⁰ State-driven narratives tend to invoke this discourse to underscore republican values through discussions of French involvement in the abolition.

The state capitalises on the theme of heightened racism to contrast French republican values with those of the Vichy regime.¹⁷¹ One example illustrative of this is the recent state-sponsored book written by Meslien and Sempaire.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ Thibault Lieurade, 'Sarkozy visits Martinique and Guadeloupe to quell discontent', *France24*, 25 June 2009, <https://www.france24.com/en/20090625-sarkozy-visits-martinique-guadeloupe-quell-discontent->> [accessed 19 February 2025].

¹⁶⁸ Préfet de la Martinique, 'L'inauguration de l'Allée de la Dissidence'; Emmanuel, 'Le 80e anniversaire du débarquement en Provence commémoré en Guadeloupe'.

¹⁶⁹ Nicola Frith, 'Crime and Penitence in Slavery Commemoration' in *France's Colonial Legacies*, ed by. Fiona Barclay (University of Wales Press, 2013).

¹⁷⁰ Vergès, 2006, pp. 70-71.

¹⁷¹ *La Dissidence en Martinique et en Guadeloupe 1940-1945 (exposition)*, Fondation de la France libre.

¹⁷² Demange, Meslien and Sempaire.

When drawing parallels between the hardships faced under the Vichy regime with ‘un retour à l’esclavage’, the book emphasises how, for local populations, the Republic had always been a synonym for liberty.¹⁷³ This again demonstrates that content produced by local populations does not always run counter to state-promoted narratives. This contrast is exhibited again in the ministre des Outre-mer’s speech at the commemoration in June 2014, where she refers to the *dissidents* as ‘descendants de l’esclavage’ who stood up to fascism in the name of republican values and freedom.¹⁷⁴ The *Dissidence* narrative is therefore constructed around this discourse, highlighting republican values that are celebrated in contemporary France.

This narrative offers a key point of differentiation in the framing of the *Dissidence*’s colonial context and the metropolitan Resistance, where the portrayal of the *Dissidence* is inherently tied to enslavement. Enslavement, which is referenced at least once in official commemorations to the *Dissidence* since 2009, is unique to the context of the *Dissidence*, but also posits it within a larger colonial narrative. The employment of this discourse within *Dissidence* commemoration influences how communities engage with the narrative, potentially fostering a more localised and identity-driven understanding of war experiences. However, as the state primarily engages this narrative to celebrate republican values, this links the *Dissidence* to the general resistance narrative, therefore complicating the ability of the *Dissidence* to occupy a distinct space within French collective memory.

State-sponsored actors, such as the *Fondation pour la mémoire de l’esclavage*, also play important roles in disseminating this history, working within the Antilles and the Metropole, to spread awareness of the enduring legacies of enslavement. The foundation, whose President, Jean-Marc Ayrault was the Prime Minister of France under President Hollande, is a private enterprise, supported by public and private bodies such as the state. The foundation helps to ‘faire reconnaître ses héritages multiples, politiques, culturels et humains’ and ‘utiliser le savoir pour lutter contre le racisme et les discriminations’.¹⁷⁵ This is another example which demonstrates the importance of the memory of

¹⁷³ Demange, Meslien and Sempaire, p. 38.

¹⁷⁴ Pau-Langevin, *Déclaration de Mme George Pau-Langevin*, 2014.

¹⁷⁵ ‘Notre projet’, Fondation de la Mémoire de l’esclavage, n.d. <<https://memoire-esclavage.org/notre-projet>> [accessed 9 June 2025].

enslavement within the Antilles and France generally, and offers an explanation as to why both non-official and official discourses link enslavement narratives to those of the *Dissidence*, in an attempt to bring together two pivotal points of Antillean and French history. Having one major organisation, supported by both state and private bodies, whose aim is to raise awareness about the historic and ongoing impacts of enslavement, enables this narrative to occupy more commemorative space. Despite confirming that they do not have any ‘spécialiste sur ce sujet précis au sein de [leur] Conseil scientifique’, they stated that they feel this subject relates to the core principles and interests of the Foundation.¹⁷⁶

The state attempts to integrate the enslavement narrative to reinforce republican ideals of liberty and resistance. As such, this narrative not only deepens the historical and cultural significance of the *Dissidence* but also raises critical questions about the homogenising tendencies of commemoration, which risk subsuming distinct colonial experiences into a broader, metropolitan framework.

Emphasis on individual heroes and experiences

A further narrative disseminated through *Dissidence* commemoration is the emphasis placed on individual heroes and their experiences. Although this narrative features less prominently, it follows previous discussions through its emphasis on individuals who often tie into metropolitan narratives.

There are three figures mentioned consistently throughout examples of *Dissidence* commemoration despite not having been *dissidents*: Felix Eboué, Paul Valentino, and Charles de Gaulle. Paul Valentino was a Guadeloupean politician who served in the French National Assembly from 1946 to 1955 and was elected mayor of Pointe-à-Pitre in January 1951. During the war he was imprisoned and exiled before returning to Guadeloupe in the overthrow of the Vichy regime and was later awarded a *médaille de la résistance*. Félix Eboué, born in French Guiana, was appointed as Governor of Guadeloupe in 1936, and later as governor of Chad. Chad became the first colony to side with the Free French in 1940 and Eboué was the first Black person to be buried in the Pantheon in

¹⁷⁶ Raphaël Janeault, email to the author, 27 February 2025.

Paris. In the 2009 and 2014 commemorative speeches, de Gaulle is mentioned nine times, emphasising his importance as a source of influence for the *dissidents*.¹⁷⁷ Both speeches also mention Félix Eboué and Paul Valentino, as examples of a 'pétri d'esprit républicain'.¹⁷⁸ Despite neither being *dissidents*, these speeches link these well-known Antilleans to both the *Dissidence* and the importance of republican values.¹⁷⁹ This narrative is further highlighted in the current commemorative cycle, where the Ministère des Armées website dedicated to the 80th anniversary of the Liberation, features a webpage honouring the *Dissidence*.¹⁸⁰ Within this article, the state-commissioned historian Géraud Létang mentions the important role of Eboué in the fight for liberation and his connections to the Antilles.¹⁸¹ This once again connects the history of the *Dissidence* to that of the broader liberation narrative, enabling the French public to recognise certain aspects of this unknown history.

Patricia Mirallès' recent visit to Guadeloupe and Martinique on 28, 29 and 30 June 2025 also demonstrates the ways in which state commemoration utilises well-known figures within these discourses. Mirallès does this in multiple ways; she highlights the death of the white, metropolitan army officer Henri Tourtet as leader of the *Bataillon Antillais no.5*, saying he died for France, 'avant d'être reconnu compagnon de la libération'. The reference made to the *Compagnon de la libération* links the *Dissidence* to the broader resistance and liberation narrative constructed following the war. In fact, many references made throughout her visit to Guadeloupe and Martinique highlight the internal resistance within the Antilles, rather than the *Dissidence*. Much of the vocabulary employed in newspaper articles refers to 'la mémoire des résistants antillais', rather than the *Dissidence* specifically. Within Mirallès' speech at the inaugural of the memorial dedicated to the *Dissidence*, she references Aimé, the French author and politician from Martinique, and Suzanne Césaire, neither of whom were *dissidents*, but who during this period published the resistance magazine *Tropiques*. Mirallès also references Paul Valentino, stating his refusal of Pétain was already 'une acte de dissidence'.

¹⁷⁷ Sarkozy, *Déclaration de M. Nicolas Sarkozy, 2009*; Pau-Langevin, *Déclaration de Mme George Pau-Langevin, 2014*.

¹⁷⁸ Sarkozy, *Déclaration de M. Nicolas Sarkozy, 2009*

¹⁷⁹ Sarkozy, *Déclaration de M. Nicolas Sarkozy, 2009*; Pau-Langevin, *Déclaration de Mme George Pau-Langevin, 2014*.

¹⁸⁰ Létang, 'La dissidence antillaise, récit de Géraud Létang'.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

The emphasis placed on individuals is also a key element of recent commemorations under President Macron, seen through his decisions to *panthéonise* Missak Manouchian and Josephine Baker, two individuals with unique resistance experiences but who symbolised republican values and risked their lives for France.¹⁸² A clear link is therefore established between the state's general commemorative decisions and those relating to the *Dissidence*, used as a way to underline republican values.

This section has showcased the homogenising tendencies of commemoration, which have integrated the *Dissidence* into a broader, metropolitan resistance framework, thus overshadowing their unique and important war trajectories and continuing the dissemination of Eurocentric narratives.

Wartime experiences

The narrative of war-time experiences analyses questions around understandings of the *dissidents'* war experiences and what aspects are promoted. The fact this discourse features less prominently than those analysed previously highlights a disinterest in the Antillean experience of war and an alternative home front.

Another way in which the Antilles' legacy of the Second World War neglects the *Dissidence* is through official commemorative initiatives which, despite placing the Antilles at their focus, have marginalised *dissident* histories. The Musée de la Résistance in Champigny, near Paris, has a pedagogical space dedicated to Aimé Césaire. The website introduces this space, Césaire, and the Antilles with references made to the resistance magazine *Tropiques*, and his role in the 1946 departmentalisation of the Antilles.¹⁸³ However, the *Dissidence* is not mentioned, highlighting that even when Antillean experiences of war are

¹⁸² Eleanor Dufton, 'Evaluating the political significance of the *panthéonisation* of Missak Manouchian', (unpublished undergraduate dissertation, University of Leeds, 2024).

¹⁸³ On March 19 1946, following the departmentalization law passed by Aimé Césaire, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guiana and Reunion, until then colonies, became French overseas departments.

included within resistance narratives, they often fail to incorporate the *Dissidence*, excluding this history from French understandings of the war.¹⁸⁴

As the *Dissidence* is not part of Césaire's identity, nor his wartime experience, this is an image of Martinique which he was not motivated to highlight. Césaire was the Mayor of Fort-de-France for 56 years, from the end of the war until 2001. His involvement in local politics and within the French state, as a member of the French National Assembly from 1945 to 1993, meant that Césaire had some control in building local war legacies which would be understood within the Antilles and across France more generally. Through the July 5 1951 ceremony, which honoured and reburied *Le Martiniquais inconnu*, an unknown member of the internal French resistance from Martinique, Césaire helped to confine the Antilles' war legacy to the internal resistance. By leading this ceremony, Césaire, largely uninvolved in armed resistance activities during the war, was able to construct a resistance narrative around himself. Emphasis placed on the internal resistance within Martinique often refers back to *Tropiques*, and therefore fits with an image of Césaire which places him in a position of importance during the war. Unlike the *Dissidence*, which had to wait over 60 years to receive any official recognition, 'la dépouille du « résistant inconnu Martiniquais » fut placée dans une tombe au pied du monument aux morts de Fort de France', holding a crucial site of high visibility.¹⁸⁵ Césaire's hold over Martinique and the construction of emphasis placed on the internal resistance meant that the *Dissidence* became sidelined following the war and has since struggled to become an important aspect of Martiniquais identity.

Similarly, state-sponsored narratives tend to focus on the training and operational experiences of the *dissidents*, which maintains the *Dissidence* as a local, rather than national history. Meslien and Sempaire have various sections dedicated to the *dissidents'* journey, training experiences (focussing primarily on those that trained at Fort-Dix in New Jersey) and the logistical difficulties facing the authorities as the number of *dissidents* grew.¹⁸⁶ Although the promotion of this narrative highlights the unique nature of the *dissidents'* experiences and

¹⁸⁴ 'Espace Aime Cesaire', Musée de la Résistance, n.d. <<https://www.musee-resistance.com/espace-aime-cesaire/>> [accessed 9 June 2025].

¹⁸⁵ 'Martiniquais inconnu "Blanchette"', Les amis de la Fondation de la Résistance, n.d. <<https://www.memoresist.org/resistant/le-martiniquais-inconnu/>> [accessed 9 June 2025].

¹⁸⁶ Demange, Meslien and Sempaire, p. 63.

emphasises the number who joined the FFL, it does not centre this narrative around individual *dissident* experiences, downplaying the significance of their impact within recognised theatres of war. Through this narrative, the state's reluctance to shift established historical frameworks can be seen; demonstrating the importance of the *dissidents'* role in various fighting campaigns would undermine the dominant state narratives which have emphasised the role of the metropolitan French, and more recently, African colonial troops. For example, since 2014, the role of African troops has been mentioned thirty-five times in significant anniversary speeches (every five years) dedicated to the Provence landings, whilst the Antilles have been mentioned twice. Each of these speeches have also begun by addressing the Normandy landings, and therefore, despite recent emphasis on colonial troops, connect these landings to a metropolitan liberation narrative. This reveals that it is not just within *Dissidence* commemoration that the state refers back to pre-existing Eurocentric discourses. Emphasis placed on these narratives is also seen within the current commemorative cycle. Macron stated that France's commemorative events across 2023 recognised the importance of the 'Résistance française'.¹⁸⁷ However, these national events have neglected the *Dissidence*, thus demonstrating that, in the eyes of the state, the *Dissidence* is not integral to the French resistance discourse. This is also telling of the relative (un)importance of the Antilles within French politics more generally; we would see a greater willingness on behalf of the state to recognise the *Dissidence* and incorporate them into the wider liberation narrative if the Antilles wielded more power and influence across French politics. As has been explored within this thesis, due to the grey space occupied by the Antilles, in not being metropolitan French but a *département*, the Antilles hold less geo-political and geo-strategic importance to the French state. This was reiterated within Macron's 80th anniversary speech which as well as highlighting the French Resistance, placed significance on the 'combattants de l'armée reconstituée par la France libre sur le continent africain'.¹⁸⁸ Once again, this demonstrates that the *Dissidence* fits neither within the French resistance discourse, nor within colonial memory. However, it is important to note these colonial histories are often portrayed in broad brush strokes, neglecting the specificities of their war-time experiences. This can be

¹⁸⁷ Emmanuel Macron, *80ème anniversaire de la Libération : le message du Président Emmanuel Macron* (Paris, 2024) < <https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-22593-fr.pdf> > [accessed 8 June 2025].

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

seen through the state's failure to delve into individual accounts of war, using sweeping statements such as 'armée d'Afrique' and 'les vies de ces héros d'Afrique'.¹⁸⁹

State accounts often marginalise *dissident* contributions, even when Antillean wartime experiences are included in official spaces, frequently prioritising internal resistance discourses. This underscores the state's reluctance to integrate neglected histories into national resistance narratives, preferring familiar metropolitan discourses.

Female narratives

The final narrative I wish to explore is that of women's roles in the *Dissidence*. Despite not recurring regularly, in exploring this narrative, this section addresses the singular, narrow interpretations of the *Dissidence* within commemorations, and the extent to which memory is constructed through selective commemoration. Women carried out crucial strategic roles in espionage, nursing, and communications, contributing to the liberation of France. Exploring this narrative allows us to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the *Dissidence* and address the ongoing failures to recognise narratives which remain at the peripheries of commemoration.

It is important to note this neglect is not specific to the *Dissidence*, with historiography 'so far [failing] to fully address women's experience by contrast with men's'.¹⁹⁰ Not only have female *dissidents* had to battle with the lack of recognition and under-exploration of the *Dissidence* generally, but the gendered lens of commemoration has marginalised their stories further.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Emmanuel Macron, *Déclaration de M. Emmanuel Macron, Président de la République, en hommage aux combattants du débarquement de Provence du 15 août 1944, à Saint-Raphaël le 15 août 2019* (Saint-Raphaël, 2019) < <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/269594-emmanuel-macron-15082019-debarquement-de-provence> > [accessed 6 June 2025]; Emmanuel Macron, *Discours du Président de la République lors de la cérémonie des 80 ans de la libération et le débarquement de Provence* (Boulouris, 2024) < <https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-23159-fr.pdf> > [accessed 6 June 2025].

¹⁹⁰ Hanna Diamond, *Women and the Second World War in France, 1939-1948: Choices and Constraints* (Routledge, 2015), p. 9.

¹⁹¹ Christine Bard, 'Femmes et guerres au XXe siècle: une mémoire éclipse', *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 92 (2006), pp. 37–50; Margaret Collins Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance: How Women Fought to Free France, 1940-1945* (Wiley, 1995); Penny Summerfield, 'They Didn't Want Women Back in That Job!': The Second World War and the Construction of Gendered Work Histories, *Labour History Review*, 63.1 (1998), pp. 83–104.

The current anniversary cycle, which aligns with eighty years of women gaining the vote in France, has led to exhibitions and conferences such as 'femmes en résistance' at the Musée de la Résistance nationale, and last year's exhibition entitled 'RÉSISTANTES ! FRANCE, 1940-1944', at the Musée de l'Ordre la Libération, which aim to 'mettre en lumière le courage, l'engagement et la force de ces femmes'.¹⁹² However, both were temporary exhibits within a pedagogical space which permanently recognises the role of men, thus reducing commemorative impact and signalling that female roles do not carry the same level of importance as those of their male counterparts.

One example illustrative of the failure to emphasise the importance of females within the *Dissidence*, despite the attendance of Jeanne Catayée and the awarding to her of the *Légion d'honneur*, are the 2014 metropolitan commemorations. Within the accompanying YouTube video, the unveiling of a commemorative plaque, as well as the commemorative speech, Jeanne Catayée neither features prominently, nor is her role or the role of women highlighted.¹⁹³

In contrast, one site of commemoration which has emphasised the role of women in the French army is Mont-Faron, the memorial dedicated to the August 1944 Provence landings. Within one of the pedagogical spaces of the memorial, the testimonies of three female *dissidents*, Jeanne Catayée, Marcelle Lislet et Anne Passionnise Thome, are featured, giving a voice to different experiences of war, including that of nursing in hospitals across North Africa, as well as essential work in communications.¹⁹⁴ Their personal stories are also emphasised within Palcy's *Parcours de dissidents*, which features each of these women (as well as Yolande Amante Gamess and Germaine Jeannet), giving voice to their personal articulations and involvement in the war effort.¹⁹⁵ Within her own work and when given the opportunity to share her experiences (such as in *Parcours de dissidents*), Catayée always speaks of the 'essentielle' work of women within the army, with her autobiography acting as a way for her to

¹⁹² 'CONFÉRENCE "FEMMES EN RÉSISTANCE" LE 27 AVRIL À 15H', MUSÉE DE LA RÉSISTANCE NATIONALE À CHAMPIGNY, n.d. < <https://www.musee-resistance.com/initiatives/conference-femmes/> > [accessed 10 June 2025]; 'RÉSISTANTES ! FRANCE, 1940-1944', Ordre de la Libération, n.d. <https://www.ordredelaliberation.fr/fr/exposition-2024> [accessed 10 June 2025].

¹⁹³ Hommage national aux anciens combattants issus de la Dissidence, YouTube; Pau-Langevin, Déclaration de Mme George Pau-Langevin, ministre des Outre-mer.

¹⁹⁴ Rémi Commin, email to the author, 4 December 2024.

¹⁹⁵ *Parcours de dissidents*.

demonstrate the importance of their roles.¹⁹⁶ The inclusion of these women's personal experiences within the museum is an important step towards more equitable retellings of Second World War histories. However, as discussed previously, this one act of recognition and integration into the museum's narrative output does not offer sufficient recognition of female *dissidents*. The decision to include these narratives within the wider narrative is telling of individual attitudes and choices, for example, the curator of this exhibition has understood the importance of female inclusion, whereas elsewhere individual curators or those involved within commemorative decisions have not sought to recognise the role of women.

Despite women's significant roles, their stories remain underrepresented in commemorations of the *Dissidence*, highlighting how gendered frameworks continue to marginalise their contributions. While certain spaces, such as Mont-Faron have elevated the voices of female *dissidents*, these remain isolated gestures within a broader context of neglect.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the complex strategies employed by the state to integrate the *Dissidence* into national commemorative narratives, revealing a pattern of selective inclusion that ultimately fails to offer a decolonial perspective. The state's commemorative efforts are primarily framed through the lens of republican values, portraying the *dissidents* as patriotic actors whose sacrifices align with the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. However, this patriotic framing is not applied across other commemorative contexts, marking the *Dissidence* as a distinct, localised history rather than an integral component of the national narrative.

A key narrative device employed by the state is the journey to the neighbouring islands, which is uniquely associated with the *Dissidence*. This journey is leveraged to reinforce republican ideals, yet it is strategically linked to other journey narratives in the national liberation and resistance narratives, subsuming the *Dissidence* within a broader, homogenised framework. This approach produces the most unified and commercially viable narrative

¹⁹⁶ Jeanne Duton-Catayée, *Avant la tombée du rideau*, vol. 2 (Editions Nestor, 2020), p. 52.

surrounding the *Dissidence*, offering a coherent story that oversimplifies the complex historical realities, but offers an interpretation which is more easily absorbed into the French imaginary.

State recognition is often exaggerated in its commemorative impact, with official narratives framing past failures of commemoration as resolved, thereby masking ongoing issues of marginalisation. These recognitions are largely symbolic, functioning as strategic reframings rather than genuine efforts to engage with the *Dissidence's* multifaceted history. Themes of enslavement are appropriated to underline republican values, juxtaposing the *Dissidence* against Vichy collaboration and colonial oppression. Yet, while enslavement narratives are mobilised to foster a local identity, they occupy a distinct and complicated space that is unique to the *Dissidence*, and which overshadows *Dissidence* narratives.

The state's reliance on well-known individuals, particularly those who fit within established Eurocentric frameworks, further embeds the *Dissidence* within a French war imaginary that sidelines decolonial perspectives. The omission of personal accounts from *dissidents* and the failure to acknowledge their roles in recognised theatres of war undermines the significance of their contributions. Instead, the narrative privileges metropolitan resistance and internal forms of Antillean resistance, marginalising the *Dissidence's* role within both national and local contexts. Female *dissidents* in particular face additional layers of invisibility due to the gendered nature of commemoration, with only recent and limited efforts made towards their inclusion.

In sum, the state's approach to commemorating the *Dissidence* remains superficial and selective. By embedding the *Dissidence* within pre-existing Eurocentric and metropolitan narratives, the state continues to obscure the complex identity of these men and women. The *Dissidence* occupies a liminal space, neither fully aligned with colonial structures nor adequately integrated into dominant resistance narratives, resulting in a fragmented and incomplete representation of their historical significance.

Chapter Three – Unofficial Commemoration

The previous chapter analysed state commemoration of the *Dissidence*. This chapter will build on these discussions, instead focussing on non-official commemoration (those not sponsored or led by the state), demonstrating how these are often informed by the absences within or misrepresentations of official discourses. One example is Euzhan Palcy's documentary *Parcours de dissidents* which, unlike the state commemorations discussed in the previous chapter, centres around *dissidents'* testimonies. In doing so, it presents a broad, multifaceted version of their history which contests the state's homogenising commemorative tendencies and the dominant Eurocentric state narrative.

The same seven narratives as in the previous chapter will be explored: patriotism, the danger of the *dissidents'* journey, failure to commemorate, enslavement, emphasis on individual heroes, combat experiences, and female narratives. These discourses are created and disseminated through a variety of means such as documentaries, literature, and media. I will refer back to previous discussions throughout, comparing official and non-official narratives.

In order to examine these discourses, similarly to the previous chapter, I will pose various questions: Are there still aspects of this history which remain neglected, even within non-official forms of commemoration? What do these narratives tell us? Do non-official narratives position the *Dissidence* more closely with metropolitan resistance narratives, or within a distinct colonial space, unique to the *Dissidence* and the Antillean context? These questions will be posed within each narrative, providing a flexible structure to each section.

Decolonial frameworks are essential in analysing how traditional narratives tend to privilege metropolitan perspectives, often marginalising colonial contributions or filtering them through Eurocentric lenses. The *Dissidence*, formed largely by Black Antillean men and women from former slave colonies, disrupts the dominant narrative of a unified, white, metropolitan Resistance. By approaching the *Dissidence* through a decolonial lens, this chapter challenges commemorative practices that either erase colonial agency, and instead foregrounds the complex entanglements of race, empire, and memory that

define France's relationship with its former colonies. In doing so, it argues that the marginalisation of the *Dissidence* is not a historical oversight, but a reflection of deeper structural exclusions embedded in national memory.

Patriotism and duty towards the Republic

Both non-official and state commemorative initiatives highlight Antillean patriotism and republican values (*liberté, égalité, fraternité*). This section will explore how non-official commemorations incorporate themes of republicanism and the impact this has in building collective memory and the liberation narrative around the *Dissidence*.

The previous chapter explored the use of Palcy's documentary, *Parcours de dissidents*, within the June 2014 commemorations. This documentary, as well as others explored in the previous chapter, is constructed around *dissident* testimonies, maintaining them at the centre of their own stories by highlighting their feelings and personal experiences. Unlike Meslien and Sempaire's recent book, a synopsis funded by the state, which cites the *Dissidence* as resistance from only the Black population, Palcy does not discriminate, interviewing two *béké* cousins who she labels as *dissidents*.¹⁹⁷ Palcy's documentary therefore offers a larger range of testimonies and *dissident* experiences, including an effort to integrate female narratives. Despite this difference, all testimonies within the documentary speak of the duty they felt towards defending France as the key motivation behind joining the *Dissidence*, with many unable to accept the defeat of France.¹⁹⁸ Chloe Glotin's 2011 documentary also claims many Antilleans were 'plus patriotes que beaucoup de français', emphasising this narrative further.¹⁹⁹ This assertion is supported through testimonies in *Parcours de dissidents*, such as Jeanne Catayée's, who highlights that Antilleans were 'très très patriotes', saying how she often had tears in her eyes when thinking of those that 'donner leur existence pour défendre la foi en leur patrie'.²⁰⁰ The choice to construct the documentaries around these testimonies consolidates

¹⁹⁷ White populations within the Antilles

¹⁹⁸ *Parcours de dissidents* 2:53-2:56, Michel Dracius; *Parcours de dissidents* 15:19-15:22, Henry Joseph.

¹⁹⁹ Gros sur mon cœur, 53.46- 53.49.

²⁰⁰ *Parcours de dissidents* 3:34-3:38, Jeanne Catayée; Jeanne Duton-Catayée, *Avant la tombée du rideau*, vol. 2 (Editions Nestor, 2020), p. 148.

this narrative, highlighting how the *dissidents* themselves held overwhelming patriotic values, or felt compelled to frame their experiences in these terms.

The decision to promote patriotic narratives within unofficial discourses can be multifaceted. One way to interpret this decision is that it problematises patriotism. Watching scores of *dissidents* outline their patriotic sentiment as a key motivator indicates that they often faced doubts about their national pride and patriotic loyalty, suspicions that would not be directed at their white metropolitan counterparts. Similarly, following the January 2015 Charlie Hebdo terrorist attacks, debates over questions around French identity, social cohesion and the place of Islam in France were reignited.²⁰¹ Parallels between the treatment of the *dissidents* and the experiences of Muslims within French society can be drawn, demonstrating that many groups within French society struggle to be accepted as meeting the Republic's narrow visions of what makes one French. The ambivalence surrounding patriotism is evident in Macron's recent commemorations of Josephine Baker and Missak Manouchian.²⁰² In these speeches, Macron underscores not only their personal achievements but also their devotion to France, framing their identities through the lens of patriotic sacrifice. When honouring Baker, for instance, he declared: 'vous entrez dans notre Panthéon parce que vous avez aimé la France'.²⁰³ This formulation makes clear that their inclusion in the national narrative hinges on the articulation of love for France, suggesting that patriotism operates as both a prerequisite and a performative act within such state ceremonies.

It is also paramount to question whether many *dissidents*, in making their decision to join the FFL, were attempting to fit a certain idea of what it meant to serve the motherland and identify as French, an identity defined by the centralised state in their school curricula. In considering these understandings of the patriotic values highlighted within unofficial commemoration, we can

²⁰¹ Claire Demesmay, 'The French Identity Crisis', *DGAP*, <<https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/french-identity-crisis>> [accessed 21 August 2025]; G Raymond, 'After Charlie: the unravelling of the French republican response', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 52.1 (2018), pp. 24-38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2018.1430548>.

²⁰² Emmanuel Macron, Discours du Président de la République lors de l'Homage solennel de la Nation à Missak Manouchian (Paris, 2024) <<https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-22284-fr.pdf>> [accessed 30 May 2025]; Emmanuel Macron, Discours du Président de la République à l'occasion de la cérémonie d'entrée de Joséphine Baker au Panthéon (Paris, 2021) <<https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-18840-fr.pdf>> [accessed 30 May 2025].

²⁰³ Macron, l'occasion de la cérémonie d'entrée de Joséphine Baker au Panthéon.

begin to understand the complex roles colonial legacies play within Antillean society.

This narrative is not only promoted in documentaries. It has been a key element of literature produced by leading Antillean writers, long before official recognition in 2009. Works like *Paroles de terre en larmes* (Pineau, 1988), *Le Nègre et l'Amiral* (Confiant, 1988), *La Dissidence* (Confiant, 2002), and *Dissidences* (Maximin, 2008), all published by publishers based in metropolitan France, centre young male characters whose unwavering duty to France embodies their patriotic sacrifice.²⁰⁴ All four works focus on life under Vichy within the Antilles, with characters often battling the desire to join the *Dissidence* because of a strong 'amour de la France chez des descendants d'esclaves'.²⁰⁵ Whilst emphasising the strong patriotic sentiments of the local Black population, these stories also focus on family experience under Vichy rule and the impact of wartime separation and food shortages on those left behind. These literary representations allow us to understand the ways in which the *Dissidence* is remembered within the Antilles, tying their story to local memory of the war whilst highlighting feelings of patriotic duty towards 'la patrie'.²⁰⁶ However, in doing so, these works fail to incorporate the *Dissidence* history onto that of the general resistance narrative, confining these histories to local collective memory.

By privileging testimonies and literary accounts that highlight devotion to France, these commemorations both affirm the *Dissidence* within broader resistance narratives and expose the pressures to perform patriotism as a condition of recognition. *Dissidence* commemoration remains shaped by colonial legacies and the ongoing negotiation of what it means to be French.

Danger of the journey to join the *Dissidence*

Another central element of *Dissidence* commemoration is the emphasis on the *dissidents'* journey to neighbouring British islands. Within both non-official and

²⁰⁴ Raphaël Confiant, *Le nègre et l'amiral* (Éditions Grasset, 1988); Raphaël Confiant, *La dissidence* (Éditions Écriture, 2002); Daniel Maximin, 'Dissidences', in *The Caribbean Writer as Warrior of the Imaginary*, ed. by Kathleen Gyssels and Bénédicte Ledent (Éditions Rodopi, 2008), pp. 3–18; Gisèle Pineau, *Parole de terres en larmes* (Hatier, 1988).

²⁰⁵ Confiant, *Le nègre et l'amiral*, p.198.

²⁰⁶ Pineau, *Paroles de terre en larmes*, p. 6.

official commemoration, this narrative is constructed through the themes of treacherous currents, unstable boats, and the constant threat posed by Vichy patrols; all of which necessitated clandestine departures. This narrative, the most frequent within *Dissidence* commemorations, serves as a powerful expression of their sacrifice and loyalty to France, thus reinforcing the patriotism narrative discussed previously.

Unlike the comparisons made within official commemoration which tie this narrative into pre-existing Eurocentric understandings of the war (such as the Ile de Sein narrative), unofficial commemorative works construct this narrative in a way which is unique to the *Dissidence* and resonates locally. This often appears as a deliberate choice to compensate for their marginalisation elsewhere. Documentaries such as Glotin's *Gros sur mon cœur* centre this narrative around the *dissidents* themselves through focus on testimonies. The *dissidents* speak of the danger in leaving their homes, and the necessity of having strong patriotic sentiments as 'c'étaient des coloniaux et malgré ça ils ont refusé de laisser la France'.²⁰⁷ Palcy's documentary also consolidates this narrative, with countless testimonies talking about the 'vagues énormes', the friends they lost on the journey, and the severe punishments they would face if caught.²⁰⁸ Recreated passages within the documentary, such as the opening scene which shows men rowing across the Caribbean Sea, and another showing men capsizing their boat to avoid being seen by the Vichy authorities, strengthen *dissident* testimonies and ratify this narrative as essential to understanding the *Dissidence*.

Confiant's *Le nègre et l'amiral* talks of a *dissident* who died when attempting to reach the British islands, having been arrested and killed by 'coups de crosse', his body then left 'sur le sable toute la journée'.²⁰⁹ This implies it was too dangerous for local populations to be seen to retrieve the body as they would also be punished. The account of the man's violent death emphasises the risk and danger of the journey, and places it in a local context as specificities to the Antilles, the journey across Caribbean waters, and local lived experiences of the war are discussed. In doing so, non-official commemorative works enable this narrative to be understood as integral to the *Dissidence*, and without necessity of

²⁰⁷ Gros sur mon cœur, 53.15- 53.48.

²⁰⁸ Parcours de dissidents 33:28-33:31, Marcelle Lislet; Ibid, 30:48-31:56, Felix Fouche.

²⁰⁹ Confiant, *Le nègre et l'amiral*, p. 221.

being attached to pre-existing Eurocentric narratives. However, this confines the *Dissidence* to local memory, failing to resonate with the Metropole.

Ultimately, recurring emphasis on the dangers of the *dissidents'* journey highlights how narratives of sacrifice have become central to commemorating the *Dissidence*, both affirming patriotic devotion and situating the movement within the geography and lived realities of the Antilles. While these unofficial accounts resist assimilation into Eurocentric frameworks by rooting the story in local experiences, they also risk reinforcing the marginalisation of the *Dissidence*. This reveals the enduring tensions between local memory and national recognition, and the ways in which colonial legacies continue to shape the remembrance of Antillean contributions to the war.

Failure to commemorate

Themes of patriotism are often drawn upon in unofficial commemoration to highlight the deception felt by many *dissidents* as the state failed to recognise their sacrifices. Testimonies seen primarily in documentaries feature *dissidents* expressing their sense of betrayal, centring this narrative around the *dissidents* themselves.

The neglect experienced by the *dissidents* was primarily commemorative rather than material because as French citizens (from 1946), they (theoretically) received the same benefits as metropolitan veterans. However, in the case of Glotin's grandfather, his long-term struggle to gain acknowledgement of his wartime service meant he suffered from more bureaucratic obstacles than his metropolitan counterparts. Despite this, unofficial commemorations focus primarily on themes of commemorative neglect.

Unofficial discourses demonstrate this disappointment through expressions of deep emotion; Pally herself seemingly recognises the importance of *dissident* testimonies in representing the full story of *oubli* as well as a tool for transmission of memory, as her documentary exhibits numerous accounts of anger and disappointment.²¹⁰ One scene which heightens the audience's awareness of the impact of this failure features a photograph of a *dissident*

²¹⁰ Parcours de dissidents.

named Henry Joseph who had his leg amputated after stepping on a landmine during the August 1944 Provence landings (see Figure 1.).²¹¹ Whilst showing this image, he speaks of how he would never be able to dance again, despite only being eighteen, emphasising the impacts of his sacrifice.²¹² The image shown in the documentary appears to be his own, rather than an official photograph, demonstrating how his sacrifice is not even properly commemorated in state audio-visual archives. Later scenes show Henry Joseph discussing his anger that the important role played by Antillean troops in the Provence landings was not recognised.²¹³ This scene uses the case study of the Memorial of Mont-Faron to exhibit the neglect felt by the *dissidents*, with Henry Joseph explaining that when he visited the museum, he saw no mention of the *Dissidence*, as if they had been completely removed from history. He states he began to cry with rage, having lost his leg only 5 kilometres from this site.²¹⁴ As has been discussed, Mont-Faron has since incorporated the *Dissidence* within its pedagogic space but ultimately fails to showcase the integral role many *dissidents* played within these landings. Although the role of the *Dissidence* is explored at multiple points, the emphasis placed primarily on troops from the North and West African colonies, reduces visibility and limits impact.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid, 1:10:20-1:10:50, Henry Joseph; Henry Joseph has been one of the leading campaigners, in his role as President of the association for *Dissidents* and veterans of the FFL in Martinique, for state recognition of the role played by the Dissidents. He co-authored a history of La Dissidence with Lucien-René Abénon, *Les dissidents des Antilles dans les Forces françaises libres combattantes*, 1940–1945.

²¹³ Wardleworth, p. 10.

²¹⁴ Parcours de dissidents, 1:21:50-1:22:35, Henry Joseph.



Figure 3 - Henry Joseph alongside fellow dissidents after losing his leg²¹⁵

The *dissident* Henri Helanon connects his disappointment to feelings of patriotism towards France, stating that although he feels ‘*profondément français*’ and does not regret his choices, he would not again make the decision to join the *Dissidence* due to state neglect.²¹⁶ This statement makes a profound impact, demonstrating the *dissidents*’ deep feelings of betrayal. Palcy also employs the use of statistics to portray the extent to which this history has been marginalised, with the narrator confirming that even sixty years following the war, despite over 2,500 of the 50,000 FFL soldiers being *dissidents*, their stories are still absent from the history books, ignored both within the Antilles and the Metropole.²¹⁷ Although the dissidents therefore only made up 5% of FFL soldiers, their contribution remains significant, and therefore the failure to commemorate or acknowledge them provokes a deep sense of betrayal.

²¹⁵ Ibid, 1:10:20-1:10:50.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 1:23:01-1:23:24, Henri Helanon.

²¹⁷ Ibid, 1:21:25-1:21:45.

Glotin's documentary encapsulates similar demonstrations of emotion and feelings of betrayal.²¹⁸ One way she highlights these feelings is by asking several *dissidents* if they have received sufficient recognition. The first *dissident* (*dissident 8*)²¹⁹ replies that there has been no recognition, with deep sadness in his eyes and emotions in his face clearly visible.²²⁰ Another *dissident*, Paul Milard, highlights that only after sixty-six years did he receive anything from the state recognising his role in the war, stating that he 'reste seule avec [sa] mémoire'.²²¹ The documentary also highlights Glotin's grandfather's difficulty in gaining recognition despite numerous attempts to contact the French authorities, even though he was based in metropolitan France. Glotin underlines that her desire to create the documentary was a way for her to 'comprendre ou trouver des traces' when she discovered her grandfather's involvement. The emphasis placed on this, with scenes throughout showing her family looking at and discussing the documents which had been found, demonstrates the impact the neglect of this has had on not only the *dissidents* but subsequent generations. Despite never hearing him 'parler de la guerre', his attachment to the documents which were later found, and his insistence on contacting the authorities repeatedly, demonstrates the importance of recognition to the *dissidents*.²²² It is important to understand his decision to not speak about his war experience within the context of the time; Glotin herself points out how many veterans chose to stay discreet due to racist attitudes and the wish to assimilate into metropolitan French society in order to protect their children who were products of inter-racial marriages.²²³ This can be viewed as non-official non-commemoration, a deliberate decision to keep recognition on a localised and personal level, rather than celebrated nationally. This has been seen within other groups such as the *Harkis*, who due to the controversial nature of their war experiences and the stigma they faced, having chosen to support the French during the Algerian War of Independence despite being

²¹⁸ Gros sur mon cœur.

²¹⁹ Dissidents are numbered in order of appearance due to difficulty in being able to name each person, but will be named where possible.

²²⁰ Gros sur mon cœur, 40:18-40:37.

²²¹ Ibid, 54:15-54:42.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Debate following screening of Gros sur mon cœur, 8 May 2019, <<https://tropiques-atrrium.fr/rcm/>> [accessed 29 March 2025].

native Muslim Algerians, chose to stay silent.²²⁴ For example, for decades, the graves of thirty-one *Harki* children were unmarked and therefore unknown to the wider public; families' memory work remained local until a stele was finally unveiled in 2024.²²⁵

Although the importance of testimonies has been highlighted throughout this section, unless clearly labelled, the commemorative impact of such statements is reduced. In her documentary, Glotin fails to name each *dissident* as they appear, making it difficult for the audience to know who each person is.²²⁶ This undermines the aim of the documentary which acts as a way for the *dissidents* to reclaim their own histories. In Palcy's *Parcours de dissidents*, each *dissident* is introduced on first appearance, with a photo, their full name, date, and place of birth. Having seen these two opposing methodologies and the consequences of each, I intend to name each *dissident*, where possible, to ensure each *dissident* remains in control of their own narrative.

The decision to show a photo of each *dissident* as they are introduced (see Figure 2.) demonstrates a clear input on how the *dissidents* themselves wish to be presented (as they are personal photographs rather than official ones), signalling to the audience that these men and women whose testimonies we are hearing have not always been old people, instead allowing the audience to imagine more clearly the *dissidents* during the war.

²²⁴ Claire Eldridge, *From Empire to Exile : History and Memory within the Pied-Noir and Harki Communities, 1962-2012* (Manchester University Press, 2016), p. 80.

²²⁵ Rémi Fagnon, 'Laudun l'Ardoise : une stèle dévoilée au cimetière du camp de Saint-Maurice, en hommage aux 31 enfants harkis retrouvés enterrés sur place', *TVSud*, 24 September 2024 <https://tvsudmagazine.fr/2024/09/laudun-lardoise-une-stele-devoilee-au-cimetiere-du-camp-de-saint-maurice-en-hommage-aux-31-enfants-harkis-retrouves-enterres-sur-place/?utm_source=chatgpt.com> [accessed 21 August 2025].

²²⁶ Credits at the end of documentary lack clarity.

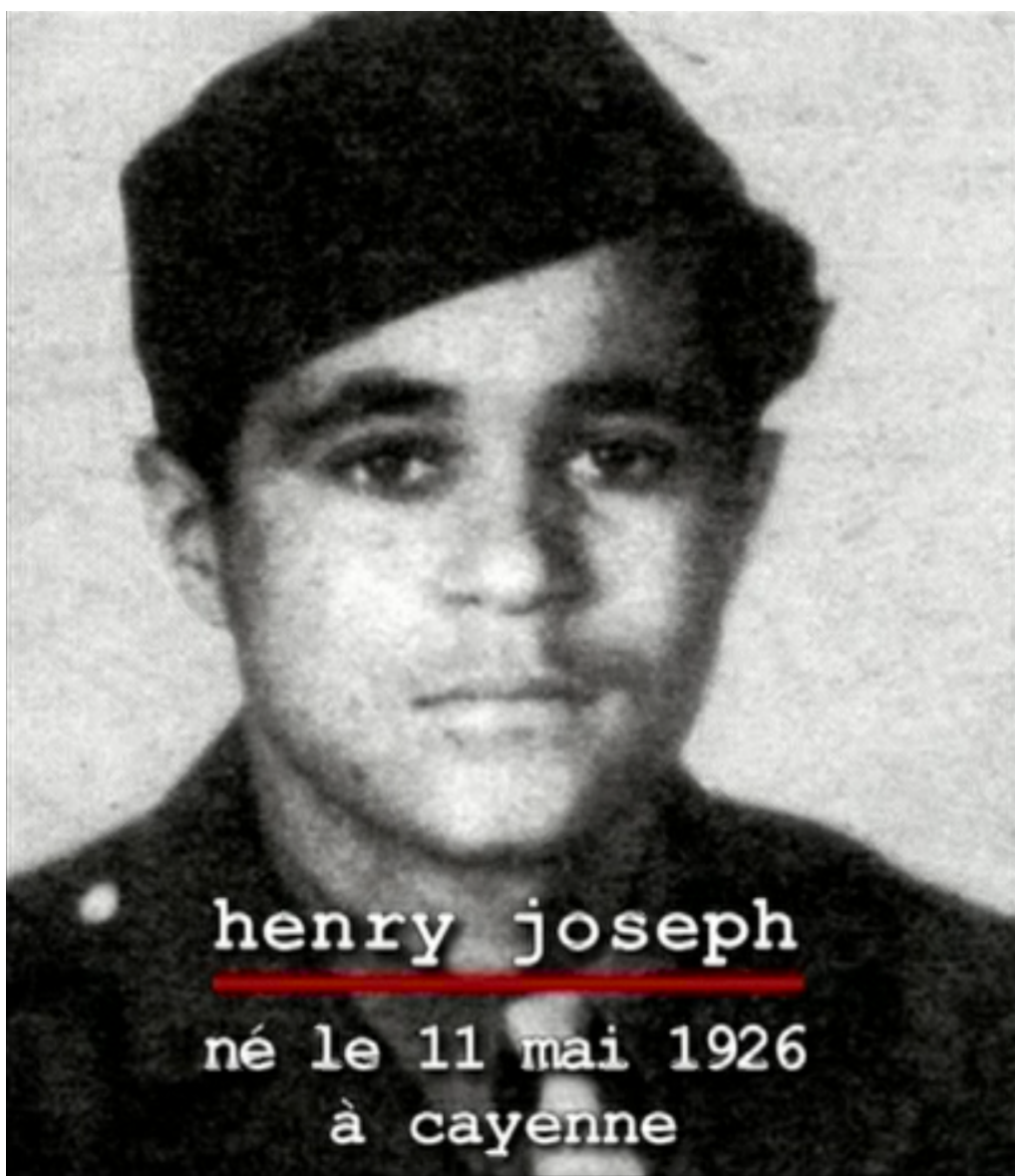


Figure 4 - Example of dissident presentation in *Parcours de dissidents*.²²⁷

Literary works by Gisèle Pineau, such as *L'exil selon Julia* (1996), *Mes quatre femmes* (2007), and *Paroles de terre en larmes* (1988), narrate stories of wartime and *dissident* experiences in the Antilles.²²⁸ Pineau, whose father was a *dissident* and who appears in Palcy's documentary, offers narratives that allow families to reconnect with aspects of history that are often absent from school curricula, commemorative events, and national holidays.²²⁹ One way in which Pineau highlights the unknown nature of the *Dissidence* is through her short story, *Paroles de terre en larmes*, her first story featuring the *Dissidence*, which follows the story of Maxime and his wife, Félicie. Maxime rebels against the Vichy

²²⁷ *Parcours de dissidents*, 15:25-15:28.

²²⁸ Pineau, *Paroles de terre en larmes*; Gisèle Pineau, *L'Exil selon Julia* (Éditions Stock, 1996).

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

officials by joining the *Dissidence*. He travels to the neighbouring British islands, and eventually fights in Africa and Europe, before returning to the Antilles. He endures harsh physical conditions, including hunger, fatigue, and the threat of death, as well as the emotional trauma of losing fellow soldiers. However, a significant aspect of the story recounts his experiences of the racial discrimination and colonial prejudice within the ranks of the French army. Despite fighting for republican ideals of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, Maxime quickly realises that these values are not extended to him and his fellow Antillean soldiers. On returning he realises his contributions to the liberation of France are unrecognised. His narrative encapsulates the emotional weight of Antillean wartime experiences: a complex mixture of pride in their role in France's liberation and bitterness over the continued marginalisation of their stories within national memory. His subsequent turn to alcohol and violence because of his PTSD, demonstrates the profound personal impact of his war experiences and the state's failure to honour their sacrifices. On returning, Maxime was met with interest, but over time this fades away as the *Dissidence* does not become an integral aspect of the resistance and liberation narrative, even within the Antilles. Maxime is even taunted by his wife, with Félicie asking him 'la France a gagné la guerre ! Et toi, qu'est-ce que tu as gagné? Tu l'as vu, ton Général ? Elle t'a reconnu, ta mère ?'.²³⁰

In her semi-autobiographical work, *L'exil selon Julia*, Pineau further highlights the failure of the state to commemorate the 'héros anonymes qui ont donné toute leur jeunesse à la France et n'ont connu qu'avec parcimonie le levain de la gloire'.²³¹ These stories work to reclaim this marginalised history and make an important political statement to the state which did not recognise their role until many years after the publication of such work.

Within unofficial discourses, we see a coherent narrative which emphasises the impact of the failure to commemorate, using *dissident* testimonies or fiction to highlight deep feelings of betrayal. Whereas the state places their failure to commemorate within the past, often non-state commemorations identify this failure as a constant element of campaigns for *Dissidence* recognition, highlighting the ongoing need to integrate permanent and enduring legacies of commemoration.

²³⁰ Pineau, *Paroles de terre en larmes*, p. 16.

²³¹ Pineau, *L'Exil selon Julia*, p.15.

Enslavement discourse

Enslavement is a powerful lens through which to view *Dissidence* commemoration, and follows previous discussions with the inclusion of themes such as the importance of republican values, the act of rebelling against authorities, both colonial and Vichy, and attempting escape, as well as the state's failure to recognise long-neglected narratives. The deployment of the enslavement narrative varies across different forms of commemoration, raising critical questions about the purpose and impact of such distinctions.

Emerging more prominently in non-official discourses, a link is made between the *dissidents'* decision to escape the Vichy-controlled territories and the concept of *marronage*.²³² The reference to *marronage*, a term referring to the process of fleeing plantations to settle and create new communities, is used to draw parallels between society under Vichy and society under slavery 'qui pousseraient les Antillais au marronage', highlighting the fears felt by the Black population during the war years.²³³

An example, which focusses on the lived experiences of its characters, is seen in local literature such as *La Dissidence: roman antillais* by Alice Delpech and Pineau's *L'exil selon Julia*.²³⁴ Delpech's novel presents a complicated array of motivations for Antillean *dissidents*, depicting their resistance not merely as a political act but as a personal struggle to escape economic difficulties and the oppressive social structures similar to those seen under slavery.²³⁵ In Pineau's *L'exil selon Julia*, Julia's fear over the re-establishment of slavery provides an additional motivation for her son to enlist, highlighting how Pineau (herself a daughter of a *dissident*) believes many *dissidents* enlisted not only due to patriotic sentiments, but for their own emancipation. In this story, Julia describes her son's departure in relation to *marronage*, linking two key moments

²³² Eric Jennings, 'La Dissidence aux Antilles (1940-1943)', *Vingtème Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 68 (2000), pp. 55-72, (p. 56); Kristen Stromberg Childers, *Seeking Imperialism's Embrace – National Identity, Decolonisation, and Assimilation in the French Caribbean* (Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 34; Wimbush, p.162

²³³ Laurent Jalabert, 'Les Antilles de l'Amiral Robert', in *L'Empire colonial sous Vichy*, ed. by Jacques Cantier and Eric Jennings (Odile, 2004), pp. 51-68 (p. 61).

²³⁴ Alice Delpech, *La Dissidence: roman antillais* (Éditions L'Harmattan, 1991); Pineau, *L'Exil selon Julia*.

²³⁵ Wimbush, p.160.

in Antillean history.²³⁶ This literary perspective enriches the historical narrative, challenging singular interpretations and underscoring the diversity of experiences that shaped the *Dissidence* and the war years within these territories.

These depictions contrast with state commemorations which offer a singular interpretation of the link to enslavement. As highlighted in the previous chapter, the state draws on the theme of enslavement to emphasise key differences in the values of Vichy, which had many similarities to society under slavery, and the values represented by the Free French. The complicated array of motivations felt by the local Black population, and the multidimensional difficulties of the period are not explored within official commemoration.

Linking themes seen within both non-official and official commemorative initiatives, writer Estelle-Sarah Bulle's perspective offers a multifaceted approach. As the daughter of a Guadeloupean father, she speaks of the heightened racism under Vichy triggering memories of slavery for the population and acting as a key motivator to see the return of the French Republic which was a source of great pride.²³⁷ This approach not only affirms ideas seen within local literature, but also offers a connection to the French Republic, a key theme explored within official discourses.

This section raises important questions about the competitive dynamics of commemorative narratives, where state funding and legitimacy often depend on the alignment of memory projects with republican values. Commemorative initiatives frequently function as tick-box exercises for state approval and resources, resulting in non-official discourses obtaining a proximity to state-endorsed narratives, as seen within the state-sponsored work explored in the previous chapter.²³⁸ A recurring challenge faced by neglected histories that hope to incorporate themselves within collective memory is the need for such commemorations to resonate with local populations, which often requires grounding them in familiar historical frameworks. In the enslavement

²³⁶ Ibid, p.169.

²³⁷ 'La Dissidence des jeunes Guadeloupéennes contre Pétain.', Autant en emporte l'Histoire, RadioFrance, 30 September 2023, podcast, Franceinter, <<https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/podcasts/autant-en-emporte-l-histoire/autant-en-emporte-l-histoire-du-samedi-30-septembre-2023-2750868>> [accessed 10 February 2025].

²³⁸ Demange, Meslien and Sempaire, 1940-1943 : résistances et dissidences aux Antilles et en Guyane : mémoires de guerre - mémoires de vie, (Orphie, 2023).

narrative, for example, references to racism and agricultural labour establish a symbolic continuity between the experience of *dissidents* and the history of enslavement. For instance, Guy Cornely's testimony, comparing his role in the Normandy landings to that of the metropolitan abolitionist Victor Schoelcher freeing Guadeloupe, demonstrates the blending of republican ideals with Antillean historical memory.²³⁹ The state's willingness to endorse such interpretations underscores a strategy of reinforcing national values through a colonial lens. In understanding the dynamics of memory politics and the need to fit within state-endorsed commemorative narratives, who controls power within the construction of national narratives is clearly highlighted. Whilst the need to resonate with a local population, which due to a vastly different geo-political and socio-cultural landscape introduced in part through colonial structures whose legacies live on, introduces further difficulty in grounding this history within French understandings of the war.

The prominence of the enslavement narrative, with its broader social resonance and long-standing recognition, has meant that it overshadows many histories, including the *Dissidence*. This is especially pertinent in moments of heightened commemorative activity, such as anniversaries (8 May, 6 June, 18 June) where limited public (and media) attention fuels a sense of narrative competition. An example of the pertinence of the enslavement narrative within Antillean collective memory is the silent protest on 23 May 1998, which saw over 40,000 people in Paris, the majority with connections to Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyane, and Reunion, celebrate the memory of their enslaved ancestors.²⁴⁰ Contrary to the official position of the French State which promoted a (metropolitan) abolitionist narrative, protesters aimed to move focus onto the (Antillean) victims of enslavement. This reveals the scale to which the Antillean diaspora feel connected to the history of enslavement, (following the Taubira law of 2001, promises were made to include enslavement within the school curriculum, and with the 2008 reforms it has been an obligatory theme) whereas

²³⁹ Victor Schoelcher was a white French abolitionist, writer, politician and journalist, best known for his leading role in the abolition of slavery in France in 1848.

²⁴⁰ 'May 23rd, a national day in homage to the victims of colonial slavery', Société de plantation, histoire & mémoires de l'esclavage à La Réunion, n.d. <<https://www.portail-esclavage-reunion.fr/en/may-23rda-national-day-in-homage-to-the-victims-of-colonial-slavery/>> [accessed 9 June 2025].

my interview with Martinican descendant, Sarah Legendry, demonstrated that the metropolitan Antillean diaspora remain largely unaware of the *Dissidence*.²⁴¹

This section has demonstrated that enslavement serves as a powerful lens through which to understand the motivations and commemoration of the *Dissidence*, particularly when framed through the concept of marronage. While the state increasingly integrates this narrative to reinforce republican ideals of liberty and resistance, non-state perspectives often centre lived experiences, trauma, and cultural memory, offering a more complex understanding of the *Dissidence*, and enslavement more generally. However, in doing so, non-official commemorative works can also complicate the ability to incorporate the *Dissidence* into the French commemorative landscape.

Emphasis on individual heroes and experiences

This section explores how local literature and documentaries place emphasis on individual experiences through *dissident* testimonies which help to challenge state-dominated, Eurocentric commemorative frameworks. However, like state commemorations, these works also employ narratives focussed on well-known figures which fit within pre-existing commemorative discourses, impacting the way the *Dissidence* is understood.

As was highlighted in the previous chapter, Eboué, being the first to rally to de Gaulle, remains a centralised figure in the Free French narrative, and Valentino also remains a well-known figure within the Antilles due to his post-war political career in Guadeloupe.

Seen within the documentary, *Dissidence aux Antilles et en Guyane* (2003), directed by Barcha Bauer, the figures of Valentino and Eboué are mentioned repeatedly. These men offer a way to link decolonial, *dissident* narratives (as figures born within these territories, with key political roles in France's colonies, and stories of dissent from the Vichy regime) to narratives promoted by the state. Although both are seemingly drawn on in similar ways, references to Valentino offer a more localised understanding of the conflict, resonating more

²⁴¹ Brigitte Brault, 'L'histoire de Martinique : comment est-elle enseignée', Franceinfo, 11 August 2020 <<https://la1ere.franceinfo.fr/martinique/histoire-martinique-comment-est-elle-enseignee-860194.html>> [accessed 19 April 2025]; Sarah Legendry, interview with author, 25 February 2025.

with a local, rather than national audience, with the wartime context specific to the Antilles.

The use of the term 'Papa de Gaulle', cited in both *La Dissidence* and *Le Nègre et l'Amiral*, demonstrates the extent to which, for Confiant, the dissidents felt an extreme connection to de Gaulle, and that he had 'sauvé la France'.²⁴² The reference to de Gaulle as a father figure is also paternalistic in a recognisably colonial way; an idea constructed through colonialism that France was the benevolent parent, guiding its colonial children to civilisation. The connection to de Gaulle is corroborated further in his work, as well as in *Parcours de dissidents*, which both place emphasis on the 18 June BBC call. Confiant's characters know the speech by heart, repeating the section which speaks of France's vast empire, demonstrating the personal importance to them and the significant motivation of the call.²⁴³ However, within *Paroles de terre en larmes*, Félicie does not speak of de Gaulle in the same gushing manner, but refers to him as a tree which produces poisonous toxins, later taunting Maxime that she knew he would not be appreciated by de Gaulle, and France more generally.²⁴⁴ Perhaps Pineau, her father having experienced neglect by the state, wishes to use her work to emphasise the state's failure to commemorate and cast de Gaulle in a different light.

In drawing on these figures, non-official commemorative work ties into state-endorsed discourses, enabling the *Dissidence* to be incorporated within the broader resistance narrative, again highlighting the power the state holds in constructing collective memory and the national narrative. Unfortunately, this decision also takes away from the individual diverse experiences of the *dissidents*, and their ability to centre their stories around themselves, introducing a singular and Eurocentric lens through which to view the *Dissidence*.

References made to Colonel Tourtet also fit within this narrative but are more intricately tied to the *Dissidence*. Colonel Tourtet founded the Bataillon Antillais no.5 in Martinique following the events of the Balata mutiny and the territory

²⁴² Confiant, *Le nègre et l'amiral*; Confiant, *La Dissidence*.

²⁴³ Confiant, *La Dissidence*, p. 146.

²⁴⁴ Pineau, *Paroles de terre en larmes*, p. 9, p. 16.

moving into control of the Free French.²⁴⁵ He later died fighting for the Poche de Royan in April 1945 alongside members of this battalion. Jeanne Catayée notes how those that died ‘donnèrent leur vie pour la Patrie’, including ‘le colonel Tourtet, notre colonel... un brave homme et un homme de cœur [qui] ne nous avait jamais abandonnées’.²⁴⁶ What makes this statement even more significant is that neither Catayée nor her husband were involved in fighting alongside Tourtet, demonstrating what a well-known figure he had become.²⁴⁷ Catayée’s autobiographies are not the only examples of non-official commemorative work where Tourtet’s character and role is emphasised. Within Glotin’s documentary, when discussing the Balata mutiny, Tourtet’s correspondence is read out, with various images of him shown. In placing the importance on the figure of Tourtet, the role of one singular white metropolitan figure is highlighted, rather than the Black Antillean *dissidents* under his command.²⁴⁸ This once again aligns with metropolitan focussed resistance narratives promoted by the state, and fails to enable the *dissidents* to express their individual experiences. Although there is a lack of material featuring *dissidents’* written testimonies available, these documentaries feature scores of verbal accounts from *dissidents* about their experiences, enough which would offer a full picture and combat the need for emphasis placed on Eurocentric narratives.

However, as well as emphasising more well-known individuals within these discourses, non-official commemorative work also explores individual *dissidents’* own stories. Unlike the examples previously explored, in highlighting the unique nature of their individual war experiences, this centres the story of the *Dissidence* around the *dissidents* themselves. The three documentaries created by Bauer, Palcy, and Glotin, are illustrative of this.²⁴⁹ These documentaries give the *dissidents* their individual moments to share elements of the history which remain important to them; this differs between each *dissident*, demonstrating the complexities of the *Dissidence* and challenging singular interpretations seen within many examples of commemoration. In official commemoration, the emphasis is placed on the collective of the

²⁴⁵ On June 27, 1943, in the Balata garrison, the 3rd Company under the authority of Henri Tourtet, mutinied. They declared their support for the Free French and refused to obey the Vichy authorities.

²⁴⁶ Jeanne Duton-Catayée, p. 117

²⁴⁷ Ibid, p.111.

²⁴⁸ Gros sur mon cœur, 19:10-21:40.

²⁴⁹ *La Dissidence aux Antilles et en Guyane*, dir. by Barcha Bauer (France, 2002); *Parcours de dissidents*; Gros sur mon cœur.

Dissidence, shown specifically through emphasis on the journey to the neighbouring islands and the 'collective' sacrifice made for patriotic and republican values (as seen by the state).

One *dissident*, Guy Cornely, speaks of his experience onboard the *Le Courbet* placing him as the first Black person to disembark at Ouistreham in Normandy following D-Day. Whereas Barthélémy Pineau cries as he recounts his memory on meeting a German POW who, after realising Pineau was not going to kill him, gave him a photo of himself to thank him. The POW even asked Pineau to tell his family he was alive, but Pineau expresses regret at not having been given the opportunity. Pineau then says how this POW must have told his family the story and that due to this, they would no longer fear Black people.²⁵⁰ Not only are these individual accounts crucial in understanding the complex array of experiences within the war but also allow Palcy to explore themes that often remain neglected within official commemoration. For example, Pineau's story demonstrates the extent to which he faced racism during the war and how he had learnt that Germans often feared Black people, whilst demonstrating the emotional impact of this (see Figure 3.). In countering the singular interpretations often seen within state commemoration, these documentaries allow the audience to grasp the true and multifaceted nature of the *Dissidence*.

²⁵⁰ Parcours de dissidents 1:04:02-1:04:46; Ibid, 1:17:30-1:19:02.



Figure 5- Barthelemy Pineau cries as he recounts his war experiences²⁵¹

Likewise, local literature also emphasises individualised narratives and experiences of the war such as in Gisèle Pineau's two autobiographical novels, *L'Exil selon Julia* and *Mes quatre femmes*.²⁵² In these texts, she explores *dissidents'* war time experiences and their clandestine involvement with the FFL (Pineau does not specify to what extent these accounts are built on her father's experiences). In doing so, she gives a voice to these men and women, highlighting their personal sacrifices and the importance of their war-time roles. Similarly to the documentaries explored above, unlike the state which embeds further Eurocentric discourses through linking the *Dissidence* to well-known figures already entrenched in collective memory, these examples of decolonial content focus on local populations and offer nuanced and true understandings of their sacrifices, resonating with the local population and experience of war.

Commemoration initiatives, such as those seen in 2009 and 2014, present a unified version of the *Dissidence*, and in doing so fail to disseminate the true and complex array of histories within the *Dissidence* history. However, offering a unified story enables the *Dissidence* to be incorporated more easily within

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Pineau, *l'exil selon Julia*; Gisèle Pineau, *Mes quatre femmes* (Philippe Ray, 2007).

understandings of the colonies' roles in the liberation. As highlighted in the previous chapters, recent colonial recognitions have focussed on the roles played by West and North African colonies, especially in events such as the Provence landings, offering a unified presentation of these events. The state therefore prefers to offer a singular unified narrative than a complex array of individual experiences which complicate narratives and understandings of the conflict. The decision to challenge these singular interpretations within many examples of non-official commemorative work is extremely important, giving voice to the *dissidents'* individual experiences, challenging singular interpretations, and emphasising the diversity of experiences that shaped the *Dissidence*, but unfortunately makes integrating the *Dissidence* within national narratives more difficult. Perhaps Palcy, Glotin, and Confiant were aware of this and therefore chose to not only centre their works around the *dissidents* themselves, but also included individual well-known figures to provide resonance, not only for the local but also national population.

While state-led commemorations of the *Dissidence* often foreground prominent figures and unify memory through national narratives, non-official commemorative practices offer a more nuanced exploration of memory. These forms of remembrance highlight both the symbolic significance of well-known individuals and the deeply personal stories of lesser-known *dissidents*. In tying the *Dissidence* narrative onto that of pre-existing metropolitan narratives, the complex and individual nature of the *Dissidence* struggles to be understood, with the testimonies of the *dissidents* failing to compete against the emphasis placed on well-known individuals.

Wartime experiences

A significant distinction emerges between state narratives and non-official discourses concerning wartime experiences. The latter, often through focus on personal accounts, places greater emphasis on the lived realities of soldiers, highlighting both the emotional and physical tolls endured.

One testimony (*dissident 2*) seen in Glotin's documentary offers a comprehensive account of an individual's war time experience, detailing the difficulties faced under Vichy, his decision to join the FFL, and his experience fighting for twenty-four days before becoming injured and spending a month in

a hospital.²⁵³ These testimonies highlight both the individual nature of war as well as the role each *dissident* played in the liberation of France. Another scene shows a further *dissident* (*dissident* 5) speaking about his experience in North Africa and the journey they made to Marseille as part of the Provence landings, ‘sans nourriture’, where their battalion was dispatched to several locations.²⁵⁴ During this conversation, the documentary shows multiple clips of his family listening to him as he recounts his personal experiences.²⁵⁵ This allows the audience to recognise the importance of sharing these testimonies with younger generations; perhaps Glotin chose to place emphasis on this as she wishes her grandfather had done the same. This demonstrates the measurable impact the failure to commemorate this history has had on subsequent generations as well as the *dissidents* themselves.

Similar powerful scenes are shown in *Parcours de dissidents*, with the final scene capturing numerous *dissidents* speaking to young Antilleans on the beaches, whilst music recounting their story plays in the background (see Figure 4.).²⁵⁶ This contrasts with earlier scenes where the *dissidents* speak of how young people are unaware of their roles in the war and how they fear their experiences will die with them.²⁵⁷ This highlights the importance of disseminating this story, especially to younger generations, and reminds the audience of their duty to make sure their memory lives on. It also underlines the impact of the lack of official recognition, both on the *dissidents* and subsequent generations, making it clear that instead of the state, it is non-official commemorative work, such as these documentaries, that fulfil this role.

²⁵³ Gros sur mon cœur, 39.05-39.17.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 29:54-30:56.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ *Parcours de dissidents*.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.



Figure 6 - Young Antillean brings Henry Joseph his wheelchair²⁵⁸

Within these interviews, demonstrations of intense emotion when recalling the difficulties they faced in fighting, establish the importance of their role and the sacrifices each *dissident* made. Henri Helanon speaks of how he never ‘cessé d’avoir peur pendant toute la guerre’, a statement which is later consolidated through his recollection of nearly losing his legs to frostbite and how he had to beg the nurse to save him, crying both then and during the interview.²⁵⁹

Another dissident, Ernest Tesor, shows emotion when recalling how he ‘vu des amis qui sont morts’.²⁶⁰ As well as employing the use of testimonies to highlight the involvement the *dissidents* had in liberating France, Palcy utilises statistics to emphasise their role, highlighting how they spent ‘350 jours au front sans interruption’, with 208 gravely injured and 28 dead.²⁶¹

These documentaries, however, also focus heavily on life under the Vichy regime within the Antilles, and the journey to the neighbouring islands. As explored in a previous section, the emphasis on the dangers of this journey allows the documentaries to explore themes of dissent and patriotism, whilst emphasising the sacrifices made by the *dissidents*, and highlighting the unique nature of their resistance. Glotin’s documentary also explores the Balata

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 1:24:40-1:24:45.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, 30:38-30:43; Ibid, 1:15:25-1:16:31, Henri Helanon.

²⁶⁰ Ibid, 1:16:47-1:16:49, Ernest Tesor.

²⁶¹ Ibid, 1:19:56-1:20:00.

mutiny, 'la force principale' in the movement to overthrow the Vichy regime in Martinique.²⁶² The documentary pays specific attention to this event as Glotin's grandfather was one of the Antilleans involved; he would then become a *dissident*, joining the BA no.5 under Colonel Tourtet following the instatement of the Free French in Martinique. The focus on this mutiny, and the events of 1943 within the Antilles, places emphasis on the internal resistance, rather than the involvement of *dissidents* within African and European theatres of war (the geographical locations which are inscribed within France's understandings of the conflict). It does however demonstrate a continuity between those that were involved in the internal resistance, specifically the Balata mutiny, and the *Dissidence*. In fact, many of those who revolted in June 1943 became *dissidents*, including Glotin's grandfather. However, focussing on this event undermines the documentary's ability to showcase the importance of the *Dissidence* within the liberation of France as it does not subscribe to France's liberation narrative.

Both *Gros sur mon cœur* and Catayée's autobiography focus entirely on the BA no.5 as this was Glotin's grandfather's and Catayée's regiment, placing emphasis on Colonel Tourtet, 'qui fut vraiment le père du régiment'.²⁶³ Although both are crucial in gaining first hand perspectives of the *Dissidence*, in focussing only on the stories to which they have personal connection they do not offer a comprehensive overview of the *Dissidence*. This would be less significant if there were more material and coverage of the *Dissidence* as a whole, but as these resources are scarce, the impact is significant. Even literature whose main theme is that of the *Dissidence*, such as *Dissidences, la Dissidence, le Nègre et l'Amiral*, focus entirely on experience of war within the Antilles, rather than within African or European theatres of war. Although an integral element of the *Dissidence* narrative and one connected to local collective memory, the decision to neglect *dissidents'* war-time roles, minimises the importance of the *Dissidence* and confines this history to a local, not national narrative.

Palcy's documentary instead explores the *Dissidence* in its entirety; her decision to interview those who left as early as 1941 to those that left following the instatement of the Free French, offers a broader and detailed understanding of

²⁶² Gros sur mon cœur, 15:35-15:38.

²⁶³ Jeanne Duton-Catayée, p. 117

the *Dissidence* and therefore allows the audience to grasp the true and varied nature of their roles.

Dissidents' differing accounts of war further complicate the ability to integrate this narrative within *Dissidence* commemoration, and wider resistance commemoration. Unlike the experience of the journey made to the neighbouring British islands which is shared between the *dissidents* and therefore introduces a united narrative, individual war testimonies introduce a complicated array of themes and discourses. As seen previously, especially within state commemoration, the narratives which are successfully integrated within understandings of the war, primarily offer a united, singular interpretation of the conflict (one which also often supports state-endorsed narratives of republican values and metropolitan-centred discourses).²⁶⁴

In relation to this, a lack of unified cultural production and the proliferation of atomised forms of commemoration significantly diminish the impact of such efforts on collective memory formation. When representations are fragmented or localised, they fail to generate the coherence required to shape enduring national narratives. In contrast to centrally endorsed or widely disseminated narratives, atomised commemorations tend to reflect highly specific, often regional or community-based experiences, which may resonate on a local level but lack the broader visibility to influence national memory discourses. As a result, such commemorations struggle to gain traction within the national imaginary and are often marginalised or overlooked in official histories. The lack of pressure placed on the state due to the lack of unified commemorative production thereby reinforces the marginalisation of *Dissidence* recognition.

While non-official commemorative works such as Glotin and Palcy's documentaries provide vital platforms for *dissidents'* testimonies and emotional recollections, their fragmented and often localised nature limits their capacity to challenge dominant national narratives effectively. The atomisation of these commemorative efforts, compounded by a focus on personal or familial connections, curtails the formation of a cohesive and unified narrative of the *Dissidence*, thereby diluting its visibility within France's collective memory.

²⁶⁴ Ann Rigney, 'Cultural memory studies: Mediation, narrative, and the aesthetic', in *The Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies* (Routledge, 2016), pp. 65-76.

Without a concerted and unified cultural production that integrates *dissidents'* wartime contributions into the core fabric of national memory, these personal testimonies, though powerful, risk remaining peripheral. The task remains to bridge these fragmented commemorations into a collective historical consciousness that acknowledges the full complexity and significance of the *Dissidence* within the broader context of the French Resistance.

Female narratives

The final narrative explored in this section is the role of women in the *Dissidence*. Though it appears infrequently in commemorative discourses, by engaging with this narrative, we gain a fuller, more inclusive understanding of the *Dissidence* and confront the persistent marginalisation of stories that remain on the periphery of official memory. As highlighted in the previous chapter, this neglect is not unique to the context of the *Dissidence*; rather, it reflects a broader pattern in which women's roles in war efforts are routinely overshadowed by those of men.²⁶⁵

Novels such as *La Dissidence: un roman antillais*, *L'exil selon Julia*, and *Paroles de terre en larmes* foreground women's lived experiences, exploring the impact of life under Vichy within the Antilles, an arena often forgotten in both geographical and gendered terms and which therefore warrants further exploration.²⁶⁶ These texts demonstrate the personal and historical nature of this gendered narrative, with focus on family memories and stories, which build an over-arching image of life in the Antilles during this period. A powerful conversation within *Paroles de terre en larmes* demonstrates the importance of understanding female experiences of war; on being told by her *dissident* husband that the war was difficult, Félicie replies 'je sais, j'ai dit, j'ai fait la guerre aussi'.²⁶⁷ However, the decision to focus primarily on the experiences of women who remained in the Antilles, rather than *dissidentes* who played a crucial role alongside male troops, fails to acknowledge the importance of female *dissidents'* roles, reinforcing the *Dissidence* as a male dominated history.

²⁶⁵ Diamond, *Women and the Second World War in France, 1939-1948, Choices and Constraints*.

²⁶⁶ Wimbush, p. 169.

²⁶⁷ Pineau, *Paroles de terre en larmes*, p. 15.

Parcours de dissidents offers female *dissidents* the opportunity to articulate their experiences. These testimonies speak of alternative roles within the recognised theatres of war of North Africa and France, detailing work in hospitals and a transfusion centre in the case of Anne Passionnise Thome.²⁶⁸ Interestingly, most testimonies do not differ from the men's, with emphasis placed on the dangers of the journeys they undertook, both to neighbouring islands and to North Africa, and the experiences of racism they faced at not being believed by French authorities that they could communicate effectively in French.²⁶⁹ These female testimonies also highlight their feelings of pride and patriotic duty, in the same way their male counterparts express these sentiments.²⁷⁰

Similarly to *Parcours de dissidents*, Catayée's autobiography enables her to highlight the important roles undertaken by female *dissidents* within the war. Catayée mentions several female roles such as 'le télétype [qui] était « une arme pour les Armées », essentielle pour la tactique militaire et pour « gagner »', emphasising the importance of the female war effort.²⁷¹ Her autobiography also gives insight into the daily experiences of female *dissidents* in North African and European theatres of war, from losing fellow comrades, to her experience at 'cet événement si important et colossal qu'était l'Armistice'.²⁷²

As seen within this literature, as well as within Palcy documentary, there is a dominance of women as producers of cultural artefacts that commemorate the *Dissidence* and also create a narrative around female roles. It seems that in order to become a prominent aspect of the *Dissidence* narrative, female stories have to be picked up on by other female actors within the commemorative space.

Although some literary works offer critical, gendered perspectives on wartime life in the Antilles, they tend to focus more on women's domestic experiences than their roles in theatres of combat. While certain works, such as Palcy's *Parcours de dissidents*, have elevated the voices of female *dissidents*, these remain isolated gestures within a broader context of neglect.

²⁶⁸ *Parcours de dissidents*, 56:21-29.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 33:28-33:31 (Marcelle Lislet); 55:20-55:42 (Jeanne Catayée).

²⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 3:34-3:38 (Jeanne Catayée), 1:20:35-1:20:44 (Marcelle Lislet).

²⁷¹ Duton-Catayée, *Avant la tombée du rideau*, p. 52.

²⁷² *Ibid*, p. 135.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how unofficial commemorations construct a powerful yet complex narrative of the *Dissidence* during the Second World War.

Patriotism emerges as a central theme in the narrative of the *Dissidence*; however, this framing often raises critical questions about why such loyalty must be constantly reaffirmed, and the lengths many colonial subjects took to claim a French identity. This tension is particularly evident in the narrative of the *dissidents'* journeys to neighbouring islands and the profound sense of disappointment that stems from the French state's failure to commemorate their actions. The emotional resonance of this betrayal is especially visible in *dissident* testimonies. Non-state commemorative efforts shed light on an enduring need for integration and recognition. In contrast, official state narratives tend to historicise the failure to commemorate, framing it as a resolved issue of the past.

In contrast to state commemorations, which often universalise memory through well-known figures and simplified narratives, these accounts foreground individual lived experience, trauma, and the enduring legacies of colonialism. The legacy of enslavement constitutes a powerful lens through which the *Dissidence* can be understood. While drawing on such connections offers a means of anchoring the *Dissidence* within familiar historical frameworks, it also has the consequence of confining it within colonial and localised spheres of memory. The distinctive nature of the *dissidents'* experiences makes their story difficult to assimilate into the dominant French resistance narrative, which tends to favour more unified resistance narratives.

Crucially, understanding the full complexity of the *dissidents'* wartime experiences is essential to appreciate the broader significance of the *Dissidence*. However, the absence of a singular, unified experience, unlike the symbolic unity represented by their shared journey, complicates efforts to incorporate their history into the national commemorative space. Instead, greater attention is often given to experiences of war within the Antilles, particularly through female narratives, yet these theatres of conflict remain marginal to the collective French war imaginary.

Two principal tensions define the challenge of integrating the *Dissidence* into national collective memory: whether to situate the narrative within familiar historical frameworks that resonate locally, especially through testimonies that foreground the *dissidents'* complex and varied motivations and experiences, or to conform to state-sanctioned narratives that prioritise a unified and simplified version of resistance. At present, it appears that non-state commemorative efforts are attempting to pursue both approaches simultaneously, navigating between the need for historical fidelity and the strategic necessity of recognisability within national discourses. This has ultimately led to the continued marginalisation of the *Dissidence* within French collective memory and national liberation and resistance narratives.

It is important to note that non-official commemoration does not inherently challenge Eurocentric or state narratives, and that non-state does not equate to decolonial. Decolonised content offers a more cohesive, inclusive narrative which disrupts the limitations of official commemorative initiatives. Creators of these narratives often set them up to explicitly challenge state-centric narratives. These alternative approaches create space for marginalised voices, fostering a more comprehensive and honest representation of the past. This tension between dominant and decolonial narratives remains a critical site of inquiry, revealing the ongoing struggle over whose histories are remembered, whose are forgotten, and what this reveals about the broader structures of power and memory.

Ultimately, this chapter highlights the need for a more inclusive and integrated approach to commemorating the *Dissidence*, even within non-official commemoration.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the commemorative place the *Dissidence* holds within France's national and local memory landscapes, revealing a persistent tension between visibility and marginalisation. While both state and non-state initiatives have sought to acknowledge the contributions of the *dissidents* in recent years, these efforts remain fragmented, inconsistent, and frequently framed through Eurocentric and metropolitan narratives that obscure the complexity of their experiences.

State-led commemorations, though often presented as definitive gestures of recognition, are largely superficial and symbolic. By embedding the *Dissidence* within pre-existing republican and patriotic frameworks, the state simultaneously incorporates and neutralises their memory, portraying *dissidents* as peripheral actors in the broader resistance story rather than as central figures in France's wartime liberation. The strategic emphasis on patriotic journeys and well-known individuals simplifies their narratives, producing a version of history that is commercially viable and easily absorbed into the national imaginary, but that ultimately sidelines decolonial perspectives and personal testimonies. The exclusion of the *Dissidence* from key pedagogical and commemorative institutions, most notably the national curriculum, entrenches their marginalisation and ensures that their contributions remain peripheral within collective memory.

In contrast, non-official commemorations foreground lived experience, trauma, and the enduring legacies of colonialism. By amplifying testimonies, including those of women whose roles are particularly underrepresented, these initiatives illuminate the emotional resonance of both loyalty and betrayal, while exposing the gaps left by official narratives. Yet even non-state commemorations face limitations. Their positioning within colonial frameworks, or their attempts to simultaneously align with and resist state-sanctioned narratives, highlight the difficulty of advancing genuinely decolonial perspectives. As such, while these initiatives create space for more inclusive representations, they too risk reinforcing the very hierarchies they seek to challenge.

This thesis therefore demonstrates that the *Dissidence* continues to occupy a liminal space within French collective memory: neither fully incorporated into the national resistance narrative nor adequately recognised within colonial or postcolonial commemorative frameworks. Their memory is contested, fragmented, and instrumentalised within broader struggles over power, identity, and belonging. To move beyond this impasse requires more than symbolic gestures or temporary acts of remembrance. It necessitates a structural rethinking of how France engages with its colonial past, and a commitment to embedding the narratives of the *Dissidence* within educational, cultural, and commemorative institutions.

Ultimately, the struggle over the commemoration of the *Dissidence* is emblematic of wider debates about the inclusivity of national memory and the persistence of Eurocentric frameworks in shaping how histories are remembered. The *Dissidence's* story, complex and multifaceted, challenges the coherence of established resistance narratives and compels a re-examination of the relationship between colonial subjects and the French Republic. Recognising and integrating these histories not only enriches France's understanding of its wartime past, but also contributes to ongoing efforts to decolonise collective memory, ensuring that those who have been neglected are acknowledged in all their diversity and complexity.

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Correspondence:

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Appendix



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

11 February 2025

Dear Eleanor

Research ethics application reference: 2268

Research project: Social and political invisibility of the Dissidence in the Second World War

I am pleased to confirm you have met the conditions set out in the conditional approval letter issued by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) for Arts, Humanities and Cultures.

Ethics approval is granted and research can now begin.

Please retain this email in your project file as it is evidence of the Committee's approval.

Matters you should note:

- Ethics approval does not infer you have the right of access to any member of staff or student or documents and the premises of the University of Leeds. Nor does it imply any right of access to the premises of any other organisation, including clinical areas. The Committee takes no responsibility for you gaining access to staff, students and/or premises prior to, during or following your research activities.
- It is your responsibility to comply with all relevant Health and Safety, Data Protection and other legal and professional requirements and guidelines.
- You are expected to keep a record of all your approved documentation, as well as documents such as sample consent forms, risk assessments and other documents relating to the research project. This should be kept in your project file.
- Audits are undertaken on approved ethics applications. Your project could be chosen for such an audit. You should therefore ensure your project files are kept up to date and readily available for audit purposes. You will be given a two week notice period if your project is selected.
- Please always include the above research ethics application reference in any correspondence with the Research Ethics team.

If you need to make **amendments** to the original research project as submitted you are expected to seek approval from the Committee before taking any further action. Changes could include (but are not limited to) the project end date, project design or recruitment methodology, or study documentation. Please go to <https://secretariat.leeds.ac.uk/research-ethics/how-to-apply-for-research-ethics-amendment/> or contact the Research Ethics team for further information at [Research Ethics](#).

I hope your research project goes well.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Rachel Prinn, Research Ethics, Governance & Compliance (formerly Secretariat), University of Leeds

On behalf of Dr Rach Cosker-Rowland, Chair, AHC FREC
