**Postcolonial Realms of Memory**

**Sites and Symbols in Modern France**

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**Introduction: Postcolonializing *lieux de mémoire***

It is time for Francophone postcolonial studies to address systematically the omissions and blind spots that have been identified by numerous critics in Pierre Nora’s *Lieux de mémoire*. These issues have been highlighted over the past two decades in sporadic interventions but there is a need now to continue this work in a collective and sustained manner. In a context where a certain class of French intellectuals is still reluctant to entertain a postcolonial understanding of the Republic, claiming for instance – in the 2018 manifesto published in *Le Point*, ‘Le “décolonialisme”, une stratégie hégémonique’ [Decolonialism: a hegemonic strategy] – that such an approach may be seen to be complicit in a ‘détournement indigne des valeurs de liberté, d’égalité et de fraternité qui fondent notre démocratie’ [shameful hijacking of the values of liberty, equality and fraternity on which our democracy is built], the need to make visible the invisible thread that links the colonial to French culture is more urgent than ever. The manifesto focuses primarily on the often-polemical discourse of activists linked to groups such as the Indigènes de la République, whose promotion of a radical political project is associated with strategies dubbed increasingly as ‘décolonial’. Some of the text’s signatories have articulated prominent critiques elsewhere of the intellectual project of postcolonialism, but that field of intellectual inquiry is not the specific target of the text in *Le Point* (although the manifesto makes it clear that a number of academic researchers are sympathetic to and have offered platforms to activists presenting themselves as ‘décoloniaux’). Although it is not our intention to blur the boundaries between, on the one hand, forms of political discourse that foreground the unresolved legacies of empire and, on the other, the kind of postcolonial work to which the present volume seeks to make a contribution, we contend that both play an integral and often complementary role in the current malaise to which this book responds. In other words, such approaches (and the visceral responses to them) underline the urgency of asserting the central place of the colonial in the making of modern France, and of anchoring it in a collective memory that has often evacuated traces of empire, as if they are deemed unworthy of remembrance or simply considered marginal. In extreme (yet more and more frequent) cases, as shown in the example above, such a proposition – whether articulated in political or academic terms – can even be labelled anti-republican or ‘un-French’. In spite of continuous resistance, an increasingly critical postcolonial discourse on French historiography provides momentum for engaging in a project seeking to discern and explore an initial repertoire of realms around which cohere traces of colonial memory. At the same time, such an approach highlights the inherently dialectical relationship between such memory traces and traditional, firmly instituted, and often state-sanctioned national memory. These issues are central to discussions of French identity, or what some would call ‘Frenchness’, especially at a time when the progressive hybridization of France – not least in terms of ethnicity and religious affiliations – raises questions about current understandings of republicanism and how this ideology fits (or does not fit) the socio-cultural realities of the early twenty-first century.

Among the signatories of the anti-decolonial manifesto in *Le Point* mentioned above was the historian and *académicien* Pierre Nora. His monumental *Lieux de mémoire* (1984-1992) has been recognized by historians in France and internationally, and also more widely across the humanities and social sciences, as one of the most influential studies of memory in the late twentieth century. Published in seven volumes (*La République* [1 volume]; *La Nation* [3 volumes]; *Les France* [3 volumes]) over a period of eight years, this collective endeavour comprised 133 topics accounting for periods ranging from prehistory (with the case of Lascaux) to the present. It has permitted the elaboration of a ground-breaking paradigm for rethinking the relationship between the nation, territory, history and memory. The collection – as well as the concept whose wider dissemination it has allowed – has fostered new readings of the past as this is represented, remembered and inscribed in the nation’s collective imaginary.Following Nora, *lieu de mémoire* has become a widely used (some would argue even an overused) critical term over the past two decades, to the point that the *Grand Robert de la langue française* included it as an expression in its 1993 edition.

Nora’s project emerged out of the particular French context of the late 1970s and early 1980s, a period which the editor himself has characterized as a ‘moment mémoire’ [memory moment]. During this period, the ‘émergence de l’intérêt pour les phénomènes de mémoire’ [emergence of interest in the phenomena of memory] witnessed ‘le retour d’une préoccupation largement partagée sur le “fait national”’ [the return to a widely shared preoccupation with nationhood] (Lavabre, 1994: 480, 481), particularly as the nation prepared for the 1989 bicentennial of the French Revolution that would inaugurate France’s ‘era of commemoration’ (Forsdick, 2009). For Nora, this collective methodological reflection on history and memory takes place at a critical time marked by the ‘acceleration of history’ (1989: 7), a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that the continuity of memory has itself been disrupted. Nora’s now famous claim is that this disruption harks back to the embodiment of memory in certain sites, phenomena or concepts where historical continuity persists. In Pierre Nora’s terms, there are *lieux de mémoire*, defined as realms ‘where memory crystallizes and secretes itself’ (1989: 7) or sites that ‘anchor, condense and express the exhausted capital of our collective memory’ (1989: 24). These exist because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, by which he means real environments guaranteeing the unmediated transmission of memory necessary to the construction of a collective heritage (1989: 7). Consequently, one of the many influential strands in Nora’s work was a conceptual, transhistorical one which established an epistemological shift in the relationship to memory in traditional societies and in modernity. For Nora, there is an increasing tendency towards the externalisation of public memory instead of the internalisation with which previous periods have been identified.

The impact of Nora’s collection at the time of its publication was considerable, and the concept of *lieux de mémoire* has since gained substantial currency as a term of reference in memory studies, often spreading beyond an academic context to achieve a clear resonance in the media as well as the heritage industry (a *Petit Futé* guide to *lieux de mémoire* in France was published in 2005, reflecting the growing importance of memory tourism, often in the form of dark tourism, in modern France at the turn of the century). *Les Lieux de mémoire* has appeared in numerous translations, including selections of essays published in English: *Realms of Memory*: *The Construction of the French Past*, edited by Pierre Nora and Lawrence Kritzman and translated by Arthur Goldhammer for Columbia University Press, and *Rethinking France: Les Lieux de mémoire*, edited again by Nora himself with the translation overseen by David P. Jordan for Chicago University Press.[[1]](#footnote-1) In part facilitated by these translations, Nora’s concept has also achieved clear transnational reach as it acquired the status of travelling theory −Nora himself has discussed the exportability of the *lieu de mémoire* (1993)− and has been transposed into a variety of other contexts, French-speaking and other (Kmec, Majerus, Margue and Peporte, 2009). Projects have indeed been developed in different national frames, most notably in Canada (Mathieu and Lacoursière, 1991), Germany (François and Schultze, 2007) and Russia (Nivat, 2007). More strikingly for the purposes of this volume, however, are the attempts to extend the concept of realms of memory to colonial and postcolonial situations in the Global South, following Henri Moniot’s call – in the context of Sub-Saharan Africa – to ‘faire du Nora sous les tropiques’ (1999; see Konaté, 2006; Somé and Simporé, 2014; Alcaraz, 2017). The boundaries of Nora’s theoretical concept have also been tested in several studies focusing on sites of imperial memory (Sengupta and Schulze, 2009; Geppert and Müller, 2015), with others rearticulating the European-nation-centred concept of the *lieu de mémoire* according to transnational and transcontinental dynamics (Derks *et al.*, 2015). Recent initiatives have also led to the elaboration of alternative terms such as *noeuds de mémoire* (Rothberg, Sanyal and Silverman, 2010), *lieux d’oubli* (Dumontet et al., 2015) and *lieux de traumatisme* (Gröning, 2016).

As these alternative studies show, sustained criticism has been levelled at Nora’s *Lieux de mémoire* since its initial publication, despite its continued paradigmatic relevance. Considering the period under scrutiny, it is true that, in the original study, some silences or absences are particularly striking. For instance, while an entry is devoted to ‘Français et étrangers’ (Noiriel, 1992), this focuses primarily on intra-European mobility, and the issue of migration and the interplay between immigration and postcolonialism are otherwise largely absent from Nora’s seven volumes, despite the visibility, political urgency and relevance in public debate that these matters acquired throughout the 1980s. The importance granted to issues of immigration in that period was, for instance, reflected in the rise of the extreme-right party the *Front National*, and in counter-political events such as ‘La Marche pour l’égalité et contre le racisme’ in 1983. Known colloquially – and it might be argued misleadingly – as ‘La Marche des Beurs’, this has since been posited as a *lieu de mémoire de l’immigration* in its own right (Abdallah, 2004).[[2]](#footnote-2) And yet the growing militancy on the part of civil society in the mid-1980s does not appear to have had a major impact on the conceptual and editorial frame within which Nora’s project evolved, despite this being the immediate context of its production.

Nora’s collection relies heavily on realms associated to the ThirdRepublic under which ‘Greater France’ was constructed and also states a clear ambition to represent the heterogeneity and plurality of France’s collective heritage. As a consequence, *Les Lieux de mémoire* has been attacked for the glaring absence − famously described as ‘nothing short of fantastic’ (Mann, 2005) − of references to empire, colonial legacy or (post)colonial topography. The collection actively accepts the fluidity of the borders of metropolitan France: contributions discuss the acquisition of Corsica in 1768 and the loss of Alsace-Lorraine during the Franco-Prussian War, but any sustained sense of trans-Oceanic and trans-Mediterranean expansion into colonial empire and the *Outre-mer* is largely hidden by the methodological nationalism on which the conception of the project depends. Central to Perry Anderson’s well-known critique (in his essay entitled *La Pensée tiède*) is the recognition of the absence of any traces of colonial memory, seen in Anderson’s terms as ‘objet d’un *non-lieu* au tribunal de ces souvenirs à l’eau de rose’ [with charges dismissed at the trial of these sentimental memories] (2005: 52). Rejecting Charles-Robert Ageron’s essay on the 1931 *Exposition coloniale* as a study of ‘babioles exotiques’ [exotic trinkets], for instance, Anderson concludes: ‘Que valent des *Lieux de mémoire* qui oublient d’inclure Diên Biên Phû?’ [What is the worth of a *Lieux de mémoire* project that forgets to include Diên Biên Phû?] (2005: 53).

*Les Lieux de mémoire* has therefore become emblematic of a certain French incapacity and/or unwillingness to engage with the inherent and increasingly undeniable imbrication of the colonial in the *roman national* [national narrative] (Hargreaves 2005). Since the late 1990s, however, postcolonial studies has increasingly gained institutional ground not only in the English-speaking academia but also in France itself, where fiction, testimonies and a new theoretical body of scholarship have contributed to a formidable expansion of the *bibliothèque postcoloniale* (Cohen, 2007), which finally emulates its Anglo-Saxon counterpart (Forsdick and Murphy, 2003; Donadey and Murdoch, 2005). Among these contributions is the significant work of ACHAC (Association Connaissance de l’Histoire de l’Afrique Contemporaine), whose approach to the investigation of France’s colonial past stands as an explicit counterpoint to Nora’s‘hexagonal’focus. In their introduction to *La Fracture coloniale* (2005), one of the publications that marks the epistemological turn in France characteristic of the new century, the editors underscore the absence of any colonial dimension in Nora’s project, lamenting the fact that it is systematically ‘minorée, presque oubliée’ [underestimated, almost forgotten] (16-17).

These are some of the numerous critiques that have been levelled at Pierre Nora and his *Lieux de mémoire* for implying not only an exclusively republican and ‘Hexagonal’ conception of history, but also a classic, if not narrow, perception of national memory in which ‘the porosity of “Frenchness”, the progressive hybridization of any such notion, its ability to be displaced and transculturated’ are all absent (Forsdick, 2009: 278). More recent articulations of this critique further castigate Nora’s editorial and intellectual decision, interpreting it as an active choice on the part of the editor, all the more paradoxical in the light of the historian’s earlier interest in Algeria. Speaking of ‘colonial aphasia’, Ann Laura Stoler, for instance, tracks back this silencing – ‘neither an oversight nor blindness’ (2016: 161) – to Nora’s training in French republican historiography, and also to his first book, *Les Français d’Algérie* (1961), in which she detects a barely veiled disdain for his eponymous subjects, who are seen to deviate from any benchmark of authentic Frenchness. Building on Stoler’s argument, one may add that Nora’s overtly eurocentric conception of ‘French history’ is actually made clear in a statement in the introduction to the first volume of the *Lieux de mémoire*. In this foundational text which outlines his theory of *lieu de memoire* − and illustrates his new public posture (Mercer, 2013) −, talking about the colonies, Nora makes the rather conservative statement that ‘independence has swept into history societies newly awakened from their ethnological slumbers by colonial violation’ (1989: 7). He reiterates here the well-established Hegelian trope relating to Africa’s perceived ahistoricity and as such strikingly anticipates the rhetoric of Nicolas Sarkozy’s controversial Dakar speech of 2007 (Chrétien, 2008; Gassama, 2008; Konaré, 2008). In addition, Nora’s contention that non-Western societies have a different relationship to the nexus of history and memory – i.e., these are ‘groups that until now have possessed reserves of memory but little or no historical capital’ (1989: 7) – excludes them from the logic that underpins the concept of the *lieu de mémoire*.

And yet the empire is not completely absent from the volumes’ contributions, and many critics have singled out to make this point the one essay that overtly addresses questions of colonial memory: ‘L’Exposition coloniale de 1931’, by Charles-Robert Ageron. The oft-cited essay now stands as the most notable exception to Nora’s ‘colonial aphasia’. Ironically, though, the author reaches the conclusion that the exhibition has entered the sphere of myth and is no longer really to be seen as a *lieu de mémoire* in its own right, thus questioning its relevance by virtue of its ephemerality. Still closer scrutiny of the volumes reveals that some entries arguably contain slightly more substantial references to the colonial than they have been credited for. While they do not challenge the criticism laid out above, its diluted presence in the project’s 5,000 pages is certainly worth considering. One could mention ‘L’Hexagone’ by Eugen Weber which traces the evolution of representations of France in relation to its empire; Hélène Himelfarb’s essay on Versailles which locates the national campaign for the preservation of the palace in the context of the wars of decolonization in Indochina and Algeria; and Maurice Agulhon, writing about ‘Le centre et la périphérie’ [centre and periphery] which links the rise of regional sentiment in France with the decline of imperial patriotism in the same period. Other entries make it clear that national memory cannot stand in isolation from its colonial counterpart: in ‘Le front de mer’ [seafront], Michel Mollat du Jourdin discusses the (on occasion) random distribution of material between colonial and naval archives; Marcel Roncayolo’s ‘Le paysage du savant’ [the scholar’s landscape] notes the significant impact of colonial expansionism on French thought; offering a specific example of traces of empire in France, Jean-Marie Mayeur’s exploration of the notion of a ‘mémoire-frontière’ [memory-border] in Alsace reminds readers of the role of Algerian troops in the Battle of Wissembourg in 1870.

Nevertheless, what makes Nora’s project so regretfully narrow-minded is that many of his chosen entries could have easily teased out the colonial dimensions of the memory practices they describe. It might indeed be argued that there is no entry in the original collection that would not benefit from scrutiny from a postcolonial perspective.[[3]](#footnote-3) Let us consider a few examples: Antoine Prost’s contribution on war memorials focuses almost exclusively on a French national narrative, failing to explore the complex nature of similar monuments to the same conflicts erected *Outre-mer*; at the same time, he pays no attention to the presence in France itself of numerous memorials to colonial troops, which are liable to disrupt the coherence in conventional narratives of national memory of the kind taught in French schools. Likewise, the essay on the *drapeau* *tricolore*, although written by colonial historian Raoul Girardet, alludes little to the travels of the flag and to the symbolic role it played in numerous colonial contexts. Finally, Mona Ozouf’s analysis of ‘Liberté, égalité, fraternité’ also considers the Revolutionary slogan in a national context, yet does not acknowledge the extent to which the Haitian Revolution contributed to and interconnected with its revolutionary equivalent, pushing it to logical limits of universal emancipation arguably unimaginable in France at the time (Dubois, 2000).

Given the extent of the lacunae exposed above, it is obvious that there is good reason to seek to postcolonialize the *lieu de mémoire*. Engaging in such a task obviously involves making editorial choices and raises a number of methodological challenges with regard to the original work we intend to reconsider. First is the distinction between history and memory. Central to our intention is a focus on memory understood not as a primary preoccupation with recovering what actually happened in the past (subsequent accounts of which are liable to vary widely across time and space), but as a term that encompasses diverse forms of representation of that past (whether personal, academic, journalistic, state-sanctioned, polemical or artistic), and produced in any medium (written, oral, architectural, audio-visual, etc.). In that sense, the subject of the volume and the challenge to which contributors have responded concerns the realm of representation: as stated in the subtitle, our realms encompass the everyday sites and symbols that freight postcolonial memories in France. Some of the *lieux* discussed in the current volume are understood in the traditional meaning of the term, that is, in connection with a material and spatially defined place. This would be the case of cities, buildings, museums, statues and other material objects. Others, however, as Nora himself proposed, consist of events, figures and other intangible entities that transcend the strictly spatial dimension. Language and discourses would fall into this category. Postcolonial or not, realms are heterogeneous, some more visible than others, and take a variety of forms. Postcolonial realms of memory, as we (re)conceptualize them, are therefore defined here as spatial/functional or immaterial sites, potentially subject to abstraction and imbued with a symbolic aura that, in the context of the French everyday, refers to more or less tangible memory traces linked to the colonial.

The second challenge was the question of the actual territory to be investigated. Should priority continue to be given to the space covered by Nora, that is, a ‘Hexagonal’ France, in order to more forcefully assert its postcoloniality? Or is it indispensable to engage, directly or contrapuntally, with realms located in the former colonial empire? Between the two, the need to revisit Nora’s original conception of France imposed itself as the more indispensable. As we saw, Nora was primarily interested in finding and consolidating French continuities in their ‘Hexagonal’ manifestations. By contrast and in response to it, our project calls for an investigation of national culture that would consider the territory of the Republic in its broadest geopolitical sense: limiting postcolonial France solely to its hexagonal contours would only reproduce another form of the denial that permeates *Les Lieux de mémoire*. Consequently, we understand modern France in the inclusive constitutional sense as encompassing both the Hexagon and its overseas departments, regions and territories known as the *Outre-mer* (DROM-COM and PTOM). This approach allows for an exploration of the limits of any shared narratives of remembrance generated by French institutions and memorial legislation (Löytömäki, 2018), while disrupting at the same time any monolithic understandings of the ‘Francosphere’ or wider ‘Francophone world’. In addition, it allows further elaboration of the notion of a ‘contrapuntal’ memory linking France to its overseas departments and territories in the neo-/postcolonial period. Including the *Outre-mer* in our definition of ‘France’ thus expands our investigation to inquiries that are all the more transcontinental, transcultural and even translingual, while giving us the opportunity to engage in comparative studies of postcolonial representations and memorial practices. That is to say, to reterritorialize these practices in a territory seen as differently French, *autrement français*.

Difficult choices also had to be made regarding the selection of entries that would potentially allow us to achieve such objectives. Amongst the absences from the table of contents that may be considered regrettable, that of ‘Paris’ will certainly be noticed. Going back to the polysemy of the term *metropole*, which underscores the city’s dual status as both urban geopolitical and imperial/colonial centre where national, transnational and postcolonial cultures coalesce, it is indeed possible to conceive of the capital as the archetypal French postcolonial site of memory. However, although Paris dominates as the hegemonic center of the Francophone world, it has also been largely reclaimed as one of the crucial poles of the Black Atlantic that has been formed historically, as Paul Gilroy has famously demonstrated (1993), by centuries of encounters, exchanges and cultural production. Following Gilroy, there now exists an important body of scholarship further documenting the centrality of Paris to the transnational and transcultural history of colonization and in particular of Black intellectual history (Stovall, 1996; **Jules**-**Rosette**, 2000; Brent Hayes Edwards, 2003; Braddock and Eburne, 2013). What emerges from such works is that the postcoloniality of such a ‘Black Paris’ also reveals itself through a set of multiple, or fragmented, realms. La Sorbonne or the Nardal sisters’ literary salon in Clamart (both of which are discussed in detail in this volume) represent such historical realms, referring to an intellectual history that also connects to what Brent Hayes Edwards (2003) called ‘the practice of diaspora’. As a result, much remains to be done within the memorial landscape of the capital city itself, starting with one of its emblematic realms, the *Panthéon*.

It would have been possible to imagine the *Panthéon* as the metonymic example of a postcolonial realm of memory located in the heart of Paris. In a major contribution to Nora’s collection, Mona Ozouf – another signatory of the *Le Point* manifesto mentioned above – describes the French *Panthéon* as one of the key Republic ‘sites of memory’ in the country, a secular shrine that has played a major role in sustaining a sense of continuity in national narratives of republicanism even during those many periods when their coherence was seriously tested. The inclusion of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Giovanni Battista Caprara among those interred in the *Panthéon* during the revolutionary period itself and in its immediate aftermath tellingly reveals the site’s flexibility and its capacity to conscript to French memory practices those born beyond the Republic. In her essay on this *lieu de mémoire*, Mona Ozouf describes the ‘peaceful cohabitation of great figures of the past’ (1997: 156), summarizing such a transcultural solidarity and the accompanying erasure of historical difference that may be seen to underpin the institution. This transnational openness was for a long time limited, however, and in a 2002 speech marking the transfer of Alexandre Dumas’s remains to the site, then president Jacques Chirac noted the author’s Haitian origins and presented this pantheonization as an acknowledgement of the racism evident in the practices of inclusion and exclusion associated with the location.

The progressive yet often ambivalent willingness to acknowledge colonial empire in the symbolic spaces of the *Panthéon* is strikingly illustrated by the integration of narratives of slavery – and more notably abolition – in the context of the bicentenary of the French Revolution. The culmination of the 1989 celebrations included the pantheonization of the abolitionist Abbé Grégoire, whose remains were transferred alongside those of Monge and Condorcet. What is often ignored, however, is that there were plans to add a fourth figure to this ceremony: in a 1988 interview, Jean-Noël Jeanneney, president of the Mission created to oversee the Bicentenary events, associated the Haitian Revolutionary leader Toussaint Louverture with Grégoire, Condorcet and Monge, suggesting that he might act as the fourth ‘emblematic figure’ of the celebrations. In the event, such recognition proved impossible, in part because Louverture’s remains had long been dispersed: buried in a common grave in the Château de Joux (one of the sites explored in this volume) in 1803, this resting place had been disturbed in the expansion of the fort in the later nineteenth century (the absence of physical remains is not, in fact, insurmountable: two of the most recent pantheonizations, those of Germaine Tillion and Geneviève de Gaulle-Anthonioz, involved the transfer of soil from their graves as the families did not want their remains to be disturbed). Toussaint nevertheless played a key role in the Bicentenary of the French Revolution as the in many respects more radical implications of the parallel events in Haiti were co-opted to serve other means (Forsdick, 2005).

Another focus at this site might have been vault XXVI of the *Panthéon*, which includes the tombs of three figures each of whom played a key role in the history of modern France (and a fourth plinth, where the remains of Louverture would perhaps have been located had he been pantheonized himself; see Forsdick, 2012). In 1949, the remains of the socialist leader Jean Jaurès were joined by those of the abolitionist Victor Schoelcher, in a ceremony overseen by Gaston Monnerville, the Guianese-born president of the Conseil de la République, to mark the centenary of the abolition of slavery the previous year. At the same time, the ashes of the colonial administrator and Free French leader Félix Eboué – also born in French Guiana – were moved from Marseille to the third plinth in the vault, the first (and for the time being only) Black historical figure to receive such an honour.

A similar analysis might be offered of the subsequent inscription to Aimé Césaire, also in proximity to vault XXVI, unveiled by then president Nicolas Sarkozy in April 2011. Sarkozy’s relationship to the Martinican poet and politician was a fraught one, not least because Césaire had – in the context of the controversial 23 February 2005 law, the fourth clause of which stipulated that French educators should teach ‘the positive role of the French presence overseas’ – declined to receive Sarkozy in his office in December 2005. Sarkozy’s championing of this legislation is to be understood in the frame of his outspoken hostility towards ‘colonial repentance’ and of his refusal to accept that France itself should be considered ‘postcolonial’. The example of the French *Panthéon* is therefore a multi-layered one, and closer scrutiny of the site reveals the ways in which – often for calculated political purposes – colonial memory has been permitted entry to this national *lieu de mémoire*. Evident, however, is close control of any potential disruption of the centralized and centralizing narratives that such inclusion entails. As the contributors to this volume demonstrate, to study the postcolonialization of sites of memory is a double-edged process, involving recognition of the colonial dimensions – latent or more overt – evident in such locations and phenomena, but also applying a critical lens that acknowledges the continued practices of stage-management and control associated with their inclusion in official narratives and memory practices.

Another potential approach related to Paris would be to account more clearly for its multisited-ness and for the heterogeneous range of cultures whose presence have shaped the capital. This would entail, for example, acknowledging sites not restricted to the Black diaspora, and better accounting for signs and symbols associated with other colonial histories. For example, the site of the *Grande Mosquée* de Paris – inaugurated as a memorial to the so-called *tirailleurs indigènes* killed in 1914-18 and alluded to in the entry below on memorials and museums – stands as a telling trace of these historical presences in the very heart of the capital. Still marginal or even invisible (including to a large extent in our study) is French Indochina, despite traces in the Parisian cityscape: one can think here of the commemoration of South-East Asian troops who fought in the First World War (Jennings, 2003); or of the plaque marking Ho Chi Minh’s residence in the 17th *arrondissement*, and his memorial bust in the parc Montreux in Montreuil. Although France’s relationship to China was never more than a semi-colonial one, the 200,000 Chinese workers drafted to support the allies during the First World War are also remembered by a plaque at the Gare de Lyon.

There is also no doubt that Francophone Postcolonial Studies would benefit from a more frequent decentralization with regards to the Hexagon itself, which entails remapping France’s postcolonial geography (Moudileno, 2012). Following Dominic Thomas’s consideration of *Black France,* our own conception of the territory also ‘broadens and decenters the symbolic territory to provincial sites’ (Thomas, 2006: 9-10) in order to highlight the fact that colonial traces can be found throughout the entirety of metropolitan space and not exclusively in its capital. In addition to the Parisian region and major urban centres such as Marseille, Bordeaux, or Nantes, our new geography thus extends to several regional *départements* and sometimes rural spaces: the Doubs in Eastern France (Fort de Joux); the Creuse in Central France; Charentes-Maritimes (île de Ré); Pyrénnées Orientales (Rivesaltes); and the Marne (Reims). We might again have supplemented the list with a number of a villages, from the Vosges to Southwest, for example in Sainte-Livrade-sur Lot, where the so-called ‘Little Vietnam’ bears the memory of a former ‘Camp d’accueil des rapatriés d’Indochine’.

Regarding immaterial realms of memory, we also acknowledge that many other symbols could/should have been included. The Marseillaise is, for example, another striking trace of ‘sacrifice’ that had to be made: the national anthem was part of Nora’s repertoire, but evidently without reference to the multiple controversies that emerged around it during the 1990s. The militant gesture of Christian Karembeu, the football player from New Caledonia, who refused to sing the Marseillaise before international games in the late 1990s, was explicitly connected to his family’s experience of colonialism (his grandfather was among the *Kanaks* exhibited in the 1931 ‘human zoos’ at Vincennes [Dauphiné, 2001]). Jean-Marie Le Pen’s comments on the subject prefigured the many more contemporary controversies surrounding sport in relation to questions of identity. If one considers the symbolic function of the Marseillaise in the domain of sports, especially its implications regarding the question of the ‘citizenship’ of players who decide to sing it or not during pre-match ceremonies, the Marseillaise must be conceived as a pertinent postcolonial realm of memory. Yet as it is suggested in this collection, sport can itself be considered a site of memory that encompasses the recent controversies connected to the idea of Frenchness while in the meantime opening up a wider array of possibilities going far beyond the current debates.

Identifying and analysing the postcolonial realms of memory that bridge the gap between an instituted French memory and traces of a never fully consolidated – and subsequently discarded – colonial memory on the Republic’s soil is the first step of a potentially unlimited project: it necessarily entails choices, and therefore creates its owns lacunae. We invite readers in their own identification and visiting of specific sites, in their reading, study and research, to reflect on extending and diversifying the range proposed in this volume. We also acknowledge that the focus in this collection on France and locations in the so-called *Outre-mer* could be usefully complemented by a parallel and often entangled consideration of *lieux de mémoire* in the wider *Francosphère*: it is clear that as a transnational memorial/memorialized space characterized by colonial and semi-colonial histories and their memorial afterlives, the wider Francophone world deserves a volume of its own.[[4]](#footnote-4) Indeed, it is hoped that a future companion volume will extend the geographical reach to encompass realms of memory in France’s former colonies in the Americas (Québec and Haiti), North and Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, Indian Ocean and the Pacific. Several contributions in this volume already gesture towards this ambition: the discussion on vine and wine inevitably touches upon the establishment of viticulture in Algeria, while the entry on colonial photography also builds on representations of this part of ‘Greater France’; the discussion of the French language considers the linguistic evolution of so-called ‘petit-nègre’ in non-metropolitan contexts; and the contribution on postage stamps also signals the forms of comparison that are possible with its emphasis on Anglophone and Francophone Africa.

Until then, the aims of the current collection are multiple: a disruptive challenge to current nationally-focused understandings of sites of memory, a call to integrate colonialism and its afterlives more actively into the practices and study of collective memory, but also an invitation to extend this conversation at the intersection of memory studies and postcolonialism. The urgency of such a project is underlined by more recent publications, patently in the wake of *Les Lieux de mémoire*, that overtly perpetuate its methodological nationalism: the selection of sites in Olivier Wieviorka’s and Michel Winock’s *Les Lieux de l’histoire de France* (2017) reflects a similar blind spot regarding the visible and tangible presence of colonialism and its afterlives: the essay in that volume on the Renault factory at Billancourt alludes in its opening paragraph, for instance, to the diversity of the workforce, but then fails to follow through the impact of the flows of North African labour during the *Trente Glorieuses*; the contribution on Reims makes no mention of the thousands of *tirailleurs indigènes* who transformed the city during the First World War; Wieviorka’s and Winock’s collection also includes one of the sites on which we focus in this volume, the Sorbonne (in an essay by Pascal Ory, who also contributed to Nora’s *Lieux de mémoire*), but it does not tease out the colonial and postcolonial dimensions identified in the current volume. Notwithstanding the historiographic controversies they generated, the essays of Patrick Boucheron’s collection *Histoire mondiale de la France* (2017) focused on colonial histories and postcolonial legacies have recently suggested that, even in France itself, there is an openness to post-national and transnational approaches to history and memory. There is a persistent risk, however, that such approaches, although moving beyond the national, fail to follow an actively postcolonial logic, evacuating alongside the nation any reference to colonialism and its memorial afterlives. It is in such a context that the contributions in this volume constitute a further interrogation of the *lieu de mémoire* and suggest how understandings of the concept must evolve to encapsulate the dynamics of memory in theory and in practice.

The case of Algeria, as Benjamin Stora has forcefully and on occasion controversially demonstrated, illustrates amply what is at stake. On the one hand, the problematic of multidirectionality (Rothberg, 2009) connects the war of independence to other major twentieth-century world historical events. On the other, the multilayered and often entangled narratives reflect the fragmentation of memorial landscape along community lines, revealing tensions that have been characterized as a *guerre des mémoires* [memory war]. The unresolved legacies of this conflict continue to impact on the fraught relationships between multiple groups often involving their inter-generational complexity: *Harkis*; *pieds-noirs* and others affected by repatriation; *appelés*; and Algerian nationalists and their descendants. At the same time, this situation feeds an often-politicized nostalgia for the colonial past, summed up in the ambivalent term *nostalgérie* (Hubbell, 2015; Ruscio, 2015). Unlocking the colonial does not for us mean re-rehearsing the potentially interminable and ultimately sterile polemics revolving around reactionary impugnations of repentance. Instead it allows us to redefine more effectively the parameters of urgently required debates about the future of the French Republic. To this end, and as a collective and ongoing intervention, the present volume contributes to mapping the territory, generating the resources and setting the agendas that allow us to prise open France’s multidirectional pasts and mobilize their postcolonial afterlives in a more productive way.

Etienne Achille, Charles Forsdick, and Lydie Moudileno

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***Le Bagne***

In one of the most searing interwar *exposés* of the abuses associated with the penal colony in French Guiana, Léon-Gontran Damas reflects on the ways in which references to the *bagne* have entered the bank of various threats deployed by parents to keep their offspring in check: ‘Toi, dira une mère qui souffre de trouver en son fils l’âme d’un dévoyé, tu finiras tes jours à Cayenne’ [You, would say a mother pained to see that her son was becoming a rogue, you will die in Cayenne] (Damas, 2003 [1938]: 66). The extent to which the *bagne* has – long after its abolition – become engrained in the French popular imagination is reflected much more widely in the other common expressions in which the institution features. ‘Quelle galère!’ (referring to the prison galleys that predated the *bagnes portuaires* in Brest, Marseille and Toulon) and the later ‘quel bagne!’ are both expressions, still in relatively general usage, alluding to an unusually harsh or challenging situation in which those uttering the exclamations find themselves. One of the explanations for ‘Tonnerre de Brest!’, the curse popularized by Hergé’s creation and Tintin’s close friend Capitaine Haddock, is that it refers to the cannon fired whenever a *bagnard* escaped from the Breton city’s prison. Another major French republican symbol (and *lieu de mémoire* in its own right), the *bonnet phrygien* that epitomizes the Revolution, is itself said to be derived from the red hat worn by *bagnards* to distinguish them easily from other members of society.

Despite this visibility, the *bagne* itself retains an ambiguous status as a *lieu de mémoire*, in part because its predominantly extra-metropolitan location means that traces of the institution in France itself are relatively rare, in part because most understandings of the institution rely heavily on representations freighted (and distorted) via popular culture (not least Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables* and its various iterations across different genres). At the same time, the relation of the penal colony to colonial memory requires careful attenuation: in French Guiana and New Caledonia, the *bagne* was a major driver in the attempted *mise en valeur* of those colonies in the face of varying degrees of resistance to settlement; also, these were sites associated with a significant transcolonial mobility that has largely been eclipsed by those representations of the institution that have proliferated since its demise: central to emerging memorial practices, in physical memorials, exhibitions and creative writing, are the forgotten travel stories of, for instance, Kabyle political prisoners deported to New Caledonia following the Al Mokrani rebellion of March 1871 or Algerians convicted of civil crimes condemned to periods of forced labour in French Guiana.

Although it does not feature in Nora’s original collection, the *bagne* was initially a metropolitan site of memory. The Mediterranean galleys powered by convict labourers (commonly known as *chiourmes*) from the fifteenth century were progressively replaced by penal sites in the port cities of Brest (from 1748), Rochefort (from 1777) and Toulon (from 1784), all three of which continued to function throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. The closure of Rochefort and Brest – in 1854 and 1858 respectively – coincided with the inauguration of penal transportation to sites in the French colonial empire, whereas Toulon, the largest of these three *bagnes métropolitains*, functioned for longer and finally ceased operation in 1873. Traces of these institutions in all three cities are limited, although a number of buildings constructed with convict labour remain prominent in the urban landscape. To these are to be added the *bagnes agricoles*, most notably that of Mettray, made famous by its inclusion by Jean Genet in his *Miracle de la rose* (1946) as well as by its discussion by Michel Foucault in *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (1975). Marcel Carné’s film on the *bagne pour adolescents* on Belle Ile, La Fleur de l’âge, scripted by Jacques Prévert and starring Arletty, was never completed, and is memorialized now in a series of photographs taken on set by Emile Savitry (2013).

As recent work by Ann Laura Stoler (2016), Clare Anderson (2018) and others has revealed, the French penal colonies primarily formed part of a ‘carceral archipelago’ that is now benefiting from increasing scholarly attention from a global perspective. French penal establishments functioned in the Maghreb, Sub-Saharan Africa and Indochina, but the main locations for transportation and deportation were the multiple sites associated with French Guiana and New Caledonia. The colonies had been used for the banishment of political prisoners during the French Revolution, when counter-revolutionary opponents of the Republic were sent for the first time to French Guiana. Prominent among these was Louis Ange **Pitou, whose lurid** Voyage à Cayenne, dans les deux Amériques et chez les anthropophages (published in two volumes in 1807) recounts his incarceration in the South American colony between 1798 and 1801. Pitou’s text inaugurates a long tradition of travel narratives – by bagnards and their warders, as well as by travellers and journalists – that have played a key role in transforming the penal colony of French Guiana and subsequently of New Caledonia into lieux de mémoire. Scrutiny of the content of these texts and its comparison with the actual histories of the bagnes and their afterlives reveal, however, a distinct divergence, especially regarding the place of the penal colony in French colonial expansionism and its transcolonial manifestations. As such, it can be argued that until recent years, and often with the direct intervention of the authorities, the bagne has operated as more of a postcolonial lieu d’oubli [realm of oblivion] than as a lieu de mémoire.

Penal transportation to France’s colonies emerged in the 1850s, within several decades of the inauguration of the post-revolutionary project of imperial expansionism (for an overview, see Toth, 2006). It was to the *ancien régime* colony of French Guiana that administrators initially turned, largely as a result – as Damas succinctly claims – of ‘le double avantage qu’offre cette colonie, d’être éloignée et spacieuse’ [the double advantage offered by this colony, to be far away and spacious (2003 [1938], 48). The transformation of a colonial space into a *bagne* served multiple purposes: it allowed removal from metropolitan France of those considered politically or socially undesirable; it provided, at relatively low cost, the workforce required to develop the infrastructure required for *mise en valeur* of the empire; and finally, convicts – during and at the end of their sentences – provided settlers to inhabit places designated as *colonie de peuplement*, and became as a result central to a policy of settler colonialism. In such a context, the introduction of a foreign (French) population has evident implications for indigenous people, ranging from, on the one hand, intermarriage and the emergence of a creolized population to, on the other, death and de-possession. French Guiana exemplifies this logic and these consequences (on the *bagne* here, see Donet-Vincent, 2003, Sanchez, 2013 and Spieler, 2012). The object of numerous attempts at settlement, most prominently the ill-fated Kourou expedition of 1763, an initial *bagne* was established in 1852 by Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte at Cayenne with the principal aim of detaining political opponents of the Second Empire. The colony began to receive convicts following the 1854 decree relating to forced labour. Central to this was the principle of *doublage* or *double peine*, meaning that those condemned to a sentence of fewer than eight years were obliged to spend period in the colony, and those with longer sentences transported for life. The conditions in French Guiana were poor, for *bagnards* and officials alike, and the mortality rate high.

The Guianese penal colony was known popularly as the *guillotine sèche* [dry *guillotine*] as a result of the diseases and other inhumane conditions with which it was associated. Life expectancy was short, even for those sent to the marginally more salubrious surroundings of the ironically named îles du salut (including the île du diable, where Alfred Dreyfus would be incarcerated). The loss of life was such that, from 1864, metropolitan prisoners were sent to New Caledonia in the Pacific, although those from other colonies – most notably in the Caribbean and Algeria – continued to be sent to South America, and after the definitive suspension of transportation to the *bagne* in Melanesia in 1897, French Guiana continued to function for another four decades, continuing to receive civilian *transportés*, political prisoners or *déportés* (including most notably Dreyfus in 1898, but also a number of dissidents from French Indochina in the 1930s), as well as *relégués* or recidivists sentenced for multiple petty crimes (whose transportation had begun under the Third Republic in 1885). The decline of the Guianese *bagne* became apparent, however, in the interwar period, in part as a result of a biting *reportage* dedicated to it by Albert Londres in the *Petit Parisien* in 1923, in part because of the inherent failure of the institution (and by extension the wider colony), an argument made by Damas in his banned 1938 essay *Retour de Guyane*. Despite his own claims, Londres’s intervention led more to reform than abolition, but it undeniably initiated a process that led to the abolition of deportation by Gaston Monnerville, Under-Secretary of State for the colonies, in 1938. With the war intervening, the remaining prisoners began to be repatriated from 1946, with the final ones seeking return to France arriving in Marseille in 1953. In 1965, the French government transferred the responsibility for most of the islands associated with the *bagne* to the Centre Spatial Guyanais,juxtaposing two very different experimental projects, historical and contemporary (Redfield, 2000), and creating an environment that has inevitably impacted on the emergence of memorial practices.

The logic of developing a second major penal colony in the Pacific was similar to that underpinning the emergence of the *bagne* of New Caledonia, relating again to the settlement and *mise en valeur* of a colony otherwise resistant to such processes (Barbançon, 2003; Bullard, 2000). The geographical proximity to Australia situates, however, the Melanesian initiative in a frame of Anglo-French rivalry (Forster, 1992), an aspect that would later have implications for heritage and memorial practices, and the relative success of settler colonialism would here lead to a relatively brief period of operation: around 21,000 *bagnards* were sent to the colony between the arrival of the first convoy onboard *L’Iphigénie* in May 1864 and the suppression of transportation in 1897 by the then governor Paul Feillet (who famously described the flow of convicts into the colony as a ‘robinet d’eau sale’ [dirty water tap]). After this date, many convicts remained in New Caledonia, forming a large part of the population of the islands. In a short period, the penal colony had spread from its initial locations around Nouméa, most notably on the île de Nou and the Ducos peninsula, to encompass numerous other sites, including the agricultural colonies around Bourail and the forestry *bagne* at Prony. The île des pins, now primarily a stopping-off point for luxury cruise ships, is associated in particular with political prisoners, most notably some of those deported following the 1871 Paris Commune, as well as Kabyle rebels incarcerated following the **Al Mokrani revolt of the same year and Kanak detained after the rebellion led by Ataï in 1878.**

**The New Caledonian bagne functioned for only just over three decades, but its impact on this overseas territory are still palpable, particularly in the visible presence of numerous public buildings in Nouméa constructed using convict labour. Memorialization of the institution and its foundational role are, however, recent, and the initial reaction following suppression of the penal colony was a sustained process of silencing, epitomized by the renaming of the île de Nou as Nouville, but also reflected in considerations of renaming the whole archipelago (see** Petit-Quencez, 2016**). The bagne was progressively limited to the île de Nou, until its formal end in 1931. Many buildings were then turned over for civilian use (those in Nouville serve today as a psychiatric hospital and theatre, and also form part of the university); others were demolished or let to fall into ruin as part of an effort to create a tabula rasa in the colony. The stationing of U.S. troops in New Caledonia during World War II accelerated processes of modernization, and seemed to distance yet further memories (if not the remaining physical traces) of the penal colony. In the 1970s, however, a number of local associations began taking an interest in the history of the penal colony, a process that became increasingly apparent following** Mélanésia 2000, a major Kanak cultural festival organized by Jean-Marie Tjibaou in 1975, and were then accelerated following the violence associated with the rise of Kanak nationalism in the 1980s (Chappell, 2013): it was in this context that the *Caldoches*, or New Caledonian population of European heritage, began themselves to look for roots not in France but in Melanesia itself. Memories of the penal colony have now become a major political issue in the territory.

One of the key challenges of considering the penal colony as a *lieu de mémoire* involves distinguishing between, on the one hand, the singularized phenomenon that the term *bagne* popularly conjures up in the collective imagination, and, on the other, the multiplication of sites, moments and experiences that the experience of penal servitude and its afterlives entail. Despite the customary emphasis on French Guiana and New Caledonia, there were penal colonies elsewhere in the French empire, most notably in North Africa where *bagnes militaires* (or the *Biribi*) operated from 1818 well into the twentieth century (Kalifa, 2009). (Albert Londres’s exposé of these establishments, *Dante n’avait rien vu*, was published in 1924, shortly after his *reportage* on abuses in the penal colonies in the Caribbean.) Major penal colonies existed elsewhere. In the case of the Poulo Condor *bagne* (now know as Côn Đảo Prison), on Côn Sơn Island in southern Vietnam, a location first used by the French for the incarceration of political prisoners in 1861, the infamous ‘tiger cages’ were subsequently used by the Americans for the torture of captives during the Vietnam War in a striking illustration of the palimpsestic nature of penal heritage sites of this type (Hayward and Tran, 2014). At the same time, 1852, the date customarily given for the inauguration of the *bagne*, ignores the institution’s complex prehistories, formal and informal: there has been a growing interest in the metropolitan predecessors of the penal colonies in the French empire, as a 2012-13 exhibition at the Musée national de la Marine in Toulon on ‘Le bagne portuaire de Toulon: entre réalités et imaginaire 1748-1873’ [The port *bagne* of Toulon: between reality and the imagination 1748-1873] illustrates clearly. There is consequently a need to recognize that ‘les vestiges du bagne’ [traces of the penal colony] are not only a phenomenon on the *outre-mer*: there are few physical traces of the *bagnes* in Brest and Toulon, destroyed in World War II bombing raids and demolished in the later 1940s respectively, but buildings and other infrastructure constructed by those incarcerated in them remain; also in France itself, the locations associated with the deportation of criminals to the colonies from the île de Ré, most notably the citadelle de Saint-Martin-de-Ré, are a striking example of penal heritage sites in France itself juxtaposed with a popular holiday destination: Jean-Marie Renouard (2007) provocatively alludes to the co-existence here of ‘baigneurs et bagnards’ [bathers and *bagnards*].

The popular iconography of *bagnards* leaving the île de Ré seen in particular in early twentieth-century postcards tends to perpetuate the racialized myth of the white French convict transported overseas. The specifically colonial dimensions of the *bagne* understood as a *lieu de mémoire* relate not just identity debates amongst populations of European origin, but are to be understood in a more complex transcolonial frame. Representations of the *bagne* in popular culture tend to privilege the mythology associated with celebrity convicts or political prisoners, or to perpetuate the idea that *bagnards* were predominantly metropolitan and white. There is a particular interest, for instance, in the deportation of Louise Michel to New Caledonia following the Commune of 1871, or Alfred Dreyfus to French Guiana, with the former featuring in a number of comics and graphic novels that range from the sensationalist *Iles des Pins* by J.P. Bouquillard and Florenci Clavé (1984) to Bryan and Mary Talbot’s *Red Virgin* (2016). Albert Londres’s accounts of the Caribbean penal colony have led to an interest in the French anarchist Eugène Dieudonné, author of *L’Homme qui s’évada*, now the subject also of a *bande dessinée* (one of a growing number of recent French comics devoted to the *bagne*); and arguably more visible is Henri Charrière, known under his nickname ‘Papillon’, whose autobiography was popularized in a memorable 1973 film version, starring Steve McQueen and Dustin Hoffman, and directed by Franklin J. Schaffner (remade by Michael Noer in 2018).

What these widely distributed representations tend to downplay is the presence in the penal colonies of colonial prisoners, convicted of civil offences or deported for political reasons. For the *bagne* to be understood as a postcolonial *lieu de mémoire*, it is essential for more attention to be paid to these transcolonial entanglements. Concrete recognition is increasingly apparent in contemporary heritage practices: long left in a state of decay, the camp Crique Anguille in [Montsinéry-Tonnegrand](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montsin%C3%A9ry-Tonnegrande) (commonly known as the *bagne des Annamites*), which functioned for Indochinese political prisoners in 1930s French Guiana, has recently been restored and made accessible; perhaps more strikingly, locations associated with Algerian prisoners in New Caledonia have been subject to increased attention, most notably those around the town of Bourail, where there is notably a graveyard known as the ***cimetière*** *des Arabes* in which political and civil prisoners and their descendants are buried. Memorial activity relating to ‘Caledoun’ (the Arabic word for New Caledonia) has increased considerably, with a major exhibition at the Institut du Monde Arabe in 2011 (Barbançon and Sand, 2013), and local associations have established links with Algeria. A particularly striking example of this is to be found at the ***cimetière des déportés* on the île des pins, a site customarily associated with memorialization of the Paris Commune as a number of *Communards* are buried there, but where the presence of Algerian *déportés* from the same time is now also commemorated, reflecting the entanglement of narratives in these postcolonial lieux de mémoire. The afterlives of these histories have also been explored in literature, a medium which can be seen to have played a vanguard function in transforming the bagne into a site of memory. The Algerian rebels deported to New Caledonia in the 1870s constitute a particularly striking example, with Mehdi Lallaoui’s Kabyles du Pacifique (1994) providing a meticulous reconstruction of their itineraries and stories, and the same subject inspired a play by Kateb Yacine (2004), a short story by Leïla Sebbar (2012) and a novel by Anouar Benmalek (2000). The very different experience of Algerian convicts deported to French Guiana has also attracted fictional attention in** Mouloud Akkouche’s *Cayenne, mon tombeau* (2002), the account by a narrator of French-Algerian heritage of a quest, in the 1980s, to uncover details of his late father’s convict past.

Recent developments in contemporary heritage practices relating to the *bagnes* of the former French empire have been considerable, most notably in French Guiana and New Caledonia. In the former, an emphasis on ecotourism and the economic reliance on the European space station eclipsed for many years the development of any active memorialization of the penal colony, although with the inauguration of a ‘centre d'interprétation de l’architecture et du patrimoine’ in the Camp de la Transportation at Saint-Laurent du Maroni suggests a renewal of interest in the area. In the latter, where the politics of local identity have more actively foregrounded questions relating to the legacies of the *bagne*, the heritagization of penal sites is more advanced although often dependent on the input of community organizations. Fort Teremeba, for example, near Bourail, has been restored and operates as a tourist destination; in Nouméa, the association Témoignage d’un Passé continues to develop plans for a permanent Musée du Bagne in the former bakery of the penal establishments in Nouville; but the sites on the île des pins – with the exception of the ***cimetière des déportés* – continue to undergo a steady process of postcolonial ruination.**

Parallels have been drawn between the French penal establishments in Australia and their French counterparts, and it is clear that there is a complex relationship between the decline of the former and the almost simultaneous rise of the latter (Forster, 1992). In parallel to these historical considerations, however, there is a need to reflect on their relative status as *lieux de mémoire* in their respective national contexts. Registration of the Australian convict sites on the UNESCO World Heritage list has led to a certain homogenization of memory practices relating to them. This is not yet the case in their French-speaking equivalents, where there is still evidence – in New Caledonia and more notably in French Guiana – of a struggle between the entropic forces of ruination and the desire to recover memories of the past. These tensions are perhaps best articulated in *Guyane: Traces-mémoires du bagne*, a photo-essay by Patrick Chamoiseau and Rodolphe Hammadi, in which there is a rejection of ‘des dizaines d’ouvrages, de chroniques, de témoignages, d’articles célèbres’ [dozens of books, chronicles, testimonies, famous articles] (1994: 23) on which the memory of the penal colony is traditionally seen to rest – and their replacement with an attempt to ‘percevoir ce que les Trace-mémoires nous murmurent’ [perceive what memory-traces whisper to us]. Patrick Chamoiseau’s notion of the ‘trace-mémoire’ developed here engages directly with the ‘lieu de mémoire’ and seeks to illustrate its limitations and to integrate more actively ‘des histoires dominées, des mémoires écrasées’ [subjugated histories, overwritten memories] (1994: 16).

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1. Kritzman and Goldhammer chose the term ‘realms’ to translate ‘lieux’, whereas the Chicago translation preferred to keep the original French expression. We have adopted the former but acknowledge that others prefer ‘sites of memory’. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. There has been growing attention paid to identifying *lieux de mémoire de l’immigration* in France (Barou, 2000; *Hommes et Migrations*, 2004; d’Adler, 2008), including to provincial locations such as the Lorraine region (Boubeker and Galloro, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Several essays in this volume are directly based on Nora’s original division, which is also the source of inspiration for many others: if ‘The Hexagon’ does not appear in the table of contents, this realm is omnipresent in the essays making up the section on ‘Territory’. Similarly, the sections on ‘Monuments’ and ‘Institutions’ refer to a certain number of central themes developed in *Les Lieux de mémoire*. It is therefore possible to maintain the classificatory lexicon of the original collection (including the use for individual contributions of concise thematic titles), whilst opening up *Les Lieux de mémoire* to a wider global French geography. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Such a development can be envisioned as part of an open-ended and longer-term endeavour taking advantage of the possibilities afforded by the digital humanities (see for example Nicola Frith’s ‘Cartographie des mémoires de l’esclavage’ [https://www.mmoe.llc.ed.ac.uk/fr/]; the digital application of the concept of the *lieu de mémoire* in a broader context is explored in Cunha Matos, Lagae and Lee, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)