

# Deconstructing the Founding Myths of France's Greatness

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*This article is intended to struggle against the ideas carried by the French Right and newly elected President Sarkozy's views and discourse. It is an insight into French history and collective imagination, that sheds a crude light on many aspects of this history and the way French people see themselves and their country. More widely, it is a strong attempt at questioning all national and historical myths in which identities often entrench themselves.*

The scene took place in June 1998, only eight years ago – not such a long time – one month before a great motley communion : the first French victory at the Soccer World Cup, won by its multi-ethnic team. At the end of a press conference, the then prospective successor of Mr Jean-Marie Le Pen as head of the National Front [1], Mr Bruno Gollnisch, exhibited his attaché-case and unveiled the secret code that would unlock it, as if it had been a war trophy.

By definition, a secret code should remain concealed. One usually treasures it as a sacred relic. Obviously, Mr Gollnisch does not : the secret can be widely disclosed, especially if the disclosure is intended to stigmatize or to gain a cheap and easy success. One's intellectual satisfactions reveal how well one is educated.

Striving for effect, he declaims his magic combination in front of his audience, spelling out slowly each of the three digits, one after another, finally coming to a liberating climax : 7-3-2. 732, he did not spoil his effect. 732, the very year the Frank kingdom's ruler Charles Martel defeated the Arab troops of Abd-al-Rahman, near the present-day town of Poitiers.

This battle was fought some 1266 years before Gollnisch's press conference. 1266 years chewing it over, which presumably points out clearly the neophyte's zeal. For 1266 years he has been chewing it over, this « third generation Frenchman » – this is how any grandchild of immigrants may be designated in France, and Gollnisch's grandparents immigrated from Germany.

As I have been a wartime correspondent in the foreign theaters of French operations, Gollnisch's indecent display and the passiveness of the journalists witnessing his vain and pointless performance triggered a kind of impulse that drove me to embark upon a fascinating diving deep into the abysses of the French conscience. Here I wish to disclose my findings, which fit the topic of this seminar perfectly – « From one shore to the opposite : writing history, decolonizing memories » – and, to tell the truth, I am not particularly seeking to spark any polemic by doing so.

Such an approach does not pertain to demagoguery or any form of populism, which – let us be honest – is the classic unfair-play accusation opposed to such demonstrations. It is aimed at contributing the semantic and psychological clarification of the post-colonial discussion, by detecting and spelling out the unsaid of the national conscience, in the course of a journey through the twists and turns of the French collective imagination.

Neither populism, nor demagoguery, nor even denigration. Rather, the method of content analysis applied to observations which may well be terse, but in no way summary nor simplistic. To sum up, this is a kind of electroshock therapy, which reveals a people's presuppositions, a nation's psychological springs and strings, and its leaders' intellectual substratum.

Let us embark upon this journey, in the course of which we will deconstruct the founding myths of France's greatness. Many thanks to Bruno Gollnisch, our unwilling and unknowing tour operator.

## **1/ The French panache, or the myth of greatness**

My point is far more significant than it may appear a priori. It is the very explanation of an undeniable reality : France's last great military victory happened 200 years ago. Yes, two centuries exactly. It was the battle of Austerlitz (1805) [2]. Certainly, there was a series of successes : first the battles of Valmy (1792) [3] and of Arcole (1796) [4], then Austerlitz. In short, the French panache. And then ? Nothing more... what a panache ! Then came Waterloo (1815) [5], an English victory, Sedan (1870) [6], a German victory, and the Fachoda incident (1898) [7], which definitely deprived France of any access to the sources of the Nile in Sudan. To sum up : almost a century of repeated military routs, which – I admit – were compensated for by the colonial conquests, especially in Algeria. Thus, one may believe that colonial expeditions can usefully make up for national disasters, and, within the present-day discussion, that immigrants are an indispensable diversion keeping the attention away from internal difficulties.

A hundred years after Waterloo, unlucky times apparently came to an end with Verdun (1916) [8] and Rethondes 1st (November 11th, 1918, when the armistice was signed by the Allies and Germany). But, actually, the French did not overcome alone. They could not claim the exclusive benefit of this victory. They had to share it, not only with their British and American allies, but also with newcomers onto the international scene : the « basanés » [9]. 550,449 soldiers from France's overseas took part in the French war effort, among whom 173,000 Algerians – i.e twenty percent of the numbers, and ten percent of the Algerian population. No less than 78,116 ultramarine soldiers died for France, as many people as are now living in the towns of Vitrolles and Orange in southern France, the political fiefs of the contemporary French Extreme Right.

Such a connection may be considered sacrilegious, but, here again, it matches the facts. On this account, Verdun is an Arab and African victory as well as a French one. Certainly, the cannon fodder was denied almost any worth as compared to the virtue of the High Command's strategists, but once again, the truth is quite the opposite. After Verdun, many had believed naively that France was bound again to be victorious. Well, no. The year 1940 and Rethondes 2nd (on June 21st, 1940, when France capitulated in Montoire) proved they had guessed wrong. In 1944, the battle of Monte Cassino [10], the greatest French victory in WWII, cleared France's honour, but was actually a collective achievement, which cost the lives of 100,000 Allied soldiers – and of 60,000 Germans. Out of 6,300 soldiers who died in

the French ranks, 4,000 came from Maghreb, i.e, two out of three. Thus, Monte Cassino is an Allied victory as well as a French, Arab and African one.

The pattern is identical as regards military achievements in the naval field : the last French feat of arms – very controversial – dates back to 1799 in Abukir [11]. Then came Trafalgar (1805) [12], Toulon (1942) [13], the missing propeller of the aircraft carrier « Charles de Gaulle » during the war in Afghanistan (2001) – the first war of the 21st century – and finally, in 2005, the erratic travel of the aircraft carrier « Clémenceau », the former gem of the French warfleet. De Gaulle and Clémenceau, surely two prominent figures of French history, deserved a more substantial tribute.

Victorious when fighting side by side with its colonies' natives, France fell defeated again when turning its weapons against them. The French forces were annihilated in Dien Bien Phu (1954) against Vietnam – the first time a Third-World country ever defeated a western one – as well as in Algeria (1954-1962).

2/ Liberty, Equality, Fraternity : the republican triptych as the founding myth of French exceptionalism

### **a) Liberty**

Colonization is the very negation of liberty, and anyway far from embodying the definition that can be found in the most recent edition (2007) of the popular French dictionary « Le Petit Robert » : « developing and exploiting the country brought under colonial administration » [14].

Freedom and colonization are proper antonyms, for colonization is the very exploitation of a country : it entails the despoliation of its riches and the enslavement of its population for the sole profit of the Metropole, which actually only considers the colony as a captive market, a raw materials warehouse, an outlet for its surplus population and workforce, and the device for adjusting the unemployment and inflation rates in the western societies.

Colonization is the gravedigger of the republican ideal, of the founding principles of the French Revolution : Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. It does not matter that prominent French figures like Leon Blum (the moral conscience of French socialism) ever praised the benefits of colonization, and presented it as a moral duty to grant primitive peoples an access to civilization. [15]

Within the present-day discussion, Leon Blum's rhetoric can be compared with philosopher André Glucksmann's, the new conscience of the new French Left, the one who, in 2003, advocated the American invasion of Iraq, arguing it was not an American attempt to grasp full control of Iraqi oilfields, but a genuine western contribution to the establishment of democracy in Arab land. « The White Man's burden », conceptualized by the British author Rudyard Kipling [16], grants a comfortable alibi, and was the recurring slogan the western world parroted to justify each and every predatory undertaking.

### **b) Equality**

The so-called « French exception » is a peculiarity. France was first in turning terror into an institution and governing model thanks to Maximilien de Robespierre during the French Revolution (1794), and in 1955 went further into enlightenment, inventing air piracy by hijacking the plane that was carrying the historic chiefs of the Algerian independence

movement (Ahmed Ben Bella, Mohamad Khider, Mohamad Boudiaf and Krim Belkacem) - an action which gave Third-World's activists ideas for their own struggles towards independence.

France is a recidivist as regards peculiarity, which is a significant feature of French exceptionalism. Indeed, this Jacobinic, egalitarian and levelling country was also the sole mindless country ever to engrave « the theory of the inequality of races » into law, giving official and legal legitimacy to what we may call « judiciary gobino-darwinism » [17]. France did so to foster and advocate segregation, not equality.

The « Homeland of Human Rights » and of modern legal compilations (the civil code and the penal code) is also homeland to the codification of discrimination and abomination. It is the country of the « Code Noir » (the Black Code) legislating slavery under monarchy, of the « Code de l'indigénat » (the Native code) in colonized Algeria under the Republic. The « ethnological exhibitions » put the latter into practice, with their « human zoos » [18] intended to engrave in the Third-World's peoples' collective imagination their inferiority as « coloured peoples » and, symmetrically, the superiority of the so-called white race, as if white was not a colour. But it is ages since this « white » is not immaculate anymore.

A single figure is enough to show how vain this principle of equality is. In the last government of the Chirac's era, led since 2005 by Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, three ministers have been in charge of putting the equality principle into effect, via its derivations : social cohesion (Mr Jean-Louis Borloo), equal treatment for women and men (Mrs Catherine Vautrin), and promotion of the equal opportunities principle for citizens both of French and immigrant origins (Mr Azouz Begag).

And yet, equality is one of the principles on which the French Republic is grounded, and it has been considered a common good for two centuries. How come nobody ever thought about putting it into practice before ? It seems that secularism, which is such a unique principle in the world, has only been erected to hide the recurrent chauvinism of the French society. The consolation prizes occasionally awarded not to the most deserving but to the most obedient people do not soften this discriminatory policy, but on the contrary they underline how much it contradicts France's universalist message. They threaten it with serious backlashes.

### **c) Fraternity... not with anybody : the « bougnoule », a tale of absolute ingratitude and absolute stigmatization**

The battlefields of World Wars witnessed fraternization, but fraternity never. No other country in the world has ever been indebted so much to dark-skinned peoples for its freedom, and yet no other country in the world has ever crushed his colonized allies so compulsively, to whom it owes its survival as a great nation. By way of fraternity, only stigmatization, discrimination and repression galore.

Twice in a single century, an utmostly rare phenomenon occurred : these soldiers of vanguard - vanguard of death and victory - were enrolled in conflicts to which they were completely foreign, quite in the etymological meaning, in « white men's quarrels », before being thrown back into the darkness of inferiority, into their subordinate condition, in what can be considered a cathartic process. No sooner had they carried out their military duties than they encountered strong repression, maybe as a reward for their contribution to France's war effort. Such repression was too recurrent to be a coincidence : it happened in

Sétif (Algeria) in 1945, cruelly the very day the Allies won WWII, then in the camp of Thiaroye (Senegal) in 1946 [19], and in Madagascar in 1947 [20].

It must be noticed, as regards the British Empire, that the ultramarine contribution to its war effort involved WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) people from Anglo-Saxon countries (Canada, Australia, New Zealand) and dark-skinned people from other countries (India, Pakistan, etc.) in similar numbers. India and Pakistan became independent in the immediate aftermath of WWII, in 1948, contrary to French colonies (Algeria, Indochina), where France embarked on ruinous colonial wars that were to last for ten years.

The insult « bougnoule » stems from a slangy *ante mortem* supplication, « Aboul Gnoul », meaning « get me the alcohol », the potion that spurred soldiers to attack. Sadly led astray, this ultimate claim, a prelude to sacrifice, was to become the very mark of absolute stigmatization towards those who paradoxically put their lives at risk twice, hugely contributing to defeating the oppressors of their own.

In French literature, the ordeal of their depersonalization and their struggle for restoring their identity and dignity are hardly mentioned tersely : « “ bougnoule ”, a masculine noun that was first used in 1890, means “ black ” in Wolof (the Senegalese dialect). Initially employed in Senegal by some whites to refer colloquially to the black natives, this noun came to be used among Europeans of North-Africa to designate the North-Africans insultingly. Synonymous with “ bicot ” and “ raton ” [21] » [22]. Subject to a progressive shift in meaning, the word « bougnoule » came to encompass France as a whole - well beyond North-Africa alone - including all « melanoderm people », either Arab-Berber or Black-African, finally casting anchor in the abysses of the French conscience as the indelible mark of an absolute disdain, while, derived from its synonymous « raton » in a parallel evolution, the word « ratonnade » became widely used to designate a method of police repression against « facies offenders » [23].

Thus, « bougnoule » came to throw indiscriminately into the same infamy each and every wog (« métèque » in French) of the Empire, the rank and file of the Republic, promoted to casual defenders of the homeland, of which they were yet the actual and essential defenders. A homeland which has always claimed to be unique among the chorus of nations, and indeed distinguished itself, often brightly, sometimes hideously. A homeland which is still carrying, like millstones from the past, the Vichy regime, Algeria, the policies of collaboration, underhand denunciation, deportation and torture - the shameful pages of its history. A homeland which has been trying for decades to expurgate its own past and whose moral magisterium has been seriously faltering for a while, for those dark pages have not been acknowledged soon enough...

A posthumous revenge for the « bougnoule », in a way.

d) France and the republican triptych : an ethnocentric outlook upon the exogenous phenomenon

My point hereafter may seem peremptory or partial, but actually matches the historical reality : the clannish division [24] of the French society was born in the minds of the host country's authorities and citizens well before it first settled in the immigrants' minds.

Now let us shift from the colonial pattern to the French society ; in France, the immigrant has long been considered a native - thus he was paradoxically a native in the eyes of the

etymologically real natives [25]. He was considered a mere servant from the lower level of workforce, who had a duty of gratitude towards the host country, for his expatriation granted him livelihood.

Of humble extraction, appointed to subaltern and disdained laborious tasks, confined to underprivileged suburbs, the immigrant was both defined as and destined for remaining in the margins of the society, and never becoming a genuine part of it. Thus he had no right to be mentioned, nor to express his wishes, let alone to speak his mind and opinions.

The immigrant has been all the more hushed up as he became the scapegoated culprit for each and every French diplomatic and economic failure in the 1950s – 1970s. The bitter defeat in Dien Bien Phu (1954, in Indochina), the war in Algeria, the Franco-British expedition reaching for the Suez Canal (1956) with the intention to weaken President Gamal Abdel Nasser, the godfather of Arab nationalism, the clash of Bizerte (1961) [26] and the decolonization of Africa,

the third Israeli-Arab war (June 1967), the first oil crisis (1973), are a few of many events that resulted in diabolizing the immigrant, especially if « Muslim-Arab », in the eyes of the French.

In those times, the Arab became the figure of « absolute evil », as a kind of counterbalance, not only in the collective imagination but also in the field of intellectual production. The common language had a bragging and contemptuous expression for this : « let us have the bougnoule work until his burnoose sweats » [27].

Through this optical trick, France was lured into believing in its revenge over its setbacks in Algeria, and through active philosemitism, into believing in its own redemption. That way, France only replaced judeophobia by arabophobia, a wrong by another wrong, and acted as if ignoring that injustice cannot fight nor undo injustice.

A symptom of such a state of facts, the « Harki » [28], the very one who should typify the good Arab or the good immigrant in the French mental patterns, for he fought on the French side, that is the *good* side, was dissimulated and secluded in the arid nooks of France, in a symbolic process intended to repress this « garbage of colonialism » into the depths of the national conscience, and finally to erase it completely.

Within the national scope, the French clenching – and self-entrenching into – their identity actually dates back to the first waves of immigration from the Muslim-Arab ensemble – mainly from Maghreb – and more precisely to WWI. With 1.4 million dead and 900,000 wounded, France suffered an 11-percent loss of its working population, not to mention economic damage : 4.2 million hectares devastated, 295,000 houses crushed to ruins, 500,000 others damaged, 4,800 kilometers of railways and 58,000 kilometers of roads to repair, 22,900 factories to rebuild, and 330 million cubic meters of trenches to fill in.

The first immigrant workers, Kabylis, came to France in small groups in 1904, but WWI boosted the phenomenon, for the country had to resort en masse to « colonial workers », and then also to the reinforcements of the « colonial soldiers » back from the battlefield, who were not listed in the same category.

The remote native gave way to the neighboring immigrant. First an exotic curiosity exhibited in human zoos to glorify France's colonial enterprise, the « melanoderm »



progressively became permanent data in the French human landscape, perceived as a constraint – a perception fostered by the immigrants' and metropolitans' differing ways of life, and by the host country encountering economic fluctuations and political uncertainties.

Quite paradoxically, during the interwar period (1918-1938), France promoted the setting up of a « Xenophobic Republic » [29], the matrix of Vichy's ideology and of the idea of « national preference », while its need for workforce was glaring. Although they were hugely contributing to rebuild the country out of its ruins, the immigrant workers were subject to suspicion, watched and trailed in a big « central file ».

So as to get a residence permit, they had to pay a tax that sometimes amounted to half their monthly wages – an extra profit for the French state. Moreover, they were regarded as a triple peril : an economic peril for the French workers' jobs, a security peril for the state, and a sanitary peril for the French population, insofar as foreigners (especially Asians, Black-Africans and Maghrebis) were alleged to spread germs and diseases.

Up to almost 200,000 « colonial workers » were to be imported from Maghreb, and whole Africa, by true slave-trading corporations, like the « Société générale de l'immigration » (SGI, i.e « General Company of Immigration »), so as to make up for French workers who had been mobilized and sent to war, mainly from the construction and textile industries. Among all immigrant workers, who first had come mainly from Italy and Poland, the Maghrebis were particularly watched over by the authorities.

On March 31st, 1925, they set up a « Bureau of surveillance and protection of North-African natives, responsible for suppressing crimes and offences » [30]. This special office, exclusively dedicated to watching over the Maghrebis, was the blueprint for the « Bureau of Jewish Affairs » (« Bureau des Affaires Juives ») set up in 1940 by Vichy's government, so as to put French nationals belonging to the « Jewish race » or the « Jewish denomination » under surveillance during WWII.

The very name of this Bureau is eloquent as regards the French government's opinion and intentions towards the « North-African natives ». The trend went on growing during WWII and the Trente Glorieuses (1945-1975), for the following colonial wars mobilized more cannon fodder, while at the same time the reconstruction of Europe urged for even more cheap and abundant workforce. This was to result in an immigration wave as important as the previous one.

So exquisitely refined was the recruitment, that it was done according to criteria of affinities, so much that it resulted in true « migratory couples », most notably Renault and the Kabyle workforce, Charbonnages de France [31] and workers from South-Morocco, as well as Volkswagen and Turkish immigrants in Germany.

As if priced like cattle on a livestock market, the colonial workers were even subject to quotation, according to their nationality and « race » [32], which subtly distinguished people depending on their origins, especially as regards Algerians, among whom the Kabyle benefited a more positive prejudice than the other categories constitutive of the Algerian population. A Kabyle invariably got a 5 (on a 20-point scale), an Arab a 4, and an Indochinese a 3. Having witnessed such a bitter humiliation while staying in Paris, Hô Chi Minh got his revenge thirty years later, by inflicting on his country's former colonizer one of the most humiliating military defeats ever encountered by a western power, at Dien bien

Phu in 1954.

Though silent, the wounds of history never heal.

France readily passes itself off as revolutionary, but actually proves deeply conservative. The country of the republican triptych has at length threatened freedom through colonization, adopted an ethnocentric outlook, and weakened the society through its socio-cultural and demographical structuring.

### **3/ The myth of the French « Arab policy »**

The conformist director and editorialist of the self-allegedly anarchist weekly Charlie-Hebdo, Mr Philippe Val, imputes Vichy's anti-Jewish policy of collaboration to « France's Arab policy ». This modern-time memorialist, who considers himself a present-day rival of the Cardinal de Retz [33], thinks such a dubious and anachronistic connection can dissimulate how recurring antisemitism has been in the French society in the course of the last centuries.

Short of crediting Arabs with an astonishing clear-sightedness verging on ultimate machiavelism, bribing the French General Staff so as to lure them into having a French officer of Jewish faith (Captain Alfred Dreyfus) convicted with high treason and condemned, or – why not ! – corrupting and rotting France's political and military leaders so as to savour the collapse of 1940, one has to admit and state that antisemitism existed in France long before the Muslim-Arab immigration began.

The most important flood of Arabs and Muslims to France occurred during WWII, purposed to contribute to the war effort against the Nazi yoke and to defending a country the inhabitants of which could not, did not want to, or did not know how to defend it – it was *not* purposed to « steal the bread from the French' mouths ». That is to say it occurred almost fifty years after the Dreyfus Affair, but right after the capitulation in Montoire.

And, for all I know, the « Bureau of Jewish Affairs » was designed after the blueprint of the « Bureau of surveillance and protection of North-African natives », created in 1925 without the least protest on the part of the French, maybe at that time too absorbed in contemplating their own superiority glorified by the « human zoos ».

Philippe Val's thesis does not stand a moderately serious analysis. But who would ever claim that Philippe Val is an analyst ? What is more, that he is serious ? Nevertheless, his thesis pertains to doctoring history, to an underhandly anti-Arab revisionist approach.

A policy may only be assessed in the long run. Put to the test of facts, France's Arab policy – a sacred dogma if there ever was one – at times proves a vast mystification, a mere selling point of the French militaro-industrial complex. Let us judge from history, our most reliable witness. The Arabs massively contributed to the French war effort in 1914-1918, within the reconquest of Alsace and Lorraine. They got nothing in return, except France expressing its gratitude twenty years later in a quite particular manner... by handing the Syrian district of Alexandrette [34] over to Turkey (in 1939), a WWI enemy.

In the immediate aftermath of WWII, France – definitely a recidivist – crushed the first separatist demonstration of Algerians, in Sétif, on the very day of the Allied victory (May 9th, 1945). In retrospect, this repression was to be considered an aberration, doubtlessly unique in the world history, which still has some impact nowadays.



Ten years later, in 1956, together with Israel and the UK, France embarked on a « punitive raid » against President Nasser, guilty of having attempted to get back Egypt's sovereignty over its sole important national asset, the Suez Canal. What a curious team such an alliance was, gathering the survivors of the Nazi genocide (who were many among the Israelis) and France, one of their former butchers, which had been an anteroom of the extermination camps under Vichy !

A curious team, but for what struggle ? Against whom ? Against Arabs, precisely those who had been widely appealed to during WWII in order to defeat the Nazi regime - i.e the occupier of France and the butcher of European Jews, among whom survivors widely immigrated in the new founded Israel right after the war.

Unless it is another subtle form of the French exception, one would have dreamt of a more appropriate expression of gratitude.

Very concretely, France's Arab policy after the Six Days war (June 1967) historically consisted in restoring the national sovereignty in the decision centers of French political power, by loosening the relationships between the French and Israeli intelligence services, for they were until then close and interlinked to the point it had become detrimental to the French national interests.

Some of you probably remember that, at the time, the chief of the Israeli military purchase commission had an office at his disposal, not in the Israeli embassy but in the very French Ministry of the Army [35], which was directly adjacent to the office of the Minister's Chief of Staff. Such a proximity, verging on promiscuity, was unprecedented, even in the French colonies.

Some of you may also still have in mind the joint implication of the French and Israeli intelligence services in the daytime abduction in 1965 of Mehdi Ben Barka, the charismatic chief of the Moroccan opposition, right in the middle of Paris, or the five patrol boats the Israelis stole in Cherbourg in 1969, a theft that remains so far the most concrete expression of the French intelligence's benevolent passivity - if not connivence - when confronted to such Israeli bold coups de main.

Bringing an end to an 11-year severance of diplomatic relationships due to the Suez expedition, and after two decades of military tribulations in Indochina and Algeria, its overtures towards the Arab countries in 1967 earned France a renewed prestige, the capture of oil markets - especially in Iraq, the UK's former private domain robbed by France in what was the major breakthrough of the French post-1950s diplomacy initiated by President De Gaulle -, as well as tremendous military contracts amounting several hundreds million dollars, particularly with Iraq, Libya and Saudi Arabia.

A flagrant expression of the unequal treatment of French and Arabs was seen upon the first oil crisis in 1973. At that time, France was officially the Arab world's closest partner, officially excepted from the boycott depriving the western countries of cheap oil, the main beneficiary of the oil boom and of the contracts with oil monarchies. This notwithstanding, the French clung on their xenophobia, on a behaviour guided by a psychorigid nostalgia for greatness.

Everyone still has in mind the humorous shafts of that time, when the French revelled in compensating their country's lack of natural resources with an alleged intellectual

superiority, displaying their pride for « not having oil but ideas ». One may decipher this turn of phrase as follows : « no gas, but the quintessence of spirit » – such humour was underlied by the reigning Arabophobia at a time when the Muslim-Arabs were pilloried for having dared make the French freeze stiff with their damned energy crisis. While the oil prices had outrageously favored the western economies for years, their rise was perceived as a crime of lèse-majesté, although it was actually a mere adjustment.

The contradiction between the French diplomacy's well-disposed attitude towards pan-Arab ambitions and the French public's narrow clinging to its identity already resulted at the time in the highly problematic incoherence – yet to be removed – of France's policy as regards the Muslim-Arab fact.

French universalism has practiced a « minorities policy » towards the Muslim-Arab world, in full contradiction with its founding principles. It has institutionalized and manipulated the denominational and clannish [21] structuring, utilizing the Maronites (in the Levant) and the Kabylis (in the West) as a tool for rechristianizing the southern shore of the Mediterranean, prohibiting the Algerians from speaking their national language in their own homeland, inflicting on this country a more severe wound than the devastation brought by 130 years of colonization : damage of the spirit – i.e acculturation –, the effects of which endure nowadays, and largely explain the recurrent crises affecting the relationships between France and Algeria.

All this is also part of this French « Arab policy ».

#### **4/ France, love it or leave it - the myth of the French excellence**

This slogan has not even the merit of being original. It was first coined by Ronald Reagan, Rambo-style President of the United States in the eighties (1980-1988), who intended his turn of phrase to thwart the criticisms that rose against the American adventurism in the post-Vietnam war period (1975-1980). This slogan was borrowed for vote-catching purposes by Philippe De Villiers, the leader of the French traditionalist Right, and then taken up by... Nicolas Sarkozy, this « second generation Frenchman» as the hallowed French expression has it to designate citizens whose parents were immigrants from the Third-World.

Cloning America is no sign of originality.

France's « basanés » are well and truly here, durably settled in the French political and social landscape, they, who have never been solemnly praised for their « positive role », which is at best incidentally mentioned when not plainly impugned or denied.

They, who live in France, their *chosen* – not host – country.

They, who are determined to advocate and defend the high opinion of itself that France wants to spread worldwide, determined to struggle against all those who weaken the economy through their hazardous administration, all those whose controversial connivance brings politics into disrepute, all those who pollute France's image by dint of fictitious jobs and fictitious responsibility, of secret commissions and « frais de bouche » [36], of insider tradings and abuses of public property. [37]

Against all those Misterys of Taiwan's frigates and Clearstream, of the Crédit Lyonnais and the Compagnie Générale des Eaux, of Elf-Aquitaine and EADS, of Executive Life and Pechiney American-Can, of the markets of the Ile-de-France region, of the HLM [38] of Paris,

of the MNEF and Urba-Gracco.

Against all those who depreciate their Justice system by dint of Outreau Affairs [39], of illegal phone tapings, of « waste sorting » to select the « good » immigrants and the friend countries, of « shameful charter flights » [40].

Against all those who depreciate their nationals by dint of « bougnoule » and « ratonnades », « racaille » and « Kärcher » [41].

Against this « grassroots France » [42] who rules the country, this France of mean manoeuvres and scabrous schemes, of « lawless zones » [43] and favours, of appointments by connections and tied accommodations.

Against this France who refuses even a slight raise of the legal minimum salary (« SMIC »), who « crystallizes » [44] the pensions of the « basanés » among the French army's veterans, while raising the well-to-do ministers' wages by 70 percent and feeding failed managers with stock-options and golden parachutes (like Vinci's and Carrefour's former CEOs).

Against this France who recycles the corrupt into the honourable, promoting to a seat in the French Council of State, as a reward for having helpfully diverted the judiciary's attention, such Minister of Justice who will go down in history as the most famous helicopters [what does 'helicopters' mean here?] embezzler of all international judicial annals.

In a word, against this contemptive and irresponsible attitude - the unique « theory of the scapegoated minion à la française » [45] - which exonerates the one in charge from every kind of responsibility, through some anti-democratic privilege grounded in a proto-fascist ideology pertaining to a facet of French culture.

And against the growing proximity between politics and crime, a symptom of present-day France's state, particularly well illustrated by Chirac's presidency, whose 12-year long double term (1995-2000) has been recurrently stained by politico-financial scandals dealing with unlawful money, without the French head of state being nonetheless discredited. Indeed, the paragon of the « social fracture », of a « modest state » and of a « century of ethics » was re-elected in 2002, despite the authoritarian and mercenary drifts of his reign.

We are precisely talking about Jacques Chirac, and not his predecessor François Mitterrand : according to Jean Montaldo, a disillusioned former supporter of Chirac and an expert in matters of political robbery, « from Mitterrand to Chirac, we drifted from the amateurish stage to the industrial one » as regards corruption. [46]

It is no vote-catching or partisan attempt saying that we need to denounce vigorously present-day drifts and abuses, so as to prevent any painful reminiscence in the future, for today's history is tomorrow's memory.

« The French Republic's police record » shows the following edifying figure : between 1990 and 2000, 900 (yes, nine hundred) elected officials have been indicted on charges of financial criminality or offences against properties or individuals, which includes sexual crimes. There is no reason to think the present decade will not rank as high in the charts.

Though - and thus -, « zero tolerance » towards white-collar criminality should be a categorical imperative for the republican order, in accordance with the principle of the

exemplarity of state.

France's capitulation to Germany in Sedan in 1870 gave birth to the French Third Republic. The capitulation to Hitler in Montoire [47] in 1940 gave birth to the Fourth Republic (1946), the defeats in Dien bien Phu (1954) and in Algeria (1955) gave birth to the Fifth Republic (1958), and to the corresponding series of great institutions. Sedan led to the creation of « Sciences Po » (the Institute for Political Studies in Paris), and Montoire to the foundation of the ENA (Ecole Nationale d'Administration, i.e the National School of Administration) in 1945. The country of Grandes Ecoles and competitive exams - the breeding-ground for elites, scholars and pencil pushers [48] - does not stand looking back over its own past. It only conceives of looking into its future. Neither retrospection, nor introspection, only prospects forecasting. Running blindly forward - a « fuite en avant » ?

The debate over the contribution of « dark-skinned peoples » to liberating the French soil and to their host country's influence does in no way pertain to any guilt-provoking hypermnesia, but to social prophylaxis against colonial damage, the concealment of which could partly explain the recurrent drifts of France : and if the royal impunity enjoyed by the politico-administrative class involved in financial scandals at the end of the 20th century had something to do with the amnesia over the « bureaucratic crimes » in 1940-1944 ? And the collapse of today's « ENarchy » with the rout of the bureaucratic elite in 1940 ? Are these mere speculative hypotheses ?

This drift was sanctioned upon the first French national vote of the 21st century. The presidential election of 2002, which opposed a « super-fascist » and a « super-liar », as the hallowed expression of that time had it, was « one of the hugest democratic blunders in France's modern history », according to the Indo-British writer Salman Rushdie. A stunning eye-opener for both the French and the whole world, it shed a crude light on the moral decay of a readily moralizing country. It also discredited its deliberately obsequious and arrogant elite, who - although it monopolized the power since the end of WWII - proved incapable of carrying on the post-industrial, post-colonial, and psychological transformations of the society - respectively within the scopes of the economy, of the sociological structuring, and of the national public opinion. This is a hint at the flagrant failure of France's integration policy towards its Muslim-African constituents.

And yet, five centuries of intensive colonization throughout the world should have made the presence of « basanés » on the French soil commonplace, as well as thirteen centuries of uninterrupted presence via five migratory waves should have granted Islam the status of genuinely local religion in France, where its compatibility with the Republic has been all the same continuously debated for half a century, as if to ward the idea off that this ethnic and cultural identity group - the first of such significance whose origins do not pertain to the Eurocentric and Judeo-Christian sphere - will inevitably be agglomerated to the peoples of France.

The French Muslim community is the most numerous in Europe, and is also, proportionally to its country's area and population, the most important in the western world. France is home to more Muslims than each of no less than eight countries belonging to the Arab League (Lebanon, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Palestine, Comoros and Djibouti). Thus, France would be entitled to apply for membership to the Islamic Conference Organisation, or at least for an observer's seat in this organisation, the pan-Islamic political forum gathering 57 states from different continents.

Integration entails the conjunction of mutual contributions, and not the removal of the basic identity features. Of course, the « third generation French » of immigrant origin are very sensitive to their international environment, as it was proved by the sudden bursts of denominational violence linked to the Palestinian intifada, the Gulf war (1990-1991), the war in Afghanistan (2001-2002), the second war in Iraq, or the war in Lebanon (2006). But even so they undeniably remain the bearers of intercultural dynamics, because of their origins, their cultural traits and their religious beliefs.

As socio-cultural mediators, the « bougnoules » of the old days - today's « sauvageons » [49] - are now empowered to become true advocates of and vehicles for the cultural influence of France (an influence which is the fundamental idea underlying the French concept of « Francophonie » and the eponymic official organization of the French-speaking countries, TN), to become the vanguard and avant-garde of the « cultural Arabo-Francophonie » [50] that France strives to set up so as to oppose the Anglo-American hegemony and to foster the dialogue among civilizations by healing the wounds of its own colonial past.

As the third millenium begins, the « homeland of short memory » is evidently hindered by a cultural and psychological block, which is brought to light by the lack of social fluidity. Reflecting a serious identity crisis, this block is paradoxically in contradiction with the French population's multi-ethnic configuration, with the cultural contribution brought by immigration, with the demographical needs of France, and finally with France's ambition to promote the « Francophonie » as the federating axis of a multicultural constellation intended to counterbalance the Anglo-American worldwide hegemony, which is the condition of France's future international influence.

## Conclusion

Five years after the (dis)gust of Lepenist right-wind within the French presidential election of 2002, as France is now getting ready to elect a new president in May 2007, it seemed salutary to me to highlight France's incoherences, deciphering the official political discourse, and taking the migratory fact debate beyond the mere Left-Right division by putting the French collective imagination to the test of historical facts and of the national everyday reality. In so doing, I intended to bring a contribution to France's post-colonial transformation.

The French exception, so highly praised and claimed in the name of France's greatness, is a plain antonym to a culture of impunity and amnesia raised to the status of a government dogma, which is thus incompatible with the deontology of command and with the imperative of exemplarity.

So I want to repeat my thanks to Bruno Gollnisch, to Philippe Val, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Philippe Douste-Blazy - who, as the representative of the city of Toulouse, initiated the controversial bill about the « positive role » of colonization -, and naturally to Nicolas Sarkozy, for their respective and invaluable contributions to putting my academic knowledge in order. Indeed, the exercise made me aware of the « positive role » of colonization... of the Metropole by its Colonies, and of the colonizers-oppressors by the colonized.

## René Naba, October 2006

Author's (AN) and translator's (TN) notes :

[1] The National front (« Front national ») is the most important Extreme-Right party in France. (TN)

[2] The Battle of Austerlitz (December 2nd, 1805), also known as the Battle of the Three Emperors, took place in Moravia - an eastern region of the present-day Czech Republic. It was one of Napoleon's greatest victories, decisively defeating a Russo-Austrian army under Czar Alexander I. It was the most prominent land battle of the War of the Third Coalition, which opposed the Austrian Empire, the Russian Empire and the United Kingdom to Napoleon's recently formed French Empire. (TN)

[3] The Battle of Valmy (September 20th, 1792) - also referred to as the Cannonade of Valmy - was fought in northeast France during the French Revolutionary Wars, and became the first victory of the French revolutionary troops. On September 21st - the day after - the French monarchy was abolished and the French First Republic proclaimed. (TN)

[4] The Battle of Arcole (November 15th - 17th, 1796) - also referred to as the Battle of the Bridge of Arcole - took place in Italy, and opposed Napoleon's French army to the Austrian army, which was defeated. (TN)

[5] The Battle of Waterloo (June 18th, 1815) was Napoleon's last battle, and was fought in present-day Belgium. Napoleon was defeated by the Seventh Coalition forces, involving mainly the United Kingdom, Prussia, Austria and Russia. His defeat led to his final overthrow, and to the restoration of King Louis XVIII. (TN)

[6] The Battle of Sedan (September 1st, 1870) was fought in northeast France during the Franco-Prussian war. The French army, under Marshal MacMahon's command, attempted to relieve the siege of Metz, but the attempt only resulted in Emperor Napoleon III being captured and his army defeated. This was the most decisive battle of the Franco-Prussian war. (TN)

[7] The Fachoda incident was a crisis which almost led to war between the United Kingdom and France. At the very end of the nineteenth century, the two countries were striving for colonial influence in Africa. A small French force had reached Fachoda - in the south of present-day Sudan - on the White Nile (one of the two main tributaries of the Nile), and occupied the small fort there. The Anglo-Egyptian larger forces led by Lord Kitchener steamed up to the Nile, and on November 4th, 1898, the French government withdrew his forces. In the aftermath, a three-month negotiation was conducted by the British Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, and the French ambassador in London, Mr Paul Cambon. It resulted in the Anglo-French Declaration of March 21st, 1899. (TN)

[8] The Battle of Verdun (February 21st - December 19th, 1916) was fought around the city of Verdun-sur-Meuse in northeast France. It opposed the German and French armies, the latter finally defeating the former. This battle - one of the most important of WWI - was a huge massacre, with more than 250,000 dead. It still symbolizes the horror of WWI. (TN)



[9] This substantive stems from a French adjective (« basané », basically meaning « dark-skinned », « swarthy ») which is nowadays pejoratively connoted, for it has been turned into an expression, approximatively meaning « the Darkies », which is used in France to label – and libel – people with a darker complexion than « Whites », mainly Arabs (but more largely Blacks, Indians, etc.). (TN)

[10] The Battle of Monte Cassino – also known as the Battle for Rome – was actually a deadly series of four battles fought in Italy from January 17th to May 18th, 1943. The Germans had set up several lines of fortifications south of Rome, collectively referred to as the Winter Line, of which the main part (the Gustav Line) barred Italy from the Tyrrhenian Sea in the west to the Adriatic Sea in the east. The main route north to Rome crossed the center of this line, in the Apennine Mountains, where the historic abbey of Monte Cassino was founded in 524 A.D. by Saint Benedict, dominating the valley where the Allies reaching for Rome had to cross the river Liri. The monastery was completely destroyed by American bombings on February 15th, and Monte Cassino finally fell on May 18th. This was a major breakthrough, but the Allies freed Rome only on June 4th, 1944. (TN)

[11] The Battle of Abukir referred to by the author actually can be distinguished in two parts, hence its « controversial » aspect.

First, the Battle of Abukir Bay (August 1st – 2nd, 1798), also known as the Battle of the Nile, was an important naval battle of the French Revolutionary Wars, opposing French and British fleets.

General Napoleon Bonaparte, who had not been elected First Consul yet, intended to threaten the British position in India via the conquest of Egypt. Three weeks after Napoleon landed in Egypt, a British 14-ship fleet under Rear-Admiral Horatio Nelson defeated and destroyed the French 15-ship fleet, leaving the French expeditionary force unsupplied. Second, although his fleet had been destroyed, Napoleon got his final victory in Africa in the Battle of Abukir (July 25th, 1799), decisively defeating the Turkish army – disembarked in Egypt from the British fleet. (TN)

[12] The Battle of Trafalgar (October 21st, 1805, west of Cape Trafalgar in south-west Spain) was the most significant naval battle of the Napoleonic Wars – a French defeat -, and part of the War of the Third Coalition (see note [2]). A British 27-ship fleet under Admiral Horatio Nelson destroyed 22 ships of a combined French and Spanish 33-ship fleet, while losing none. Nelson died late in the battle, but he had already ensured the UK's naval supremacy. (TN)

[13] After the Nazis invaded the until then unoccupied « Free Zone » of southern France on November 11th, 1942, the French warfleet – anchored in Toulon – scuttled itself on November 27th, so as to avoid being taken by the Germans as well as being used by the Allies : Admiral Jean de Laborde, who gave the order, did not try to flee with the fleet and reach North-Africa, where the Allies had landed. It can hardly be considered an act of true resistance against the Nazis, it was rather a refusal to choose. (TN)

[14] The exact definitions given in French by this dictionary are :

« COLONISATION. 1: Le fait de peupler de colons, de transformer en colonie. La colonisation de l'Amérique, puis de l'Afrique, par l'Europe. 2 : Mise en valeur, exploitation des pays devenus colonies.

COLONISER. 1: Peupler de colons. 2: Faire de (un pays) une colonie. Coloniser un pays pour le mettre en valeur, en exploiter les richesses. »

The controversy rose because the expression « mise en valeur » – « enhance the value of » the colonized country bears a positive meaning. Thus the definition has been perceived as highlighting the positive side-effects of a hugely negative process. (TN)

[15] Léon Blum claimed that he « loved » his country « too much to disavow the spread of French culture and civilization ». In the newspaper « Le Populaire », dated July 17th, 1925, he wrote : « We recognize that the superior races have the right, and even the duty, to raise to their own cultural level the other races who failed to reach it by themselves ». Alexis de Tocqueville legitimated the butcheries, for he considered « seizing unarmed men, women and children as one of those regrettable necessities to which one is submitted, who wants to go to war against the Arabs ». For his part, in his speech to the Palais-Bourbon (the French national assembly) on July 29th, 1895, Jules Ferry contended that « there is a right that the superior races have because there is a duty for them. They have the duty to civilize the inferior races ».

See Olivier Le Cour-Grandmaison, « Quand Tocqueville légitimait les boucheries » and Pascal Blanchard, Sandrine Lemaire and Nicolas Bancel, « Une histoire coloniale refoulée », both in « Le Monde Diplomatique », June 2001 (Within the global report « Les impasses du débat sur la torture en Algérie »). (AN)

[16] Rudyard Kipling (1865 – 1936) published “The White Man’s Burden” in 1899, an appeal to the United States to assume the task of developing the Philippines, recently won in the Spanish-American War. (TN)

[17] The author coined this expression out of the names of Charles Darwin (« On the origin of species by means of natural selection ») and Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau (1816 – 1882), a French aristocrat, novelist and man of letters who became famous for advocating White Supremacy and developing the racialist theory of the Aryan master race in his book « An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races » (1853-1855). (TN)

[18] From 1877 to 1912, about thirty ethnological spectacles took place in the Acclimatation Garden of Paris. Some were also set up upon the Universal Exhibitions of 1878 and 1889 – within the latter, the showstoppers were the inauguration of the Eiffel Tower, and a « niggers’ village » involving 400 figurants. Then followed an exhibition in Lyon (1894), the two colonial exhibitions in Marseille (1906 and 1922), and the great exhibitions in Paris in 1900 (including a Madagascan Diorama, which attracted some fifty million visitors) and in 1931 (the curator of which was no one else than the old Marshal Lyautey, who had served in Algeria, Indochina, Madagascar and Morocco...).

See « Zoos humains, de la Vénus Hottentote aux Reality Shows », La Découverte Ed., March 2002, under the collective coordination of Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, Gilles Boetsch, Eric Deroo and Sandrine Lemaire. See also Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel and Sandrine Lemaire, « Le spectacle ordinaire des zoos humains » and « 1931 – Tous à l’Expo », both in « Manière de Voir » n°58, July-August 2001. [See also Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard and Sandrine Lemaire, « Ces zoos humains de la République coloniale », August 2000, <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2000/08/BANCEL/14145.html>, TN]. (AN)

[19] On November 21st, 1944, a battalion of 1280 Senegalese infantrymen disembarked in

Dakar, and was gathered nearby in the camp of Thiaroye. These veterans began to protest because their pays in arrears still remained unpaid. Further, huge discriminations were obvious between North-African and metropolitan French soldiers as regards the payments. Bitter and disillusioned, they mutinied and briefly confined a French general who promised they would be paid as soon as he would be freed. Instead, the French army slaughtered them in the night of December 1st - they were in a daze (for they were asleep when the massacre began) and disarmed. The number of casualties apparently remains unknown, but was most probably huge. The military censorship was able to hush the slaughter up, since it had occurred in wartime (WWII was not finished yet). (TN)

[20] At least 100,000 Madagascans (according to the statements in January 1949 of Pierre de Chevigné, the French High Commissioner of Madagascar) were killed by the French colonial army's repression of the national revolt that began in March-April 1947. The army (up to 30,000 soldiers) used the terrorist methods that later prevailed in Algeria. (TN)

[21] Both words are racist terms. « Raton » basically means « little rat » (but this word is not used in present-day French, except in the French expression « raton laveur » meaning « racoon »). Though the dictionary « Grand Usuel Larousse » states that the word « bicot » derives from the slangy « Arbecot », itself derived from « Arabe », one may note that « bicot » is also a colloquial word designating a kid (a young goat). (TN)

[22] See « Dictionnaire Le Petit Robert », edition of 1996. (AN)

[23] I coined this translation from the hallowed French concept of « délit de faciès » - literally « facies offence ». A « facies offender » (for whom there is no such terse equivalent in French) designates a person being considered an offender because of his / her mere physical appearance (usually the complexion, or the distinctive « ethnical » features of the face, hence the reference to the facies). It is of course a witty designation for what is basically a racist police behaviour. (TN)

[24] In this article, « clannish » is the approximative translation for the French adjective « communautariste » which refers to a society whose organization tends to consider the affiliation to a specific community (in the usual contexts, the main criterions are religion, foreign origin, ...) as important as (or more than) for instance the affiliation to the French nation or the « European citizenship ». (TN)

[25] See « Du Boughnole au sauvageon, voyage dans l'imaginaire français », René Naba, L'Harmattan Ed., 2002. (AN)

[26] Bizerte is a city on the Mediterranean coast of Tunisia. Due to its strategical status of sole French (and later NATO) base outside of Algeria on the southern coast of the Mediterranean (near the Sicilian Straits), France had transformed the Lake of Bizerte into a military harbour, and dug a canal to link it to the sea. Thus, despite Tunisia having become independent in 1956, France wanted to keep control over its military base. Seeking for more diplomatic relationships and support in the Arab world, President Habib Bourguiba wanted to oust France completely. On July 19th, 1961, three Tunisian battalions encircled the French base, but President De Gaulle refused to give up, and the French army imposed a maritime blockade, bombed oil stocks and crushed the Tunisian troops. France only agreed to leave the base on October 15th, 1963, once the Evian Agreements (March 18th, 1962) had put an end to the war in Algeria - these agreements granted France a base in Meirs El Kebir (Algeria) for fifteen years, so Bizerte was not that useful anymore. (TN)

[27] The tersest form of the French expression still remains in the colloquial language : « faire suer le burnous » (literally, « to make the burnoose sweat »). Depending on the context, it may be perceived as racist or not. (TN)

[28] « Harki » - from the Arabic word « harka » meaning « military expedition or operation » (according to the « Trésor de la langue française ») - designates an Algerian who fought for the French during the Franco-Algerian war. (TN)

[29] See « La République Xénophobe, 1917-1939, de la machine d'Etat au " crime de bureau ", les révélations des archives », Jean-Pierre Deschodt and François Huguenin, JC Lattes Ed., September 2001. (AN)

[30] In French, le « Bureau de surveillance et de protection des indigènes nord-africains chargé de la répression des crimes et des délits ». (TN)

[31] A coal mining company. (TN)

[32] See « Une théorie raciale des valeurs ? Démobilisation des travailleurs immigrés et mobilisation des stéréotypes en France à la fin de la Grande Guerre », Mary Lewis, in « L'invention des populations », under the coordination of Hervé Le Bras, Odile Jacob Ed. (AN)

[33] Jean-François Paul de Gondi (1613-1679), best known as the Cardinal of Retz, was a French statesman, memorialist and intriguer, involved in the Fronde (revolt of the French aristocrats against Louis XIV, then an infant). He is notably remembered for his memoirs (first published in 1717). (TN)

[34] This district matches the present-day Hatay province of Turkey. (TN)

[35] Which only later became the Ministry of Defence (first in 1969, and then again in 1974, its name remains unchanged since then). (TN)

[36] This is a transparent allusion to the scandal of President Chirac and his wife's « frais de bouche » - i.e « personal » kitchen expenses - while Chirac was the mayor of Paris. This was recently subject to a criminal investigation, that finally (and unsurprisingly...) got nowhere. (TN)

[37] It would be irksome for both the reader and the translator to give explanations for the abundant allusive references constitutive of this paragraph and the next ones. It would take pages, so let us only say that the author refers to different headline scandals, in most of which politicians were involved. (TN)

[38] « HLM » is a French acronym meaning « Habitations à loyer modéré » - low rent, state-owned housing. (TN)

[39] The Outreau Affair is a recent gross and tragic miscarriage of justice. It concerned an alleged network of pedophiles. 18 people charged with pedophilia and incest were held on remand for between one and three years. Most of them were finally found innocent (whether in the first trial or in appeal) and acquitted, but this has been a huge judiciary scandal, and the reform of the French judicial system has become a parliamentary and headline topic in the immediate aftermath. (TN)

[40] Literal translation of the French expression « les charters de la honte » which

designates the charter flights forcedly bringing immigrants back to « their » country. (TN)

[41] « Racaille » is a slangy word approximatively meaning « rabble ». It was used by Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy in October 2005, a few days after he said he wanted to « clean the suburb with a Kärcher ». These words are one of the reasons why Sarkozy has been (rightly) accused of having contributed to spark the civil unrest and riots of November 2005. (TN)

[42] In French, « la France d'en bas », an expression coined by the former Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin while in office, to designate the lower classes of the French society. (TN)

[43] The French hallowed expression is « zone de non-droit », which can also be translated into « no-law zone ». (TN)

[44] It is the term used by the French Council of State. (TN)

[45] In French, « théorie du fusible à la française ». (TN)

[46] See « Chirac et les quarante menteurs » and « Mitterrand et les quarante voleurs », Albin Michel Ed. (AN)

[47] Actually, the armistice itself was signed in Rethondes on June 22nd , 1940, symbolically in the same place and in the same railcar than the armistice of November 11th, 1918. However, it is the meeting of Pétain with Hitler in Montoire on October 24th, 1940, which sanctioned France's collaboration with the Nazis. While the armistice was merely a suspension of hostilities, the meeting in Montoire was an actual capitulation to Hitler, since Pétain approved the collaboration with the Nazi regime, although Germany had broken its promises by annexing the region of Alsace-Lorraine in August 1940. Thus, this meeting is Pétain's very Walk to Canossa... [the author refers to Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV humiliating himself to have the Pope Gregory VII lift his excommunication, in 1077, TN]. (AN)

[48] In 2000, there were 5 million civil servants in France, the most important numbers in the European Union, amounting to twenty percent of the French working population. (AN)

[49] Basically meaning « wild child », the French word « sauvageon » is nowadays mostly understood approximatively like « savage ». Though noticeably milder, « sauvageon » also contains the notion of « uncivilized ». The present-day understanding of the word still includes the connotation of « young » : one would usually not designate a mature adult offender – even if Muslim-Arab... – as a « sauvageon ». (TN)

[50] The expression was coined in 1995-1996 by Stellio Farangis, former Secretary General of the High Council of the « Francophonie ». (AN)

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