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Invention of a National Memory of Slavery in France**

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**Title of article: Between Resistance and the State: Caribbean Activism and the
Invention of a National Memory of Slavery in France**

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Between Resistance and the State: Caribbean Activism and the Invention of a National Memory of Slavery in France

Abstract: Between 1998 and 2006, the memory of slavery in France developed from a marginalized issue into a priority of the state. This article examines the process in which community activists and state actors interacted with and against one another to integrate remembrance and the commemoration of slavery and its abolitions into a Republican national narrative. It focuses on a series of actions from the protests against the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in 1998 to the creation of the 10 May National Memorial Day to Slavery and Its Abolitions in 2006. Basing its analysis on oral-history interviews and various publications, this article argues that “memory activists” – and particularly new anti-racist groups – mobilized the memory of slavery to address issues of community identity and resistance within the context of 21st-century Republicanism. In so doing, they articulated a new kind of black identity in France.

Keywords: *Memory, slavery, abolition, anti-racism, colonialism, blackness, Republicanism*

Article:

In June 2014, the newly appointed President of the *Comité National pour la Mémoire et l'Histoire de l'Esclavage* (CNMHE), Myriam Cottias, spoke about the organization's history and future plans in an oral history interview. For her, one of the most pressing goals of this state organization was to direct the growing interest in the commemoration of the history of slavery away from the “simplification [...] of memory” to the “complexity of history”. She believed that “*cette phase de la mémoire s'est achevée et les gens maintenant veulent de l'histoire. Il faut bien aussi que ça se normalise*”.¹ This view represented a growing concern of French state actors that the recent politicization of memory – and the memory of slavery in particular – had fractured French society and given too much space for particular group

identities. Indeed, from the late 1990s into the 2000s, the struggles of Caribbean activists turned the national conversation toward France's involvement in the enslavement of Africans. The development of a memory culture about slavery² was thus (re-)becoming a defining feature of the relationship between the French state and African-heritage communities living in the *h xagone*.³

This article examines the national debate and increased politicization of the memory of the slave trade in French public discourse. In particular, it will explore how grassroots associations and state actors interacted to integrate the memory of slavery and its abolitions into France's national postcolonial narrative through a series of actions from the protests against the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in 1998 to the creation of the 10 May National Memorial Day to Slavery and Its Abolitions in 2006. It studies these interactions within the context of the emergence of a new type of "memory activism" in France, where new activist groups focused their struggle on achieving official state recognition of their particular narratives. In so doing, they redefined the meaning of community identity and resistance within the context of 21st-century Republicanism. This particular case will explore the way new anti-racist groups mobilized the memory of slavery to articulate a new kind of black identity in France.

In this context, this article complements the growth in scholarly attention to the challenges and contradictions of present-day French Republicanism in its multi-ethnic, postcolonial circumstance. Its focus on the struggles of African-heritage activists to commemorate slavery on a national level highlights two main Republican fault-lines. Firstly, it examines the conflicts that arise from the Republican concentration on supposedly color-blind national cohesion and its antithesis of *communautarisme*. Secondly, it addresses the peculiar role of memory in the contestation of contemporary identities in France. As activists struggled for acknowledgement of their particular narratives, they often found it impossible to reconcile the contradiction between the goal of resisting state monopoly and the desire for state recognition.

Even before the 1990s, the history of enslavement had weighed heavily over the relationship between the French state and its overseas territories, particularly the overseas departments (DOMs) of Martinique, Guadeloupe, Reunion Island and French Guyana. From the era of plantation slavery to abolition and the post-abolitionist transition into other forms of colonial domination, slavery and its legacies could not be disentangled from the attachment of these dependencies to France. Myriam Cottias argues that a state-induced mechanism of silence facilitated their continued entanglement. This “politics of silence” had been implemented in the metropole and the colonies alike to turn the page and “move on” from the founding event of enslavement.⁴

In the DOMs, this silence informed an abolitionist narrative, where state-sponsored celebration of abolition and the figure of Victor Schoelcher, “the father of abolition”, became omnipresent.⁵ From the 1920s into the 1960s, Pan-African activists, and in particular Aimé Césaire and the *négritude* movement, challenged this view within a broader struggle for independence. In this context, Edouard Glissant’s work was key in raising Caribbean consciousness and challenging Schoelcherism. However, after decolonization and departmentalization, anti-colonial struggles were slowly abandoned in favour of politics of development.⁶ Meanwhile, issues relevant to the DOMs – such as extreme poverty, staggering inequality and endemic unemployment – remained out of sight of hexagonal society.⁷ Yet even as the legacies of slavery informed certain Antillean independentist⁸ movements, including independentist activists in the metropole,⁹ the abolitionist discourse in the DOMs was further reinforced by the Mitterrand government’s decree from 1983. It fixed the date of the abolition of slavery as a public holiday in the DOMs and instructed schools in both the DOMs and the *héxagone* to dedicate an hour every 27 April to studying France’s abolitions.¹⁰ Whereas schools in the *héxagone* have rarely been made aware of this decree in order to implement it, this tradition has been respected in the DOMs.¹¹

Simultaneously, while intellectuals and political activists in the DOMs challenged the abolitionist discourse on a local level, national preoccupation with the legacies of slavery remained minimal. Nonetheless, it depended on changes in the nature of *domien* political engagement with the hexagon. In particular, from the 1960s onwards, the growing *ultramarin* population in the hexagon sought a voice both through political representation and grassroots activism. These initially focused on two different goals. On the one hand, young activists took advantage of their French nationality to improve the conditions of their constituencies in the hexagon, both through alliances with trade unions and involvement with nascent French anti-racism.¹² This group did not evoke the memory of slavery. They perceived it as either irrelevant for their struggles or potentially pernicious, as it could alienate white allies. On the other hand, Paris became the home of radical independentist activists, who sought to challenge the political status quo. Despite drawing on references such as Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*, Edouard Glissant's growing body of work or drawing on 350 years of colonial oppression, these activists did not prioritize the examination of the legacies of slavery within the framework of a Republican public debate, but rather aimed to achieve independence from this very Republic. By the later 1990s, however, the memory of slavery had resurfaced as a central feature of the relationship between the Republic and its *ultramarin* citizens, as both politicians and activists shifted their attention to influencing the French public debate and discourse.

First Mobilizations

The discovery of the importance of slavery as a political issue for hexagonal Antilleans was aided by a group of Guadeloupian activists centred on the couple Serge and Viviane Romana. The Romanas, a surgeon and a psychoanalyst based in Paris, had become key organizational figures in the metropolitan-based independence movement of the island territory. However, by the mid-1990s, just as independentism in the DOMs was losing momentum, the Romanas opted to abandon the goal of independence in favour of reflection on the plight of Antillean

communities in the metropole. They focused their attention on the disarray these communities faced, and especially on the discrepancy between their expectation of being accepted into society as equal French citizens and the discrimination they faced on the ground. French citizenship – rather than race – was key to understanding the Romanas’ shift from independentism to community organization and outreach.¹³ Instead of challenging discrimination as a problem shared by African-heritage communities across the board, the demands of the Romanas’ new activism centred on the value of their citizenship. For them, the historical bond between Antilleans and the Republic needed to be redefined and readapted to live up to its promise.

Nonetheless, the Romanas’ transition between Guadeloupien independentism to a focus on equality under French sovereignty was not self-evident. It was the result of Viviane Romana’s work on “auto-psychoanalysis”, which she initially explored through exchange with mainly Jewish colleagues who worked on the role of collective trauma in shaping patterns of behaviour in affected families long after the event in question had taken place.¹⁴ This work on individual transmission of painful experiences focused on the root of Antillean identity’s emergence through slavery. According to this logic, the uniqueness of the Guadeloupien or Martiniquais condition could not be found in opposition to the French metropole, but rather through shared historical continuities in a society that had not existed prior to the enslavement of Africans. The Romanas concluded that unlike other colonial subjects, who could regain their dignity through the act of independence and detachment from the metropole, Antillean societies could not disentangle themselves from their “creators”. Instead, they needed to re-articulate their relationship with France in a way that acknowledged the painful history of slavery and the bonds that defined Antilleans as inherently French.

For these ends, the Romanas founded the association *Bwafouyé* in 1994. Its manifesto focused mostly on the organization’s goal of confronting and making sense of the Antillean

community's painful past. As the organization's name – Kreyol for “a tool for digging” – suggested, the Romanas' main objective was to dig into the Antillean collective consciousness:

Parce que nous souffrons dans notre âme de la non-conscience du Sens de cette histoire tellement prégnante [...]

*Parce que nous pensons que notre existence et notre avenir sont liés à l'effort que nous ferons pour que vive notre passé, [...] nous voulons **FOULLER** :
- **Fouyé** notre propre histoire personnelle et [...] en faisant tout pour la comprendre et l'intégrer dans le mouvement historique général de notre société.¹⁵*

The manifesto's attempts to uncover the “origins” of members of the Antillean community reflected the association's initial preoccupation with individual genealogical research. Nonetheless, the focus on the concept “*devoir de mémoire*” as the association's primary goal and the manifesto's title is especially telling. This term had first appeared in the 1970s in the context of mainly Jewish struggles to come to terms with France's role in the Holocaust. In 1992, it began to be used in official discourse as a reference to the French state's duty to incorporate the memory of Vichy's crimes against Jews into the Republic's historical narrative. By the late 1990s, it had become ubiquitous in the popular discourse.¹⁶ In this instance, it highlighted the Romanas' ambition to move beyond the level of the individual and the community towards the articulation of a national memory of slavery. Ultimately, 1998 offered an opportunity to make an impact on a national scale, as the government was preparing the commemoration of the 150th anniversary for the second abolition of slavery.

The Jospin government had decided to celebrate the 1998 anniversary as a gesture of good will towards the overseas departments and some of their MPs, who had previously called on the government to mark the occasion. As a sign of unity, the government planned the events as a Republican spectacle under the motto “*tous nés en 1848*”. A series of commemorations that began with a ceremony on 25 April 1998 in the Palais Bourbon was supposed to interpret the act of the abolition of slavery as a commitment to the values of the Republic: Liberty, Equality and Fraternity on the one hand, and a call for social cohesion on the other. Laurent Fabius, the president of the National Assembly spoke during a press conference that presented the

programme. He declared that “*ce fut bien le décret du 27 avril 1848 [the abolition decree] qui créa une rupture, répara une brisure et fit de notre pays un Etat de tous les citoyens ‘libres, égaux, fraternels’*. *C’est la France entière qui alors en fut grandie.*”¹⁷ Catherine Trautman, the Minister of Culture, added that “*cette année doit être considérée non pas comme une fin mais un commencement [...] Parce que ce n’est pas une année de célébration qui suffit à marquer l’héritage, à rattraper deux siècles d’oubli ou de mépris*”.¹⁸ With the intention of appeasing Caribbean communities in France, government officials used the commemoration year to speak of the ubiquitous horror of slavery. Simultaneously, these declarations always ended with a focus on the need for Republican cohesion, embodied by the act of abolition. Despite a budding awareness of the importance of the topic for Caribbean communities in France, the government still framed slavery and abolition as parts of a Republican discourse that celebrated the greatness of the nation.

The plans for the commemoration of the anniversary with their focus on an abolitionist narrative pushed members of the Romanas’ association to act, as they were particularly outraged by the separation of the abolitionist Republic from the preceding “non-Republican” enslavement. They decided to mount a protest and plan an alternative commemoration with the support of the Guadeloupe-based lawyer and vice president of the Pointe à Pitre branch of the *Ligue des Droits de l’Homme*, Hubert Jabot. As a first step, they called for a unitary meeting with various Caribbean associations and community figures. According to Serge Romana, more than a hundred activists – with different goals and programmes – attended this new attempt to unite Antillean activists in the metropole. On 23 January 1998, the meeting turned into an emotional discussion that focused on how French history writing had prevented these activists from paying tribute to the memory of their – often nameless – slave forebears. At the end of the debate, they decided to organise a silent march to honour the memory of the dead, creating the unitary Caribbean network *Comité pour une Commémoration Unitaire du Cent*

cinquantenaire de l'Abolition de l'Esclavage des Nègres dans les Colonies Françaises (CCUCAENCF).¹⁹

Subsequently, the main commemoration occurred on 23 May 1998. The date corresponded to the abolition of slavery in Martinique, where a slave revolt forced the governor to implement the abolition decree before its arrival. In this case, however, the date was chosen for reasons concerning organization and mobilization rather than symbolic value. On the morning of 23 May, between 6,000 and 40,000 men and women²⁰ – most of whom were of Caribbean origin – marched silently between République and Nation to show respect for the occasion “*sans clamer des slogans, sans appeler à la vengeance*”.²¹ They collected 10,000 signatures for a petition calling on the government to recognise slavery as a Crime against Humanity. Even though press coverage of the event remained minimal,²² the demonstration quickly became a symbol of the metropolitan Antillean community’s desire to “*briser le silence*” around the subject of slavery.²³

Legislative Measures: The Taubira Law and Its Aftermath

In March of the same year, Antillean Communist MPs began taking legislative initiatives to achieve state recognition of slavery as a Crime against Humanity. These legislative measures reacted to the visibility of the 1998 commemoration as well as the first attempts to mobilize the Antillean community. Simultaneously, however, as they considered ways to politicize the memory of slavery, Antillean activists and politicians reacted to the success of Jewish activists in pursuing state recognition for the Republic’s responsibility to the crimes perpetrated by the Vichy regime. While President Chirac’s 1995 declaration that “*oui, la folie criminelle de l’occupant a été secondée par l’état français*”²⁴ marked the state’s official acknowledgement, it followed a lengthy trajectory in which Jewish activists needed to devise an arsenal of ways to challenge the state’s narrative and seek redress. For observers from other communities, the

two most successful methods appeared to be the recourse to the courts and legislation. The former used the term Crime against Humanity in order to prosecute Vichy executives despite legal amnesties.²⁵ Subsequently, the 1990 Gayssot Law that penalised “*négationnisme*” added another level of state recognition of the importance of the memory of the Holocaust.²⁶ As Antillean politicians sought legal recognition of slavery as a Crime against Humanity, they sought to emulate Jewish success from a practical vantage point, if not also to seek “memorial parity” with another minority community.²⁷

For this end, three Communist bills, submitted between March and July 1998, picked up on different aspects of commemoration and legal action: the first to institutionalise the 1998 commemorations in an annual memorial day,²⁸ the second to commemorate slavery rather than its abolition together with the construction of a memorial,²⁹ and the third to recognise transatlantic, colonial slavery as a Crime against Humanity.³⁰ The Socialist majority rejected all three. However, the bills prompted the Jospin government to take action and appoint a special governmental *mission* to appease the “*demandes ultra-marines*” and to draft another bill that would eventually create a synthesis between the different elements of the Communist projects. Christiane Taubira, a young and energetic Guyanese former-independentist-turned-Socialist, led this mission. Taubira had not previously campaigned for the memory of slavery. However, she later recalled that members of the Antillean community in France and in the DOMs convinced her of the importance of acknowledging slavery as a Crime against Humanity despite her “*très fortes réticences et même [her] agacement du début*”.³¹

Taubira presented the new bill to the *Assemblée nationale* on 18 February 1999. After several readings in both houses, its final version passed unanimously by the *Sénat* on 10 May 2001. The law that would come to be known as the *Loi Taubira* recognised the status of the transatlantic slave trade as a Crime against Humanity, stipulated that school curricula and research programmes “*accorderont à la traite négrière et à l’esclavage la place conséquente*

qu'ils méritent”, called for adequate international cooperation on the issue of the commemoration of slavery and, lastly, prescribed the creation of an expert committee to institutionalise the commemoration of the slave trade and its abolitions.³²

The road to this unanimous vote reflected the growing acceptance of the French state’s involvement in matters of memory. At first, the preliminary commission debates painted a picture of a political class that was ready to acknowledge the horrors of the act of enslavement, but simultaneously rejected the necessity of this legislative process.³³ Taubira recalled that her own party members had approached her to dilute the bill’s contents into a single article of official acknowledgement devoid of its educational aspects. However, in these instances the Guyanese MP, who had been introduced to the concept of *devoir de mémoire* only shortly beforehand, realised this popular expression provided her with a way forward. As she appropriated it, Taubira managed to convince fellow politicians of the need to embrace this legislative measure as a Republican duty towards Antillean citizens. Subsequently, the debate in the National Assembly on 18 February 1999 showed Taubira’s strategy had born fruit. Nearly all *députés* seized the opportunity to denounce the nastiness of the slave trade, show indignation at the suffering of the victims of the slave trade and provide at least one quote from a great Enlightenment thinker, preferably Condorcet.³⁴ They presented the law as the latest, most appropriate act of a national “*devoir de mémoire*”, a legislative way to fight against popular forgetfulness. Georges Sarre, the Socialist mayor of Paris’s 11th arrondissement bemoaned:

*Je regrette que, dans les moments où les Françaises et les Français sont unanimes à condamner l’esclavage [...] il n’y ait pas dans l’hémicycle ce sentiment qu’il est en effet nécessaire de regarder le passé, de condamner ce qui doit être condamné, pour mieux servir le présent et, en particulier, travailler en faveur de la citoyenneté.*³⁵

In the same vein, Christiane Taubira spoke of this act of memorial legislation as the only acceptable link between the state and the people and therefore the only possible act of moral reparation:

Nous sommes là pour dire que la traite et l'esclavage furent et sont un crime contre l'humanité [...] qu'il est juste d'énoncer que c'est dans nos idéaux de justice, de fraternité, de solidarité, que nous puissions les raisons de dire que le crime doit être qualifié. Et inscrit dans la loi parce que la loi seule dira la parole solennelle au nom du peuple français. Cette inscription dans la loi, cette parole forte, sans ambiguïté, cette parole officielle et durable constitue une réparation symbolique...³⁶

During this phase, the subject of slavery was seen as a rallying cry for the Republic from all sides of the political spectrum. Members of all parties thought a positive reaction to *ultramarin* initiatives to recognize the slave trade as a Crime against Humanity represented minimal political risk. This recognition portrayed the Republic as inclusive of all its citizens by breaking a century of silence. Yet as much as the speakers engaged with accepting French responsibility for the slave trade,³⁷ they did not go as far as to include the subject of reparations within the parameters of the law. Furthermore, the most striking element of the debate was how the *députés* framed the debate around notions of the Republic as the *pays des Droits de l'Homme*. Here, the pre-Republican character of the slave trade, abolished with the proclamation of the Second Republic, meant that slavery was beyond Republican temporality and could not be seen as a dark stain on Republican institutions. This facilitated the official recognition of the slave trade as a Crime against Humanity within a self-proclaimed tradition of Republican benevolence.

Finding a Memorial Day

Article 4 of the Taubira Law called for the creation of a “*comité de personnalités qualifiées, parmi lesquelles des représentants d'associations défendant la mémoire des esclaves, chargé de proposer, sur l'ensemble du territoire national, des lieux et des actions qui garantissent la pérennité de la mémoire de ce crime à travers les générations*”.³⁸ The cohabitation government did not take any steps toward the creation of this committee before the 2002 elections, and Chirac's UMP government waited for more than a year before taking action. In January 2004, Overseas Minister Brigitte Girardin announced she had begun assembling the *Comité pour la mémoire de l'esclavage* (CPME) under the directorship of the novelist Maryse Condé.³⁹ It was

composed of 12 members, mostly high-profile academics like the vice president Françoise Vergès and Nelly Schmidt, but also members of associations. These included Henriette Dorion-Sébéloué, president of the *Union des Guyanais et des amis de la Guyane*, and most notably Serge Romana. The latter had by that time established his reputation as the grass-roots authority on memory after founding the association *Comité de marche 98 (CM98)* in order to continue what had been started with the unexpected success of the protest against the government's commemoration. The committee's first mission was to produce a report about the different aspects of the institutionalization of the commemoration of slavery. It included an evaluation of popular awareness of the history of slavery in 2005 as well as proposals in the fields of education, research and culture. Finally, and most important, the CPME was commissioned to propose a date for a national commemoration day of slavery and its abolitions. Françoise Vergès recalled that

on a fait un énorme travail en 2004. [...] On a fait un bilan de ce qui existait [...]. On a vu dans l'enseignement: pas grand-chose. Dans la recherche? Pas grand-chose et dans la culture? Pas grand-chose non plus. [...] Il y avait eu quelques expositions ou des choses comme ça, mais au niveau de l'état, au niveau gouvernemental - et en France ça compte beaucoup - pas grand-chose.⁴⁰

On 12 April 2005, the CPME submitted its first report, which contained an analysis of the main challenges facing the commemoration of the slave trade in France. As a starting point, Maryse Condé's introduction framed the necessity of initiating state commemoration and promoting education about the slave trade in terms of the expectations and demands made by French citizens *issus de l'esclavage*:

il existe une forte attente, au-delà de tous les clivages, pour un acte symbolique fort et pour des actions concrètes de la part des plus hautes autorités de la République française [...]. Cette attente s'explique par le fait que la très grande majorité de nos concitoyens du monde issu de l'esclavage sont convaincus que, malgré la loi du 21 mai 2001, l'histoire de la traite négrière, de l'esclavage et de leurs abolitions continue d'être largement ignorée, négligée, marginalisée. Ces concitoyens perçoivent cet état de fait comme un déni de leur propre existence et de leur intégration dans la République.⁴¹

The report identified the main problem – and with it also the main goals of commemoration – as one of knowledge, or lack thereof. In this vein, the CPME's focus with regard to the fields

of popular culture and education was not to appease communities *issues de l'esclavage*, but to overcome ignorance and promote *citoyenneté* through the dissemination of knowledge to French society at large.⁴² To achieve this aim, the main problem that needed to be overcome was not “silence”, but indifference and the fact that

*rare sont les Français qui savent que, pendant près de quatre siècles, leur pays fut une grande puissance esclavagiste [...] que la plantation ne fut pas une particularité de l'économie américaine, que le Code Noir – qui définit l'être humain asservi comme un simple « meuble » – fut une création du droit français, qu'il fallut deux abolitions (1794 et 1848) pour mettre fin à ce système, et, enfin, que leur nation compte en son sein, aujourd'hui même, des descendants d'esclaves.*⁴³

The biggest impact of the CPME's report was the choice of 10 May as the date for France's new national commemoration day. To reach this decision, the committee made a list of possible dates and examined whether any of them could be imbued with enough symbolic value to be both evocative and consensual at the same time. Furthermore, such a date needed to relate – at least loosely – to aspects of both the history of the slave trade and its abolitions and prompt national consensus, while avoiding being too closely connected to any single community or region.⁴⁴

The CPME found the two first obvious dates, those of the two abolitions of slavery in France, symbolically problematic, as the choice of any abolition date would have perpetuated an abolitionist narrative that overshadowed the motivation of commemorating the crime of the transatlantic slave trade. In particular, members of associations involved in the debates of the committee were most strongly opposed to the choice of 27 April, the date of the second abolition, as it was “*à la fois date d'émancipation et de perpétuation d'un système colonialiste*”. In addition, they deplored that “*le culte ultérieur de Schoelcher, qui a transformé le grand abolitionniste en personnage paternaliste, a fini par occulter la portée émancipatrice de son action*”.⁴⁵

The CPME struggled just as much with other, less obvious dates. 23 August, the beginning of the Haitian Revolution, was discarded as it fell in the middle of the school holidays. 10 May,

the date that eventually became France's national commemoration day, was not initially included in the list of possible dates. Françoise Vergès recalled that it was only during her interview with Christiane Taubira that the parliamentarian proposed adopting 10 May, as it was a day in which "*les Elus de la République ont adopté à l'unanimité une loi historique et universelle à la fois*".⁴⁶ The members of the committee were convinced of the merits of adopting a date that symbolized the Republic's recognition of the crime as well as the struggle of descendants of slaves to make their voices heard. Taubira's suggestion enabled the committee to invent an act of consensual commemoration. While it was stately and Republican in character – as it celebrated the Republic's recognition of its duty to the Rights of Man, it also claimed the mantle of radicalism as the result of an *ultramarin* struggle against the structures of the Republic.

Nonetheless, the committee's search for a Republican consensus did not come without casualties. Its biggest conflict followed Serge Romana's suggestion to celebrate 23 May, or date of the 1998 *marche silencieuse*, and thus officially acknowledge the national importance of this act of popular Antillean mobilization. Moreover, since 1999, Romana's organization *CM98* had organised protest marches to commemorate slavery every 23 May, an event which had de facto turned into the first annual organised commemoration of slavery in Greater Paris. The CPME rejected Romana's suggestion to institutionnalise *CM98*'s tradition as "*cette date, fortement associée au travail d'associations principalement antillaises, n'avait pas acquis une portée universelle*".⁴⁷ As a result, Romana resigned from the committee and promptly severed all ties between associations related to *CM98* and government initiatives.⁴⁸ In the short term, this conflict prompted the emergence of two competing commemorations of slavery and its abolition. The continued rivalry between 10 May and 23 May reflected tensions between two perceptions of the purpose of commemoration. On the one hand, 10 May represented the Republican appropriation of slavery within a narrative of *Devoir de mémoire*. On the other,

however, 23 May embodied CM98's narrative that perceived the commemoration of slavery as an act of resistance to Republican paternalism and an attempt to acknowledge a Caribbean voice. These two competing narratives informed the debates around the commemoration of the first *Journée nationale des mémoires de la traite, de l'esclavage et de leurs abolitions* on 10 May 2006.

For the official commemoration of 10 May, the test was whether the programme devised by the CPME – which in 2006 was re-launched under the new name *Comité pour la mémoire et l'histoire de l'esclavage (CPMHE)* – could be memorable enough to imbue the date with enough meaning for a national audience that did not necessarily think of slavery and its abolitions as key events in French history. In this vein, the main event took place at the Jardin du Luxembourg in the presence of President Chirac, Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin and the Presidents of the Sénat and the Assemblée nationale, and bore the mark of a classically Republican ceremony. It began with expected tributes to Caribbean culture – in form of readings of Aimé Césaire and performances by contemporary Antillean artists – and culminated with a presidential speech.⁴⁹ Chirac's speech placed the commemoration of slavery and its abolitions within a quintessentially Republican tradition. First, it stressed the connection between Republicanism and abolition in concluding that "*la République est née avec le combat contre l'esclavage. 1794, 1848: la République, c'est l'abolition*".⁵⁰ Secondly and just as importantly, it referred to a trajectory of "coming to terms with the past" that strengthened France's national cohesion. In so doing, Chirac appropriated the recognition of France's responsibility for the crime of slavery as part and parcel of a national project that stressed elements of common Republican "*citoyenneté*" rather than the image of slavery as a history that belonged first and foremost to France's Antillean community.

Ultimately, this act of official recognition was widely covered by the media as "history in the making" and – even more than the Taubira Law – attracted the attention of men and women

who had previously not been involved in the nascent debate. Particularly the criticism from the ranks of the conservative Right highlighted some of the obstacles standing in the way of incorporating slavery – and not just its abolitions – into the national narrative. These often took one of two forms: fear of the spectre of “*communautarisme*” or outrage at this sign of state “repentance”.

The rejection of so-called repentance was most evident in the Speech of the then Interior Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, who spent 10 May at a UMP conference in Nimes where he called on his audience to “*refuser qu’on fasse de l’esclavage l’unique visage de la France*”.⁵¹ The editorial of the conservative *Le Figaro* warned of a similar danger as “*l’opinion risque ainsi d’être plongée dans un bain de confusion et de dériver entre repentance et ressentiment*”.⁵² These comments did not refer to any apologies that were incorporated into the commemorative programme, as there were none. On the other hand, they attacked the notion of memory politics as means for the state to prioritize acknowledgement of the country’s dark past over the focus on more traditional tropes of national grandeur. The focus on *Communautarisme* reflected the traditional case against any group particularism in France’s supposedly colour-blind Republican system.⁵³ As comments like the Overseas Minister François Baroin’s about the danger of “*se servir de l’histoire de la servitude comme prétexte au communautarisme*”⁵⁴ demonstrated, there was no consensus that the acknowledgement of France’s responsibility for slavery would reassert its national cohesion. Indeed, for many political actors – especially, but not only, on the right – the main issue with the commemoration was whether it contributed to strengthening the “indivisibility” of the Republic or whether the acknowledgement of slavery as a particularly French responsibility weakened the Republican national project.

10 May and Black Activism

Simultaneously, the first 10 May commemoration provided an opportunity for Afro-Caribbean activists to re-articulate a black identity that focused on a changing relationship with the state. While Antillean activists associated with the Romanas ignored the new memorial day altogether, coalitions of Afro-Caribbean activists picked up the gauntlet to challenge the state's monopoly on the event. Here, for the first time since the heyday of Pan-Africanism in the early 1950s, the articulation of the memory of slavery became a defining element of a nascent black French activism. Indeed, the notion of "blackness" in France had evolved differently from those in Britain or the US, both due to Republican ideas of supposed colour-blindness and rifts between African and Antillean communities in France.⁵⁵ In particular, African and Antillean activists focused on different issues for a long period of time, as their citizenship status influenced their expectations from the French Republic, their relations with republican institutions and their opportunities for dissent. Simultaneously, when Antillean activists and politicians discovered the political potential of mobilizing the memory of slavery, they mostly rejected any African involvement. Not only did Caribbean activists consider slavery a historical burden that their African peers did not share, but they also perceived contemporary Africans as the descendants of men and women who had sold their brothers and sisters to slavery in the first place. By 2006, however, a different kind of black activism had been brewing. A new generation of activists began appropriating the memory of slavery as a means of speaking to France's black constituency and to define its place in within French society.

The most notable appearance of black activism happened in December 2005 through the founding of the *Conseil représentatif des associations noires* (CRAN), the first national umbrella organization of Afro-Caribbean activists.⁵⁶ In a move that was deemed innovative, the CRAN sought to underline the problems "*qui ne font pas de subtilités entre les noirs de Guyane, les noirs du Bénin et les noirs de la Réunion*",⁵⁷ yet it wanted to do so through cooperation with the structures of the Republic. In the early phases of its existence, the CRAN's

first president, the UDF member Patrick Lozès, focused the organization's strategy on conducting ethnic statistics to show that the politics of diversity and representation were compatible with Republican principles of national cohesion.⁵⁸ The memory of slavery was not featured on the CRAN's list of priorities, particularly because the recent achievements of Antillean activists and politicians had not left the organization much space in which to operate. To show their willingness to work with the government and unite black communities, the CRAN's activists attended the 10 May commemoration.⁵⁹ The CRAN, however, showed that it was not entirely convinced by the government's appropriation of 10 May. The organization's then-spokesperson, Louis-Georges Tin, spoke of a "*rendez-vous manqué avec l'histoire*"⁶⁰ as the government's monopoly over the planning of the event did not engage associations that wished to contribute. As a result, Tin noted, the commemoration did not fulfil the black community's expectations of increased participation after the Taubira Law, but rather sowed division between activists and the state.

Simultaneously, other black activists identified an opportunity to formulate a contemporary black identity through resistance to the symbols of the Republic. For them, 10 May 2006 came conveniently after a year that saw a continuous debate about "colonial continuities" and their impact on contemporary French society. Through a sequence of events - between the founding of the organization *Les Indigènes de la République* with its battle cry to "decolonize the Republic",⁶¹ the November riots with the debate about the impact of colonial legacies on contemporary problems in the suburbs, and lastly the debate on the 23 February Law on the "positive role" of French colonialism⁶² - the French public conversation seemed to open up for men and women who wanted to invoke racial questions through historical connections. In this context, another initiative launched by the author Claude Ribbe, *Collectif pour l'Organisation d'un 10 mai républicain et de recueillement*, organized an alternative event on 10 May. The invitation and the programme circulated on all major radical left-wing, Muslim and African

websites in France including *lesogres.org*, *oumma.com* or *afrikara.com*, and announced a conference at the Bourse de travail at République followed by a march towards Place de la Nation. The event's goal was to recreate a narrative of resistance in the same vein as the march of 23 May 1998, but this time for a black rather than Antillean community.

Similar to 1998, Claude Ribbe and the organizers of the 10 May event approached their audience as a group of “*descendants d’esclaves*”. Yet, while in 1998 the Romanas used genealogical research as a starting point for their activism, in 2006 the term “descendants of slaves” did not apply to historical continuity. Interestingly, as Ribbe spoke of “real descendants of slaves”, he evoked a group defined through resistance to a Republican establishment rather than connection to family history. For Ribbe, the “*vrais descendants d’esclaves*” were “*ceux qui ne reçoivent pas de cartons d’invitation pour aller faire des ronds de jambes dans des ministères, à ceux qui ne parlent pas au nom des autres, à ceux qui ne comptent pas pour les décideurs et les puissants, mais qui ont une envie sincère de rendre hommage à leurs ancêtres*”.⁶³ Here, the right to address a lineage to the enslaved became entangled with a political identity of activists who challenged Republican “decision makers” and were not tempted by the privilege of power.

The alternative 10 May protest, which remained a fairly small event,⁶⁴ did not cultivate a myth of political mobilization like 23 May 1998. It did, however, unite men and women from very different sides of the black cultural elite. Participants included on the one hand some of the more “Republican” figures of France’s black community such as actress Joby Valente, author Calixthe Beyala and radio station owner and *Délégué interministériel pour l’égalité des chances des Français d’Outre-mer* Claudy Siar. The latter had spoken of the importance of marking 10 May in a respectable way to show an alternative to Sarkozy, de Villiers and Le Pen.⁶⁵ On the other hand, the most memorable appearance at the event was assigned to the comedian Dieudonné, who – after he had tried to interrupt the official ceremony at the

Luxembourg – came to show solidarity to the alternative event together with a group of supporters.

Dieudonné's increased attention to the memory of slavery in the previous years was at odds with Siar's desire for respectability and inclusion. Since 2002, the mixed-race comedian of Breton and Cameroonian descent, who was previously known for his anti-racist credentials and mediatized campaigns against the *Front national*, had rebranded himself through his newly-found "anti-Zionist" fervour. His interventions repeatedly targeted Jewish symbols, most often the memory of the Holocaust in France, and portrayed Jews as interlocked in a historical battle against blacks in France. By 2005, his interventions had become often quoted in the press and usually attracted far more public attention than the enactment of the Taubira Law and its aftermath. One such claim was that "*c'est quand même amusant de voir à quel point le pouvoir sioniste en France va jusqu'à priver une partie de la population du devoir de la mémoire. Les juifs ont souffert moins que les Noirs, On ne parle que des chambres à gaz, mais les Noirs ont été jetés vivants à la mer*".⁶⁶ Here, Dieudonné presented his increasingly popular rants as acts of resistance against a Republican establishment that prioritised the Jewish memory of the Holocaust over the black memory of slavery. In so doing, he defined the relations between blackness and the memory of slavery in the public eye in much the same way as Ribbe did: it was not the result of clear historical continuities, but of the mobilization of a vocabulary of historical references to challenge the Republic. Indeed, when the half-Cameroonian Dieudonné spoke for descendants of slaves, he did not do so because he could claim that he had descended from enslaved Africans. He appropriated the right to do so as a means of slaughtering what he – and many of his supporters – perceived as a Republican "holy cow".

Ultimately, the convergence of such different characters in one small event on 10 May 2006 does not suggest that they all shared the same vision of blackness or of the commemoration of slavery and its abolitions. Far more tellingly, it is but a snippet, a miniature window into the

way a new generation of activists articulated blackness in 2006. Here, appropriating the memory of slavery provided an opportunity to define a community through the theme of resistance to the state rather than the CRAN's focus on police violence or ethnic statistics. Simultaneously, however, this interpretation of resistance had its limits. Firstly, it did not bridge gaps between African and Antillean communities, as *ultramarin* groups affiliated with the Romanas' CM98 had their own relationship with the state. They did not prioritize resistance as such, but demanded recognition as French citizens with a particular history that was not shared by Africans. Secondly, challenging the state over the 10 May commemoration was difficult, as this represented a moment in which the Republic had acknowledged the importance of the history of slavery within its national narrative. Although the theme of resistance had helped expose inconsistencies within the Republican discourse that the commemoration had strengthened, it did not actually call the dominance of Republican structures into question. Nonetheless, Afro-Caribbean activists who wanted their voices to be heard could not forego 10 May 2006 as an opportunity for symbolic protest. As the first such anniversary, it was a rare moment where the media focused its attention on issues relevant to France's Afro-Caribbean communities, while the attention given to Dieudonné and the 2005 controversies over the 23 February Law on colonialism had already sensitized the public to such debates. Indeed, public attention to 10 May would later diminish as its novelty value subsided.

Conclusion

The period between 1998 and 2006 saw the transformation of the French state's relationship with the memory and history of enslavement and its abolitions. Indeed, in the mid-1990s, metropolitan Republican actors paid little attention to the role of slavery in French history. Engagement with the importance of slavery was confined to the DOMs, both within state mechanisms invested in perpetuating an abolitionist narrative and local activism that tried to challenge it. By 2006, however, the French Republic had legislated to recognise transatlantic

slavery as a Crime against Humanity and instituted a national memorial day to commemorate both the victims of historical enslavement and the tumultuous road to abolition. Even though this happened in less than a decade, the process in which the Republic “came to terms” with the memory of slavery was by no means linear and self-evident.

While there were metropolitan initiatives that had focused on the memory of slavery before 1998, the main impulse to initiate a national debate in France came from Antillean activism in the hexagon. In particular, the shift from independentism to a search for ways to articulate a new link between Antillean citizens and the Republic led activists to explore the history of enslavement as the source of their French citizenship. As they followed the example of Jewish memory activism to demand their voice within Republican structures, the focus on the articulation of a new memory culture became a way to access a new sense of *citoyenneté*. The success of Christiane Taubira and other *ultramarin* MPs in turning this initial impulse into legislation owed much to their success in formulating the demand of recognition through the emerging political vocabulary of “devoir de mémoire”. From the vantage point of French legislators, the debates that followed, most notably instituting a memorial day on 10 May of each year, contributed to the inclusion of France’s Antillean communities into this memory discourse in order to reaffirm their symbolic bonds to the Republic.

However, the conflicts that arose from the creation of 10 May demonstrated the limits of the symbolic achievement of the Taubira Law. Firstly, the rift between the Romanas’ CM98 and the CPMHE revealed the reluctance of many French Antilleans to accept a commemoration that could be interpreted as Republican self-glorification. For Serge Romana, the rejection of 23 May, a date of Antillean resistance in Paris, in favour of a celebration of Republican benevolence seemed like a case of Republican paternalism. Moreover, it failed to acknowledge the meaning of such a commemoration for the Antillean community. On the other hand, reactions of organizations and individuals invested in speaking for a “black” community

revealed another kind of unease with the celebration of 10 May. These men and women wished to re-appropriate the memory of slavery from a specifically *ultramarin* community for the sake of the articulation of a black identity that corresponded with lived realities in 21st-century France. Nonetheless, blackness had often been defined less through references to Pan-Africanism and more through resistance to police violence and racism, which the official commemoration of slavery and its abolitions did not seem to change.

Ultimately, the process in which the French Republic embraced a state memory of transatlantic slavery was part of a larger context of the politicization of memory in France. For activists, this meant that they approached memory not for the sake of the mechanics of commemoration, but to address their place in French society. In so doing, they operated within the broader context of race relations and reacted not only to what many saw as the success of Jewish activism in creating a state memory of the Shoah, but also to wider developments such as the growing visibility of the Algerian War of Independence and the controversy over the 23 February Law in 2005. Especially for black activists who tried to challenge what they saw as the state's hegemony over the 10 May commemoration, memory provided a useful vocabulary to challenge discrimination. Nonetheless, as confusion over concepts of "resistance" showed, this vocabulary was limited in what it could achieve in terms of tackling discrimination on the ground. In 2006, activists were confronted with the necessity of translating symbolic achievements into more tangible anti-racism, as focus on memory often exacerbated problems rather than offered remedies.

¹ Interview Myriam Cottias, President of the CNMHE, and Florence Alexis with author, Paris, 17.06.2014

² For a non-exhaustive list of works on the historical involvement of France in the transatlantic enslavement of Africans and its abolition, see Myriam Cottias, *La traite et les esclavages. Perspectives historiques et contemporaines* (Paris, Karthala, 2010), Serge Daget, *La traite des Noirs: bastilles négrières et vellétés abolitionnistes* (Rennes, Editions Ouest-France, 1990), William B. Cohen, *The French Encounter with*

Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880 (Bloomington and London, Indiana University Press, 1980) and Nelly Schmidt, *L'abolition de l'esclavage. Cinq siècles de lutte, XVIe-XXe siècles* (Paris, Editions Fayard, 2005).

³ Throughout this article, metropolitan France will be referred to interchangeably as “France” and the “hexagon”. Simultaneously, men and women from the DOMs will be referred to as Antilleans, *domiens* or *ultramarins* to represent the diversity of terms used to describe this community.

⁴ see Cottias, *La traite et les esclavages*, 2010.

⁵ The figure of “Papa Schoelcher” has been especially visible in the DOM TOM in something akin to a ‘memory cult’. See Christine Chivallon, *L'esclavage, du souvenir à la mémoire: Contribution à une anthropologie des Caraïbes* (Paris, Karthala, 2012), p. 32.

⁶ See Félix Germain, *Decolonizing the Republic: African and Caribbean Migrants in Postwar Paris, 1946-1974* (East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 2016), about continued black activism in the metropole.

⁷ Françoise Vergès, “L’Outre-mer, une survivance de l’utopie coloniale républicaine?”, in: Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel and Sandrine Lemaire (eds.), *La fracture coloniale: La société française au prisme de l’héritage colonial* (Paris, La Découverte, 2005), p. 69.

⁸ This is a direct translation of the French term “*indépendentiste*”. It is used here rather than the otherwise more common English “nationalist” to stay closer to Antillean groups’ discourse on separation from France rather than the construction of a new nation.

⁹ See Germain, *Decolonizing the Republic*, 2016, pp. 117-140.

¹⁰ JORF, Décret n° 83-1003, 23.11.1983.

¹¹ Françoise Vergès, *La mémoire enchaînée: Questions sur l’esclavage* (Paris, Albin Michel, 2006), p. 110.

¹² See Germain, *Decolonizing the Republic*, 2016, but also Martin Schain, “Immigration and Trade Unions in France: A Problem and an Opportunity”, in: Erick Chapman, Mark Kesselman and Martin Schain (eds.), *A Century of Organized Labor in France: A Union Movement for the Twenty-First Century?* (New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1998) and Daniel Gordon, *Immigrants and Intellectuals: May '68 and the Rise of Anti-racism in France* (Pontypool, Merlin Press, 2012).

¹³ See interview Serge Romana with author, Paris, 27.11.2014.

¹⁴ Ibid. See also an interview with Serge Romana on the website Afrik.com: “*il faut le dire, les Antillais connaissent très rarement leurs ancêtres et donc la signification de leurs noms. Il y a là une absence totale d’affiliation. Nos recherches se basaient alors sur deux piliers : le premier était la bibliographie et le deuxième*

la généalogie. Notre objectif était de colorer cette généalogie en mettant des noms à notre histoire': 23 mai, *Journée nationale des victimes de l'esclavage colonial*, 2007, <http://www.afrik.com/article11783.html>.

¹⁵ See Association Bwafouyé, *Namn a bwa fouye, pour un devoir de mémoire*, manifesto, 1994.

¹⁶ The term *Devoir de mémoire* appeared in the French national discourse in 1992 for commemorations of deportations of Jews and quickly became a common reference for the state's responsibility to acknowledge its own crimes against its own citizens. On the emergence and broad acceptance of this terms, see Sébastien Ledoux, *Le devoir de mémoire: Une formule et son histoire* (Paris, Editions CNRS, 2015).

¹⁷ *Le Monde*, 07.04.1998.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Interview Serge Romana with author, 27.11.2014 and presentation text written by Viviane Romana: http://www.cm98.fr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=48&Itemid=57 (last accessed 10.10.2015).

²⁰ 40,000 is the number given by the organisers when referring to the 23 May event. At the time, *Libération* asserted something different: the police estimated the number of marchers at 8,000, and the organisers at 20,000; see *Libération* 25.05.1998.

²¹ Viviane Romana, CM98 presentation: http://www.cm98.fr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=48&Itemid=57 (last accessed 10.10.2015).

²² Mainstream newspapers on the date reported extensively about a story of three African children fleeing modern slavery, but barely mentioned the Antillean demonstration. See *Libération*, 25.05.1998, and *Le Monde*, 24.05.1998.

²³ Even political adversaries of the organisers of the demonstration on 23 May 1998 see it as a starting point for Caribbean memory activism in France and claim that '*C'était bien 23 mai 1998 qui a vraiment vu une forte mobilisation de la population antillaise ici, en France*' (Interview Myriam Cottias and Florence Alexis with author, 17.06.2014), and '*On ne peut pas sousestimer la portée de ce moment*' (Interview Françoise Vergès with author, 23.06.2014).

²⁴ Jacques Chirac, *Déclaration solennelle*, 16.07.1995, accessible on the INA online archive: <http://fresques.ina.fr/jalons/fiche-media/InaEdu01248/discours-de-jacques-chirac-sur-la-responsabilite-de-vichy-dans-la-deportation-1995.html>.

²⁵ By the late 1990s, the four cases of Barbie, Touvier, Bousquet and Papon epitomised the Jewish struggle for legal justice. The trials continued the tradition of justice-seeking from the Eichmann Trial and sought to punish individual perpetrators for their crimes and generate a visible debate in the process. See Olivier Wieviorka, “Francisque ou Croix de Lorraine: les années entre histoire, mémoire et mythologie”, in: Pascal Blanchard and Isabelle Veyrat-Masson (eds.), *Les guerres de mémoires, La France et son histoire*, (Paris, La découverte, 2008), pp. 94-106.

²⁶ JORF, *Texte intégral de la loi du 13 1990 tendant à réprimer tout acte raciste, antisémite ou xénophobe*, 17.07.1990. The enactment of the law triggered a debate about the “*juridification de la mémoire*”, see Annette Wieviorka, “Shoah: Les étapes de la mémoire en France”, in: Blanchard and Veyrat-Masson, *Les guerres de mémoires*, 2008, p. 109.

²⁷ Much has been written about the struggle of different minority groups to commemorate their own narrative against others as “*guerres de mémoires*” or memory wars. The term was coined by Benjamin Stora in 2005 and was often re-articulated by many French historians (see for example See Stora, *La guerre de mémoires: La France face à son passé colonial (entretien avec Thierry Leclerc)*, (Paris, La Découverte, 2008). For the specific issue of “memory parity” between the Antillean and Jewish communities, see Myriam Cottias’s remark during an interview about “*cette conviction qu’entre la mémoire de la communauté antillaise et celle de la communauté juive [...] il y a un effet de deux poids, deux mesures*”, in: Interview Myriam Cottias, President of the CNMHE and Florence Alexis with author, Paris, 17.06.2014.

²⁸ JORF, Assemblée nationale, *proposition de loi n° 792, relative à la célébration de l’abolition de l’esclavage en France métropolitaine*, 31.03.1998.

²⁹ JORF, Assemblée nationale, *proposition de loi n° 1050 tendant à perpétuer le souvenir du drame de l’esclavage*, 07.07.1998.

³⁰ JORF, Assemblée nationale, *proposition de loi n° 1302 relative à la reconnaissance de la traite et de l’esclavage en tant que crime contre l’humanité*, 22.12.1998.

³¹ Interview quoted in Ledoux, *Le devoir de mémoire*, 2015, p. 201.

³² JORF, Assemblée nationale, *Loi n° 2001-434 du 21 mai 2001 tendant à la reconnaissance de la traite et de l’esclavage en tant que crime contre l’humanité*.

³³ See Vergès, *La mémoire enchaînée*, 2006, p. 115. See also Christiane Taubira’s interview with Sébastien Ledoux; quoted in Ledoux, *Le devoir de mémoire*, 2015, p. 201.

³⁴ ³⁴ JORF, Assemblée nationale, 11^e Législature, *Compte rendu intégral des séances du jeudi 18 février, 1999*.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ An amendment was also debated which aimed at making French responsibility even clearer. Ibid.

³⁸ JORF, Assemblée nationale, Loi n° 2001-434 du 21 mai 2001 tendant à la reconnaissance de la traite et de l'esclavage en tant que crime contre l'humanité.

³⁹ *Libération*, 15.01.2004. See also Comité pour la mémoire de l'esclavage, *Mémoires de la traite négrière, de l'esclavage et de leurs abolitions*, premier rapport (Paris, La Découverte, 2005), p. 3.

⁴⁰ Interview Françoise Vergès with author, 17.06.2014.

⁴¹ CPME, *Mémoires de la traite négrière*, 2005, p. 3.

⁴² Interview Françoise Vergès with author, 17.06.2014.

⁴³ CPME, *Mémoires de la traite négrière*, 2005, p. 12.

⁴⁴ Ibid, pp. 24-6.

⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 28-9.

⁴⁶ Interview Françoise Vergès with author, 23.06.2014. Vergès added that she had not been personally convinced by the Taubira Law as it had passed, but learned to appreciate its pedagogical merits.

⁴⁷ CPME, *Mémoires de la traite négrière*, 2005, p. 29.

⁴⁸ Interview Françoise Vergès with author, 23.06.2014. See also Interview Serge Romana with author, 27.11.2014.

⁴⁹ See the programme of the commemorations on the CNMHE's website:

http://www.cnmhe.fr/spip.php?rubrique81&id_mot=2 (last accessed 12.09.2016). For more information, see descriptions in all large media outlets, for example: *Le Figaro*, 11.05.2006; *Libération*, 10.05.2006; *Le Monde*, 11.05.2006; *L'Humanité*, 11.05.2006.

⁵⁰ *Libération*, 11.05.2006. The full text of Chirac's speech can be found on the CNMHE's website:

<http://www.cnmhe.fr/spip.php?article504>.

⁵¹ *Le Figaro*, 10.05.2006.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ For a discussion of Republicanism and the ideal of a colour blind republic, see Alec Hargreaves, *Multi-ethnic France: Immigration, culture, politics and society* (London, Routledge, 2007).

⁵⁴ *Le Figaro*, 10.05.2006.

⁵⁵ For a reflection on the development of “blackness” in France, see Pap Ndiaye, *La condition noire* (Paris, Calman-Lévy, 2008) and Germain, *Decolonizing the Republic*, 2016.

⁵⁶ On the emergence of the CRAN, see Itay Lotem, “Anti-Racist Activism and the Memory of Colonialism: Race as Republican Critique after 2005”, in: *Modern and Contemporary France*, vol. 24/3, 2016.

⁵⁷ Interview Louis-Georges Tin, director of the CRAN with author, Paris, 10.06.2014.

⁵⁸ Due to the Republican focus on colour-blindness, French governmental bodies had never conducted any research about the size of communities, as separating them would have been an acknowledgement of anti-Republican difference. The CRAN’s early focus on these was a way to define France’s black community and show that “*elles ne sont pas interdites contrairement à ce que tout le monde croit*”, *ibid.*

⁵⁹ The CRAN had also planned its own commemoration event, a concert at Place de la Bastille, but had cancelled it in the last moment due to a campaign of black organizations against the “carnavalesque” character of the planned celebrations. See “Le Cran annule le concert du 10 mai place de la Bastille”, 2006, <http://www.afrik.com/article9782.html>.

⁶⁰ *Libération*, 10.05.2006.

⁶¹ On the Indigènes, see Lotem, *Anti-Racist Activism*, 2016 and Robine, Jérémy, “Les “Indigènes de la République”: Nation et question postcoloniale. Territoires des enfants de l’immigration et rivalité de pouvoir”, in: *Hérodote*, vol. 120, January 2006, pp. 118-48.

⁶² For an analysis of the debates over the 23 February Law, see Bertrand, Romain, *Mémoires d’empire, La controverse autour du ‘fait colonial’* (Vulaines sur Seine, Editions du Croquant, 2006).

⁶³ Claude Ribbe, *TOUS A PARIS, PLACE DE LA NATION, LE 10 MAI 2006 A 17 HEURES !*, 2006, published on Oumma.com and Lesorgres.org, here accessible on http://leprisonnier.levillage.org/lesogres2004/article.php3?id_article=2016.

⁶⁴ According to the organisers, the event attracted between 3000-4000 participants: http://leprisonnier.levillage.org/lesogres2004/article.php3?id_article=2023 (last accessed 12.09.2016) and <http://www.afrikara.com/index.php?page=contenu&art=1234&PHPSESSID=74ab05940c181bb44c3b545a5e5bf228> (last accessed 12.09.2016).

⁶⁵ “Claudy Siar : « Le 10 mai doit être une date solennelle et non une fête de la musique ! »”, 2006, <http://www.afrik.com/article9784.html>.

⁶⁶ *Echo d’Oran*, 17.02.2005.