

Memorials to French Colonial Soldiers from the Great War  
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On 25 June 2006, at Verdun and on the ninetieth anniversary of the battle that took place there, President Jacques Chirac unveiled a memorial to Muslim soldiers who fought in the French armies during the First World War. Paying tribute to the French soldiers who died at Verdun – and also acknowledging the German losses – Chirac stated: 'Toutes les provinces de France sont à Verdun. Toutes les origines, aussi. 70.000 combattants de l'ex-Empire français sont morts pour la France entre 1914 et 1918. Il y eut dans cette guerre, sous notre drapeau, des fantassins marocains, des tirailleurs sénégalais, algériens et tunisiens, des soldats de Madagascar, mais aussi d'Indochine, d'Asie ou d'Océanie'. Chirac did not dwell on the service of the colonial soldiers, though the only two whom he cited by name, Bessi Samaké and Abdou Assouman, were Africans who distinguished themselves in the taking of the Douaumont fort, but the event was important both for the anciens combattants and their families and communities, and for a French public that has often known or thought little about the military contributions of those whom it colonised.<sup>1</sup> With the building of a monument to the Muslim soldiers, an ambulatory surrounding a kouba, according to *Le Monde*, the inauguration also gave Verdun 'le statut de haut lieu de la mémoire musulmane de France'.<sup>2</sup> In moving terms, the rector of the Paris mosque, Dalil Boubakeur, added of the battlefields where many Muslim soldiers had died, *morts pour la France*, 'C'est là que l'Islam de France est né. Il a pris racine dans les plaines labourées de Verdun, Douaumont, Fleury où les tirailleurs algériens, tunisiens, sénégalais et les tabors marocains ont défendu dans les tourments la France. Aujourd'hui, alors que les jeunes Français se posent des questions sur leur identité, il est important de dire que leurs parents ont participé à la défense du pays'.<sup>3</sup>

The commemoration of the overseas soldiers thus joined an episode in the military and colonial history of France with recognition of the role of Muslims in contemporary French society. While the Verdun ceremony called attention to the soldiers from the colonies who served in the Great War, Rachid Bouchareb's film *Indigènes* – greeted with enormous publicity, acclaim both from the critics and audiences, and considerable coverage in the press in 2006 – focussed attention on soldiers who fought in 1940 and in the Liberation of France in the Second World War. On the screen and in the many articles devoted to the movie and the colonial soldiers it portrayed, the Maghrebins and black Africans who had served under the French flag were more in evidence than ever before.<sup>4</sup>

The role of the colonial soldiers – especially 'native' men in arms – during the world wars had previously attracted attention in only intermittent fashion, despite a small body of historical literature and memoirs that recounts their service, and a landmark exhibition at the Historial de la Grande Guerre on soldiers in the 1914-1918 war held in 1996.<sup>5</sup> Several recent publications sparked by *Indigènes*, and a masterly survey of *Les Colonies dans la Grande Guerre* by Jacques Frémeaux, however, have now begun to rectify

<sup>1</sup> 'Allocution du Président de la République à l'occasion du 90ème anniversaire de la bataille de Verdun', website of the Présidence de la République ([www.elysee.fr](http://www.elysee.fr)).

<sup>2</sup> *Le Monde*, 23 June 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Quote in *Le Monde*, 25 June 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Coincidentally, a telefilm entitled *Harkis* simultaneously reminded the French public of the service of North African soldiers fighting on the French side in the Franco-Algerian War, a group now commemorated in the *journée nationale des harkis* instituted by President Chirac.

<sup>5</sup> *Mémoires d'outre-mer. Les colonies et la Première Guerre mondiale* (Historial de la Grande Guerre, Péronne, 1996).

the lapse of memory in French recollections of colonial soldiers.<sup>6</sup> Readers and the public are increasingly aware of the major role they played in the First World War, and of the place of the colonies – as battlegrounds, sources of men and matériel for the war effort, and stakes contested by the belligerent powers; as well, thousands of men (especially from Indochina) were imported into France to work in industry as part of the war effort.<sup>7</sup> In cities where they were garrisoned, as well as on the front lines, the ‘natives’ brought the colonies to the view of the French in ways different from the stereotypes of traditional colonialist propaganda, as symbolised by the metamorphosis of the African on the famous Banania advertising. Their presence also changed the French landscape – a Buddhist pagoda, still used by the faithful today, was constructed in 1917 for the Indochinese near Camp Gallieni in Fréjus. In 1928, Captain Abdel Kader Mademba, the highest-ranking African soldier in the French army during the Great War, spearheaded the building of a mosque in the style of the Djenné mosque of western Africa for a site not far from the headquarters of the *Troupes coloniales* (now the *Troupes de la Marine*), also in Fréjus. The sacrifices of Muslim soldiers inspired the building of Paris’ mosque, where the laying of the cornerstone (by Marshal Lyautey) in 1922 and the inauguration provided opportunities to hail the service and sacrifice of France’s Muslim subjects.<sup>8</sup>

The erection of new *lieux de mémoire*, such as the Verdun memorial, has also given belated recognition to those from afar who fought and died for France. Commemoration has not been restricted to France, but has also taken place in the former colonies, notably with the rehabilitation of the statue of ‘Demba and Dupont’, the French and Senegalese soldiers, in Dakar.<sup>9</sup> In colonial days, monuments aux morts were almost as omnipresent in France’s overseas possessions as they were in the metropole, running the gamut from simple plaques and stelae to grandiose representations of colonial sacrifice and of amity between the French and the ‘natives’, monuments drawing attention to what were then considered the indefectible bonds that tied France to the *outré-mer*. In some places, decolonisation left them intact – such as in Pondichéry, where the war memorial remains testimony to now distended links between the *mère-patrie* and the outposts of *la plus grande France*.<sup>10</sup>

In other places, war memorials became unwelcome signs of colonial overlordship. Colonial-era monuments were sometimes shifted to less prominent positions than the major squares or axes in which they were erected, or they simply disappeared from view. In Vietnam, they were largely removed, although one in Hue still stands. Built in the syncretic form popular in the inter-war years, it combines the theme of a stela with the traditional screen that fronts many Vietnamese temples. On the obverse of the screen are engraved the names of French settlers in Vietnam *morts pour la patrie*, while the names of the Indochinese are carved on the reverse. The screen also

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<sup>6</sup> Jacques Frémeaux, *Les Colonies dans la Grande Guerre. Combats et épreuves des peuples d’Outre-Mer* (14-18 Editions, Paris, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> See Robert Aldrich and Chris Hilliard, ‘The British and French Colonies and the Great War’, in John Horne (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Great War* (Blackwell, Oxford, forthcoming).

<sup>8</sup> On these and other commemorations of colonialism, see Robert Aldrich, *Vestiges of the Colonial Empire in France: Monuments, Museums and Colonial Memories* (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2005; a French translation will be published by the Société Française d’Histoire d’Outre-Mer).

<sup>9</sup> Ruth Ginio, ‘African Colonial Soldiers between Memory and Forgetfulness: The Case of Post-Colonial Senegal’, *Outre-Mers*, dossier on ‘Sites et monuments de mémoire’ edited by Robert Aldrich, No. 350-351, 1er semestre 2006, pp. 141-156.

<sup>10</sup> See William F.S. Miles, *Imperial Burdens: Countercolonialism in Former French India* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, 1995) – the retention of French citizenship by thousands of Indians after the retrocession of the *comptoirs français de l’Inde* to India (and their descendants) has created both a specific link with France and a sense of solidarity among French Indians that is manifested in annual remembrance ceremonies in Pondichéry.

bears in Vietnamese the words 'Nothing is more precious than independence and liberty', no doubt a post-colonial amendment to the site.<sup>11</sup> In Algiers, Paul Landowski's grand sculpture of two horsemen, one métropolitain and one Algerian, surrounded a winged Victory shouldering the bier of a dead soldier; after 1962, the monument was hidden behind cement covering (although a model remains in a museum in Boulogne-Billancourt).<sup>12</sup> The fate of the memorials after bloody wars of decolonisation in Indochina and Algeria is perhaps not surprising, though such iconoclasm can also be interpreted as historical revisionism in an effort to erase public recognition of part of the experience of the colonised.

Many of the First World War monuments in North Africa (along with other colonial statuary), however, were 'repatriated' to France after 1962, arguably the most systematic 'migration' of commemorative monuments ever known, there to be re-erected in various communes. At great expense to the French Navy, which transported the stelae, sculptures, plaques and other memorabilia, these monuments, which Alain Amato has termed 'monuments en exil', were moved across the Mediterranean and offered to towns that wished to give a home to them. Some went to the headquarters of military units whose soldiers they commemorated or to other military institutions. The 1931 monuments aux morts from the Légion Etrangère headquarters in Sidi-bel-Abbès, a giant globe marked with the iconic battle of Camerone, surrounded by statues of Légionnaires from various epochs, was re-erected at the Légion's metropolitan base in Aubagne; the monument from the Ecole Militaire in Cherchell was placed in the Ecole d'Infanterie in Montpellier. A marble soldier from Hammam-Bou-Hadjar was transported to the aeronaval base in Fréjus. Landowski's massive monument to wartime Franco-Moroccan fraternity, a French poilu and a Moroccan spahi mounted on horseback and shaking hands, unveiled by Marshal Lyautey in Casablanca in 1924, was scheduled to be demolished after Moroccan independence. But 'Le Burnous', an association of former North African soldiers, petitioned the Navy to bring the monument back to France, where it was placed in Senlis, the town that had garrisoned the spahis. Other monuments ended up at institutions that had similar functions to those where they stood in Algeria: the one from the Institut Agricole of Maison-Carrée was placed in the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Agronomie in Grignon (Yvelines). Sister-cities took monuments from the places with which they were paired in *Algérie française*. A set of plaques from Bougie bearing the names of three hundred fallen soldiers was delivered to Bougie's sister-city, Bordeaux, and ceremoniously unveiled in 1968 by Jacques Chaban-Delmas, mayor of Bordeaux, and Jacques Augarde, the last French mayor of Bougie. In the same year, a large statuary group of three sculptures, designed by Albert Pommier to commemorate the 12,500 soldiers from the Oran département who died for France, was re-erected in Oran's sister city of Lyon. Communes that felt a link with the old French outposts, sometimes because of the presence of pieds-noirs, especially in the Midi, requested and received monuments for their municipalities. For instance, Joseph Ebstein's marble Victory and two soldiers from Tlemcen ended up in Saint-Aygulf (Var), Camille Alaphilippe's huge bronze from Philippeville now stands in a Toulouse cemetery, and Maurice Favre's sculpture of two 'native' soldiers from Mostaganem was relocated to Montpellier. A monument aux morts from Mascara was moved to Saint-Raphaël (Var) and, in 1971, rededicated to all of the French in the outre-mer who died for the patrie. In some cases, only elements of monuments, rather than entire structures, were 'repatriated' and

<sup>11</sup> Arnauld Le Brusq, *Vietnam. À Travers l'architecture coloniale* (Patrimoines et Médias / Éditions de l'Amateur, Paris, 1999), pp. 125-126.

<sup>12</sup> Philippe Rivet *et al.*, *Monuments de mémoire. Le Monument aux morts de la Première Guerre mondiale* (Mission Permanente aux Commémorations et à l'Information Historique, Paris, 1991), p. 222.

incorporated into metropolitan monuments – a statue of a soldier from Mondovi for the memorial in Eragny-sur-Oise (Val-d'Oise), and a stela from Philippeville commemorating the victims of shelling by a German ship in 1914 for a monument in Versailles.<sup>13</sup>

These 'repatriated' monuments brought to France were preserved from possible neglect, vandalism or destruction in independent Algeria. The efforts of public authorities and private citizens to have them relocated testify to the value placed on these works and, as well, to the enduring importance attached to commemoration of First World War soldiers. In the metropole, the monuments of the Great War also became monuments to the 'lost' homelands of Frenchmen overseas, the struggles to preserve Algeria and the colonies as part of France, and to an empire that was now only a memory. Sometimes the war memorials, and other statues and monuments brought back from North Africa, served as rallying points for nostalgic or disaffected *piets-noirs*, such as the *anciens* of Mascara who gather in Saint-Raphaël. In the *départements et territoires d'outre-mer*, meanwhile, ceremonies held at war memorials, such as wreath-layings at the monuments aux morts in Nouméa, in the 1980s, stressed the desire of the loyalists for New Caledonia to remain an integral part of the French Republic.<sup>14</sup>

As Annette Becker has shown, overseas monuments, including those in the present-day DOM-TOM, often replicated those in mainland France – and indeed, stelae and statues were frequently ordered from French supply-houses.<sup>15</sup> Although ordering of catalogue models was a matter of convenience and cost, the similarity of styles reinforced the parallels between the colonies and the metropole. Motifs were generally the standard ones used for France: the list of those morts pour la patrie, images of the heroic soldier, the grieving woman, the allegorical Marianne or *coq gaulois* – in Pointe-à-Pitre, there is a veiled widow or mother, in Cayenne, a woman cradling an injured soldier. In some cases, however, more vernacular presentations appeared. In Iracoula, Guyane, a *poilu* brandishing a flag stands near a stilt house, a reminder of the linking of European battles and equatorial Frenchmen. In Le Lorrain, Martinique, a rather original version of a monument aux morts shows a white angel crowning a dapper black soldier with the laurel wreath of victory. A hybrid example is the monument aux morts in Tahiti, located near the Assemblée Territoriale and the High Commissioner's office in Papeete. A thousand soldiers from France's small territories in the island Pacific fought in the war (with 325 morts pour la France), the best known of whom among the Polynesians was Pouvanaa a Oopa who, in the 1950s, became the leader of the Polynesian nationalists.<sup>16</sup> A barefooted woman, wearing a garment that might be imagined to be a traditional Tahitian *pareo*, stands on a pedestal looking up at a cartouche of a helmeted soldier, surmounted by the inscription 'Les Etablissements Français de l'Océanie à leurs enfants morts pour la France 1914-1918' and a *coq gaulois*. Other plaques commemorate soldiers in the Second World War and Tahitians who served in Korea, Indochina, Madagascar and North Africa. Regular ceremonies continue to gather together Polynesians and Europeans at Tahiti's monument.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Alain Amato, *Monuments en exil* (Éditions de l'Atlantique, Paris, 1979).

<sup>14</sup> The hierarchy of colonial service was exemplified by the Nouméa monument, where the names of French *colons* were engraved on the obverse, while only the 'tribes' of Melanesians were inscribed on the reverse, a discrimination only recently rectified.

<sup>15</sup> Annette Becker, *Les Monuments aux morts. Mémoire de la Grande Guerre* (Errance, Paris, 1991).

<sup>16</sup> Pouvanaa, a member of the Assemblée Nationale, was (with Sékou Touré) the only major leader to call for a 'no' vote in the 1958 referendum concerning overseas territories. He was subsequently arrested on a charge – almost certainly invented – of planning an arson attack in Tahiti, and was exiled to France for a decade. On his return to Papeete, Pouvanaa was elected to the French Senate.

<sup>17</sup> Annette Becker has asked: 'Comment les indépendantistes militants n'en sont-ils pas venus à dégrader ces monuments, la France jusqu'au bout du coeur?' (Becker, *op. cit.*) Any such attacks would

Wherever they stood in the colonies, or still exist in the DOM-TOM, monuments aux morts were intended to record the service of both Frenchmen and 'natives' performing their duty to an imagined common fatherland. Yet war memorials, like other built sites, from government buildings to churches, also marked these colonial landscapes with the French presence, imprinting colonial rule on the very geography of colonised regions. What William Kidd calls an 'elision of difference' in the iconography and ceremonial of the monuments diminishes the ethnic and political difference between metropolitan and colonial soldiers, suggesting a great empire-wide campaign in which all participated equally, voluntarily and heroically.<sup>18</sup>

Eric Jennings, in examining two memorials, in Guadeloupe and in Madagascar, has shown the way in which colonialist ideology and monumental iconography combined. In Guadeloupe, from 1925 to 1944, monuments aux morts were erected in almost every town and village; the iconography of the monuments blended Republican and Catholic imagery, as well as both metropolitan and colonial allusions. According to Jennings: 'Commemoration of the Great War in Guadeloupe reflected and, indeed, played out fundamental ideological precepts, constructing Guadeloupean identities in relation to metropolitan ones'.<sup>19</sup> Commemoration, he continues, 'assumed a multitude of meaning: it was at once a banner brandished at France to remind the mother country of Guadeloupean devotion and, depending on one's stance, either a bargaining chip in the quest for greater equality, a tool for achieving full assimilation, or a shield with which to fend off [Louis] Vignon-inspired essentialists'.<sup>20</sup> In Madagascar, the building of a monument aux morts on the shores of Lac Anosy, where the Merina monarch had maintained an island chalet which was razed by the French, represented (in location and iconography) an appropriation and recycling of pre-colonial traditions. It formed part of a policy of urbanism undertaken by the French authorities in the inter-war period. Furthermore, it served to mark Antananarivo with a dramatic sign of the French imperial presence.<sup>21</sup>

The war monuments in the former colonies and present-day DOM-TOM thus recall the colonial soldiers, especially those who served in the Great War and subsequent wars. They pay welcome tribute to those who fought and died for France. However, such monuments are not only war memorials but also monuments to colonialism – the perceived success of the mission to inculcate patriotism in France's subjects, the union of black and white soldiers at the battlefield, the grateful recognition of services rendered, the joining together of colonies and metropole through the blood shed in battle, the sharing of the rewards of victory. The history behind such monumental narratives, in reality, is rather more complex. Many soldiers were recruited under duress, provoking

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no doubt seem an offense to those who served under the flag, whose service provided one of the key arguments for extension of French citizenship, greater political rights, autonomy and even independence. The inscription on a statue of Pouvanaa in Tahiti notes that he was a volunteer in the Bataillon du Pacifique. (See Robert Aldrich, 'Colonies et commémoration', in *Outre-Mers*, pp. 5-26.)

<sup>18</sup> William Kidd, 'Representation or Recuperation? The French Colonies and 1914-1918 War Memorials', in Tony Chafer and Amanda Sackur (eds), *Promoting the Colonial Idea: Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France* (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2002), pp. 184-194.

<sup>19</sup> Eric Jennings, 'Monuments to Frenchness? The Memory of the Great War and the Politics of Guadeloupe's Identity, 1914-1945', *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Fall 1998), pp. 561-592; quotation from p. 563.

<sup>20</sup> Vignon was a theorist of associationism, which, in contrast with assimilationism, promoted the maintenance of separation between the French and the various 'races' and cultures in the colonies; such ideas were thus both essentialist and racist, and Jennings ascribes to them much influence in the later Vichy regime. The quotation from Jennings is from *ibid.*, p. 565.

<sup>21</sup> Eric Jennings, 'Les multiples visages du monument aux morts du Lac Anosy, Antananarivo', in *Outre-mers, op cit.*, pp. 123-140.

anti-conscription rebellions from French West Africa to the South Pacific (including a major insurrection in New Caledonia in 1917). Even some administrators, such as Governor Von Vollenhoven (who himself died on the battlefield in the war), criticised the tactics of forced recruitment in Africa. The dislocation of indigenous economies and societies through the absence or death of men serving for France was considerable. Access to citizenship promised for heroic war service turned out to be extended only to a few returned soldiers who agreed to renounce their indigenous *statut civil* to become fully-fledged Frenchmen. Their experiences in France made many soldiers question the propaganda of colonialists and the inequalities that they faced at home, and the barracks and battlegrounds could help stimulate nascent anti-colonial nationalism rather than the hoped-for unswerving loyalty to France.

The role of the soldiers of greater France was seldom highlighted in monuments in the mother-country itself – an omission, whether by intention or not, of the debt that France owed to the more than 700,000 soldiers who had served under the Tricolour from 1914 to 1918. There were some, but relatively few, references to colonial soldiers and colonial battles in general war memorials. The dramatic war monument on the corniche in Marseille, inscribed ‘Aux Héros de l’Orient et des terres lointaines’, does list among other battles ones in Morocco, the Levant and Cameroon; one soldier portrayed on the side of the monument wears a tell-tale colonial fez. An inscription, now partly faded away, reinforces the contributions of the colonials: ‘Aux Fils de la plus grande France’. The Marseille monument, like many others at home and abroad, was updated with plaques in honour of the Second World War soldiers. One pays tribute to the soldiers in Indochina: ‘France-Indochine / 1624-1956 / Trois siècles de présence française ont scellé par le sang versé, un pacte solennel entre la France et les peuples de l’Union indochinoise’. The wording places the Franco-Indochinese war in the *longue durée* of colonial history, yet the phrasing about the French ‘presence’ carefully avoids mention of colonialism – though the ‘Union indochinoise’, created in 1887, was a purely colonial political entity. Another plaque, dedicated ‘A la mémoire des militaires et supplétifs de toutes confessions “Morts pour la France” en Afrique du Nord’, is again notable for careful wording that avoids mention of the Franco-Algerian conflict that, officially, was not a ‘war’ until the parliament recognised it as such in 1999. The language of the memorial, while acknowledging the war service of men from the colonies, thus tends to elide the fact of colonialism, and the grouping together of the wars in Indochina and North Africa with those of the world wars – though common enough in war memorials – inevitably joins the dead of very different military campaigns into the same pantheon of martyrs.

It is possible to find other material traces of First World War colonial soldiers in France, ranging from items in museum collections<sup>22</sup> to the graves of ordinary foot-soldiers. Ministerial instructions issued in December 1914 specified the proper burial for Muslim soldiers – a soldier’s body should be washed and wrapped in a white cotton shroud (rather than placed in a coffin), the *shehada* (the ritual affirmation of faith) should be recited at the interment, and the soldier’s grave should be marked by a stela facing Mecca. After the war, temporary graves scattered around battlefields were commonly grouped in military cemeteries – the one in Douaumont counts 592 Muslim graves (alongside 14,263 Christian graves). In the 1930s, cement stelae replaced provisional wooden markers, ornamented by the Muslim symbols of the star and crescent, with the traditional ‘Here lies...’ and the name, rank, unit and date of death of the soldier, alongside the words *morts pour la France*.

<sup>22</sup> There are, for example, items relating to First World War colonial soldiers in the Historial de la Grande Guerre in Péronne, the Musée de la Légion Etrangère in Aubagne and the Musée des Troupes de la Marine in Fréjus, as well as numerous regimental museums.

In 1917, the Souvenir Indochinois, modelled on the Souvenir Français set up after the Franco-Prussian War, was established to tend graves of soldiers from France's Asian empire. The gesture was considered particularly important because of Vietnamese beliefs in the necessity to care for ancestors' tombs and to carry out appropriate ceremonies in memory of the dead. 'Il n'est de pire destin pour un homme que de mourir sans avoir donné la vie au fils qui assurera à ses ascendants et à lui-même la pérennité du culte [des ancêtres]', said one publication of the Souvenir Indochinois.<sup>23</sup> At the end of the war, the director of the Service d'Architecture de l'Indochine designed four mausolea for the remains of Indochinese soldiers killed in France; containing 1061 tombs, they are located in Marseille, Bergerac, Aix-en-Provence and Montpellier, with a fifth (designed by a different architect) in Tarbes. A further 1180 Indochinese are interred in cemeteries with designated 'Indochinese' precincts. That in Toulouse has a commemorative statue of a 'Soldat Annamite victorieux' (by Charles Breton), holding a gun and wreath, dedicated 'à la mémoire des soldats et travailleurs morts au service de la France 1914-1918'. In the Nogent-sur-Marne cemetery, Indochinese graves surround a column with commemorative inscriptions.

Relatively few monuments in France specifically commemorate colonial troops in the First World War. (Indeed soldiers from the British Empire – Australia, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand, Newfoundland and India – are more grandiosely commemorated at French battlefield sites than are those from the French empire.<sup>24</sup>) There are, nevertheless, some plaques and monuments that predate the Verdun memorial unveiled by Chirac. At Mondement (Marne), a plaque honours the Moroccan division that fought there in 1914, and a monument in Vimy is dedicated 'aux morts de la division marocaine' in 1915. A monument at Douaumont pays homage to the bravery of the force noire. Neuville-en-Argonne (Meuse) has a war monument, situated in the Place de la Guadeloupe, paid for by the colony of Guadeloupe, which 'adopted' this war-ravaged little town, and contributed to its reconstruction.<sup>25</sup> In Reims, there is a starkly austere monument – two square towers atop a rectangular tablet – erected in honour of 'soldats africains tombés pour la défense de la liberté, 1914-1918'; an earlier monument to the armée noire, a statuary group of five soldiers erected in 1945, was destroyed by the Germans in 1940.<sup>26</sup> In 1983, Cerny-en-Laonnais (Aisne) put up a plaque 'à la mémoire des frères du Président Léopold Sédar Senghor et des tirailleurs sénégalais morts pour la France sur le Chemin des Dames en 1914-1918'. A monument erected in Fréjus in 1994, modelled on an iconic image of the taking of the Douaumont fort, is dedicated 'à toutes les troupes noires qui ont vaillamment servi le drapeau français pendant plus d'un siècle et dont Fréjus était la plus importante garnison'. It is also inscribed with searing words by Senghor: 'Passant, ils sont tombés fraternellement unis pour que tu restes Français'.

The most important site of commemoration of colonial soldiers from the Great War is the former Jardin Botanique Colonial, a garden established at the very end of the nineteenth century for experimentation, acclimatization and production of plants and seeds for the colonies; the Jardin was also home to the Ecole nationale d'agriculture

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<sup>23</sup> *Oeuvre des tombes et du culte funéraire des Indochinois morts pour la France* (Le Souvenir indochinois, Paris, 1932).

<sup>24</sup> On the Australian case, see recent books by Garrie Hutchinson, *Pilgrimage: A Traveller's Guide to Australia's Battlefields* (Black Inc., Melbourne, 2006), and Bruce Scates, *Return to Gallipoli: Walking the Battlefields of the Great War* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> Jennings, 'Monuments to Frenchness?', p. 567.

<sup>26</sup> German wartime propaganda had focussed on the perceived ignominy of Africans fighting against Germany on behalf of the French, and right-wing nationalists were later outraged at the presence of black colonial soldiers in post-war French occupation forces in Germany.

coloniale. Located at the eastern extremity of the Bois de Vincennes in Paris, the garden – with dilapidated greenhouses, a dusty library and vacant pavilions left over from an exhibition held there in 1907 – is certainly one of the most evocative colonial sites in France, little known even by Parisians though gradually being rediscovered.<sup>27</sup> The colonial vestiges in this site, which have been explored in an article by Eric Jennings and in a book by Isabelle Levêque, Dominique Pinon and Michel Griffon, as well as in my own writings, are a haunting reminder of the French overseas empire and of the ‘amnesia’ that long affected the memories of the colonies in France.<sup>28</sup>

The quiet and leafy Jardin Colonial, with its history of exhibitions, scientific and agronomical research, and teaching, provided an ideal spot for colonial war memorials after 1918, and they include commemorations of soldiers from various French possessions.<sup>29</sup> A simple stela is dedicated ‘aux soldats coloniaux’. That commemorating the ‘soldats noirs morts pour la France’ is a large stone tablet with an almost life-size bas-relief of a young woman looking sadly at the grave on which lies a soldier’s helmet against the background of a ruined village – a representation of the personal grief of a widow who would never be able, most likely, to visit the grave of her loved one buried far away from home. Unlike these monuments, the one dedicated to Laotians and Cambodians reflects more localised inspiration: a terraced phnom with Buddhist symbols and bas-reliefs in Khmer style. The Malagasy soldiers are honoured by a grand brick and stone monument topped by a traditional eagle, symbol of the royal house of Madagascar.

The monument for Christian Indochinese returns to the simplicity of a stela decorated with a commemorative laurel branch, but that for the non-Christian Vietnamese, nestled among a copse of bamboo trees, is the most dramatic in the garden. For a 1906 colonial exhibition in Marseille, the French government in Indochina commissioned the building of a *dinh*, a ceremonial village hall; the edifice was moved to Paris for the 1907 exhibition in the Jardin Colonial, and in 1920 it became the Temple du Souvenir indochinois in memory of Vietnamese Buddhist troops killed in the war. The shrine was suitably decorated with altars, lacquer panels, incense burners, bronze bells and regimental banners, as well as a rescript from the Emperor of Annam. Albert Sarraut presided at the consecration of the building, and Emperor Khai Dinh himself visited several years later; anciens combattants gathered for regular remembrance

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<sup>27</sup> In 2007, the Bois de Vincennes hosted an exhibition of Michel Denancé’s photographs of the Jardin Colonial in Paris and the Jardin d’Essai in Algiers, a poignant juxtaposition of sites and images. There will soon be a retrospective exhibition on the Jardin Colonial, which now houses research centres on sustainable development.

<sup>28</sup> Eric Jennings, ‘Remembering “Other” Losses: The Temple du Souvenir Indochinois of Nogent-sur-Marne’, *History and Memory*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2003), pp. 5-48, reprinted in a revised version as ‘Representing Indochinese Sacrifice: The Temple du Souvenir Indochinois of Nogent-sur-Marne’, in Kathryn Robson and Jennifer Yee (eds), *France and “Indochina”: Cultural Representations* (Lexington Books, Lanham, Maryland, 2006), pp. 29-48; Isabelle Levêque, Dominique Pinon and Michel Griffon, *Le Jardin d’agronomie tropicale. De l’agriculture coloniale au développement durable* (Actes Sud / CIRAD, Arles / Montpellier, 2005); Aldrich, *Vestiges of the Colonial Empire*, *op. cit.*, and ‘Vestiges of the Colonial Empire: The Jardin Colonial in Paris’, in Robert Aldrich and Martyn Lyons (eds), *The Sphinx in the Tuileries and Other Essays in Modern French History* (University of Sydney, Sydney, 1999), pp. 194-204.

<sup>29</sup> Of course, the Exposition coloniale internationale of 1931 was held at the other, western side of the Bois de Vincennes – the remains include colonial street names in the *quartier*, the old Musée Colonial (now called the Palais de la Porte Dorée), a gilded statue of an allegorical France (called ‘La France colonisatrice’ at the time of the exhibition), the zoo, and the pavilions of Togo and Cameroon (now, oddly, the Centre Bouddhique International); the Catholic church from the 1931 fair was re-erected in Epinay-sur-Seine. Also in the Bois de Vincennes is a memorial to the Marchand expedition of 1898, though the statue of Captain Marchand himself was blasted off the sculpture group in the 1970s – though whether as a political act or sheer vandalism remains unknown.



ceremonies. As time passed, and colonialism gave way to decolonisation, the dinh fell into disrepair; ceremonial urns and other artefacts disappeared, and in 1984 a fire completely destroyed the building. (Whether the fire was an accidental conflagration or arson is not known.) The Association des Anciens d'Indochine lobbied for the rebuilding of a memorial, and in 1992 a new, smaller shrine was dedicated 'à la mémoire des Vietnamiens morts pour la France' in the world wars and in other conflicts, a bright red building in Asian style that once again has served for commemoration ceremonies. Near-by in the old Jardin Colonial, the rare visitors can see a few other reminders of the Great War, such as mementos of the mosque established for Muslims when the garden's buildings were commandeered as a wartime hospital for colonial soldiers.<sup>30</sup>

The fate of the Jardin Colonial mirrors the metamorphosis in views about the colonies: from the triumphalist combining of science, exhibition and commemoration in a prominent site in the colonial era to the gradual abandonment of these relics of an extinguished and repudiated empire. It is emblematic of the change in French attitudes towards the colonies from the post-First World War period when *salut par l'empire* seemed to have been proved through the service of colonial soldiers and was championed at the Exposition Coloniale of 1931, down to the days of decolonisation and *oubli* that characterised the post-imperial period. The hesitant present-day renovation of the Jardin Colonial, alongside the new commemoration of colonial soldiers at Verdun, seems to form part of a general 'rediscovery' of the colonial era that France has witnessed in recent years – with debates about the deeds and misdeeds of the colonial period and about the legacy that colonialism has left to present-day France. In that re-examination of the colonial past, *lieux de mémoire* are playing a significant role – from the Algerian war memorial inaugurated on the Quai Branly in 2002 to the monument to the enslaved unveiled in the Luxembourg Gardens in 2007, from the Musée du Quai Branly with its treasure-trove of ethnographical art and artefacts to the centre for study of immigration forshadowed at the old colonial museum of the Porte Dorée. As France increasingly works through, and perhaps tries to come to terms with its colonial past, these monumental incarnations of colonialism and its heritage, old memorials and new monuments, underline the importance both of the colonies to France, and of the cult of commemoration to recollecting and comprehending colonial history and its legacies.

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<sup>30</sup> On the hospital and mosque, see Levêque *et al.*, pp. 101-110. Among other colonial traces still visible in the Jardin Tropical de Paris (as the site is now called) are a Chinese-style gateway, a Khmer-inspired bridge, remnants of a model for an allegorical monument to 'La France Coloniale' (which was never built), and a statue of Eugène Étienne, leader of the *lobby colonial*.