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The Documentary as a Site of Commemoration: Filming the Free French Dissidents from the French Antilles

Abstract:

Thousands of young men and women left the French Antilles (Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guyana) to join the Free French from 1941 to 1944. The contributions made by these Dissidents (Antillean resistance fighters) has for decades been overlooked both at home and in metropolitan France. This article explores what Euzhan Palcy's 2006 documentary, Parcours de Dissidents (The Journey of the Dissidents) reveals about how such historical omissions shape questions of national identity and belonging in the Antilles, through an analysis of its use of testimonies, archival footage and personal mementos. It also examines the film's afterlife; how it has been used as a tool to demand greater recognition for these veterans and ultimately acts as an important site of commemoration, when physical memorials are still lacking.

De milliers de jeunes hommes et femmes ont quitté les Antilles (Martinique, Guadeloupe et Guyane) pour rejoindre les Forces Françaises Libres entre 1941 et 1944. Le rôle joué par ces Dissidents (résistants des Antilles) a été oublié aussi bien aux Antilles qu'en métropole. Cet article examine ce que le documentaire d'Euzhan Palcy, Parcours de Dissidents (2006) peut nous révéler sur la façon dont cet oubli a pu influencer la question de l'appartenance des Antilles à la nation française. Nous considérons comment la réalisatrice utilise témoignages, images d'archive et photographies personnelles dans ce documentaire. Par ailleurs, l'article se penche également sur la trajectoire du film après sa première diffusion publique : il montre le poids du film dans la demande auprès de l'Etat français que soit reconnu le rôle joué par ces

anciens combattants antillais pendant la guerre. Plus largement, l'article offre une réflexion sur l'approche des représentations cinématographiques en tant que 'lieux de mémoire'.

Keywords: World War Two; Antilles; Documentary; Commemoration; Memory

Despite a few exceptions – Indigènes (Days of Glory, Bouchareb, 2006), Les Enfants du Pays (The Local Lads, Javaux, 2006) and the series of short documentaries *Frères d'Armes* (Brothers in Arms, Bouchareb, 2014) – colonial histories of France's experiences during World War Two often remain under-explored and under-represented in the very large corpus of more general audio-visual depictions of this conflict. Even though, as Sylvie Lindeperg and Jean-François Dominé have documented, the corpus of French cinema about World War Two has itself changed its focus dramatically at various points in the decades since 1945, both in its subject matter and its critical viewpoint. It moved from 1940s/50s images of glorious armed Resistance, to depictions of collaboration in the 1970s and then depictions of women's roles in the 1990s and more transnational representations in the 2000s.[1] The colonial histories of this conflict are also under-commemorated by the French state, through traditional vectors of historical memory; (museum exhibits, commemoration days) and their relative exclusion from national acts of remembrance and celebrations (Parade of 14 July on the Champs-Elysées, ceremonies of the 8 May and the CNRD (Concours National de la Résistance et de la Déportation).[2]

New approaches to the French history of the Second World War and the external Resistance have, in the last ten years, started to re-examine of the role the French Empire and its soldiers in the Free French Armies. Important historical studies, such as Eric Jennings' 2014 Free French Africa in World War Two, have focused attention on the African troops (North and sub-

Saharan) that formed the majority of the Free French Forces (FFL) until the integration of former internal Resistance fighters into the official national army and the blanchiment (whitening) of the winter of 1944 and the Spring of 1945, when African troops were withdrawn from active service.[3] This special issue seeks to de-centre the history of external Resistance movements, moving analysis from London and Algiers to reflect the external Resistance's nature as a global phenomenon. Similarly, this article moves the focus to Fort-de-France, Pointe-à-Pitre and Cayenne. The issue also examines new issues around questions of identity of members of the External Resistance. This article will address such questions through an examination of the story of the Dissidents (External Resistance fighters), a group of thousands[4] of men and women from the French Antilles (the islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe and the territory of French Guyana, which are still part of the French Republic today). These men and women were colonial subjects of the 'old colonies'[5] and volunteered to fighting from 1941 onwards. Their story has not received the same level of attention as that of their African counterparts[6] and much less than their metropolitan French counterparts, precisely because of their particular status. Colonised then, but not part of an independent nation now, there is no national government to represent the *Dissidents'* specific history,[7] for they are part of a French Republic which promotes universalism, and a dominate metropolitan narrative.[8]

In the light of this under-commemoration, this article will examine Euzhan Palcy's 2006 documentary, Parcours de Dissidents (The Journey of Dissidents – from now on Parcours), which is the first and only feature-length cinematographic depiction of the story of the resistance fighters of La Dissidence. Euzhan Palcy has become, since the 1980s, a well-known director in both the Francophone and Anglophone world because of her historical works of fiction (Sugarcane Alley, 1983 and A Dry White Season, 1989).[9] Since the mid-1990s Palcy has made documentaries about her homeland of Martinique, beginning in 1994 with her documentary trilogy about the Martinican statesman and intellectual, Aimé Césaire.[10] The topic

of the resistance finds an echo in Palcy's life for she grew up hearing stories of La Dissidence told by members of her family, for her father was himself a Dissident.

The article will analyse how Palcy has used her documentary to bring the story of the Dissidents to a wider audience both in the Antilles and in metropolitan France; exploring how the subjects it raises and the cinematographic techniques it uses have been chosen to highlight the *Dissidents'* specific history. The film is composed of segments from twenty-one interviews[11] with Dissidents from each of the Antillean territories. Each interviewee relates their wartime experiences from the beginning of Vichy rule on the island until their return from France in 1945/46. These interviews are interspersed with archival footage. The depth and range of both the interviewees' testimonies and the archival images highlight the previous paucity of analysis of these *Dissidents'* stories in existing historical research (outside the Antilles), in the traditional vectors of FFL memory (Musée de l'Ordre de la Libération) and official commemorative sites (Mémorial du débarquement de Provence). Finally, the article will analyse the afterlife of this film in a variety of different spheres; such as official French state commemorations and school curriculum in France, placing it within the 'memory wars' and heated debates around colonisation in France in the 2000s.

La Dissidence

Palcy has deliberately chosen the term Dissidents and not Résistants for her documentary. What was La Dissidence? In the Antillean context, the Guadeloupean historian Eliane Sempaire, makes the distinction between Dissidents (and therefore La Dissidence) as the black population of the Antilles who left their homeland to join the Free French, while les Résistants are the white békés (Antillean Creole term to describe a descendant of the early European, usually French, settlers in the French Antilles) or metropolitan French civil servants and members of

the military who defied the Vichy regime, but rarely fought outside of the Antilles.[12] All of the interviewees in the documentary use the term La Dissidence or describe themselves as Dissidents, demonstrating the prominence of the term in the Antilles.

The first acts of La Dissidence began in the French Antilles in July 1941. In the months and years that followed young men and women from Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guyana left these then Vichy-controlled territories clandestinely to join the FFL, travelling in small fishing boats and canoes across the dangerous waters between these territories and the British islands of Dominica, Saint Lucia and Trinidad, from where they were sent on to training camps in the United States and then FFL-controlled French Morocco. Following the overthrow of the Vichy regime in the Antilles in July 1943, larger numbers of men and women from these territories continued to join the FFL in a more organised manner, being shipped from the Antilles in banana boats straight to Morocco. They fought as part of other colonial, often West African Tirailleur, regiments as well as in specific Antillean units (5ème Bataillon de Marche des Antilles – 5BMA) and provided logistical support (telephony, nursing, transport) throughout the campaigns in North Africa, the Provence landings of August 1944 and the Liberation of France in 1944/45, demonstrating the ambiguous place these Antillean populations occupied in theories of colonial and racial hierarchy.[13] Sometimes these Dissidents were regarded as a Black soldier indistinguishable from those of West Africa and at other times they were viewed as a more distinct ethnic group with attributes that made them suitable to lead their own countrymen and other groups.[14] Some Dissidents even fought on German soil, as Antillean soldiers were virtually not affected by the blanchiment of 1944/45 as they served in metropolitan and not colonial units. The most famous Dissident was the young Frantz Fanon, who left Martinique clandestinely in early 1943 at the age of 17 for the island of Dominica. Repatriated following the overthrow of the Vichy command in Martinique, Fanon eventually joined the FFL, setting sail for North Africa on the 12 March 1944. He served in Algeria and

was wounded in the Vosges in the winter of 1944, returning to Martinique in 1945.[15] Fanon's period of service would be formative, exposing him to social conditions in colonial Algeria and the ambiguous place of Antillean populations in France's colonial racial hierarchy, subjects which he was to return to in his professional practice as a psychiatrist as well as in his theoretical essays.

The military historian Julien Tourielle notes that there was a brief revival of interest in La Dissidence amongst specialist historians of the French Antilles and French Colonialism in the late 1980s and 1990s (including Sempaire, Jennings, Abenon and Chathuant). However, this was in contrast to the period of missed commemoration opportunities between the 1940s-1970s, such as Presidential visits by De Gaulle, school curricula changes and street naming projects in the Antilles.[16] So what were the origins of such a historical omission in the decades that immediately followed the Second World War? Is it because this Antillean story is labelled as an act of Resistance and not as a period of, often-conscripted, service within the colonial army? Eric Jennings claims that the Ministry of the Colonies refused to acknowledge the non-metropolitan resistance in the immediate post war period, 'A true maquisard, an "authentic Resistant", claimed the Minister for the Colonies, could only be metropolitan French'.[17] Such an attitude speaks of the racial hierarchy that underpinned colonial ideology. If engagement in the FFL was meant to be motivated by an ideological refusal of collaboration and fascism and by a sense of patriotism, the Minister for the Colonies asked how colonial subjects could have the necessary intellectual and moral capacity to make such a decision. The Colonial ministry also feared that such recognition would fuel independence movements throughout the empire.[18] This fear was not ungrounded given Frantz Fanon's later role in the struggle for Algerian independence alongside Ahmed Ben Bella (the first President of an independent Algeria) who also served in the FFL. It can be surmised that such prejudices survived long into the post-war and post-colonial era.

Problematic archives – official and personal

The Dissidents' omission from FFL historiography is also echoed in and maybe partly motivated by their absence from the visual archives of the period. The film theorist Joachim Paech speaks of the power of the archival image for the viewer: 'The ephemeral historical moment becomes a permanent presence in the moving image through these archives of history'.[19] Therefore the use of archival footage can be judged to be even more important in documentaries such as Parcours that recount previous little told, little known historical moments which have so far struggled to become a 'permanent presence' in mainstream French historical narrative about the external Resistance.

However, the inclusion of such archival footage is highly problematic for Palcy. My own research at ECPAD (Etablissement de Communication et de Production Audiovisuelle de la Défense, Ivry) reveals that sourcing such footage would have been difficult. The digitalisation of French national visual archives (Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, ECPAD) as well as those of large corporations such as Gaumont and Pathé, has increased both the amount and the diversity of the material available to film makers in recent decades. But, searching within the online catalogues for these institutions suggests that the footage available does not feature any images of Antillean soldiers. This highlights the partial, white and, importantly for later analysis, male dominated nature of such official images. These images then went onto construct a national narrative about the (external) Resistance that was equally partial, white and male dominated. The selective nature of the archival images poses several questions; did more complete archives in fact originally exist and were they, like the French Army itself, whitened at the end of the war? Did the army film makers chose or were instructed to focus mainly or even solely on the FFI's metropolitan French troops? Susan Langlois notes that 'Every army

(of the FFL (my addition)) had a Film Corps which produced visual images as the soldiers progressed'.[20] Therefore, in theory, there was the capacity to film the roles played by these Dissidents. This contrasts with the internal Resistance, who for logistical reasons, had little archival footage to draw upon to construct narratives in the post-war period.

Palcy has been constrained to use more general archival footage and fixed images from the period, such as short clips from Pathé or the French Army's audio-visual archives (ECPAD) or military maps, depicting events such as the battles at Monte Cassino, Italy, in 1943, the D-Day landings in Normandy in June 1944 or the battles of Eastern France. The narrative voice over or extracts from the interviews with the Dissidents are then used to provide specific details about the involvement of the Dissidents in such events; 'Nous fait Toulon, nous fait Hyères, nous fait Marseilles puis la direction de Lyon'[21] is spoken over the images of the Provence landings. Such a paucity of visual archives provides an insight into how difficult it is, especially for a documentary filmmaker, who relies so heavily on visual images, to write a complete national (French and Antillean) history when working with incomplete archival resources.

This lack of available archival images is countered by Palcy's use of personal photographs taken by the Dissidents, portraying life, both at work (manning an anti-aircraft gun in Tunisia, convalescing in hospital) and at play (at dances, or social events) during different campaigns throughout the war. Such images were captured by the soldiers themselves on the cameras they purchased while they were stationed in Fort Dix in New Jersey for several months to receive military training from the American army. These cameras and photographs are also a visual insight into how their time in America altered the subsequent wartime experiences of the Dissidents, providing them with superior kit and uniform to other colonial (and French) troops.

These photographic images particularly highlight the important roles played by female Dissidents from the Antilles in the Free French's medical and logistical corps, throughout the

campaigns in North Africa, France and Germany. The stories of these women are even less well known that those of their male counterparts. They do not appear in sources about women in the Free French[22] or in either Jennings' or Sempaire's studies of La Dissidence. Yet these female Dissidents were far more numerous (at least a hundred, the documentary claims) than the French and American ambulance drivers of the 2e division blindée, les Rochambelles and les Marinettes, who were regularly filmed and photographed for propaganda purposes and about who numerous articles and books have been written in the post-war period.[23] The photographs of the female Dissidents are identical in subject matter and pose (in uniform, next to their jeeps, at their workstations) to those of their white counterparts, but they were not captured by official photographers, therefore they did not feature in press coverage at time or have a later archival legacy. Colonial ideology had a long-established discourse on the symbolism of the roles played by male colonial subjects as colonial troops in the French Army.[24] However, colonial discourse on the female colonial subject portrayed them as either highly sexualised objects or as subservient mothers and wives, therefore unsuitable for any military role.[25] Such stereotypical images continued after the war. Especially with départementalisation, from 1961 to 1982, women from the Antilles were recruited in large numbers under the BUMIDOM (the Office for Migration from the Overseas Departments) program to work in low skilled employment in metropolitan France. While the program was meant to promote assimilation and to reduce unemployment and overpopulation in the islands and therefore targeted at both genders, it was mainly women who were recruited for childcare and domestic tasks.[26] Therefore, these women's presence in army roles was ignored post-war as it did not fit such ingrained colonial and postcolonial stereotypes of women without intellectual and political agency.[27]

The personal photographs in the documentary also allow the audience to establish a stronger connection to the interviewees. It permits them to be able to imagine these women and men

now in their seventies, eighties and nineties as strong and energetic young people and therefore to bridge the gap of the period between the war and the old people that they see on screen. Each time a new interviewee is presented, the audience is given their name, date and place of birth, written on screen against the backdrop of a wartime photograph. Both the photographs and the dates of birth serve to underline the young age of many of these men and women on their departure, with the majority aged between 17 and 22, while the youngest was 15.

Such links between the past and the present in these personal images strengthen feelings of empathy amongst the audience. The image of Henry Joseph[28] on crutches having had his leg amputated after he stepped on a landmine during the Provence landings, lends added resonance to his lament that as an eighteen-year-old he was then facing a future when he would never be able to dance again. The emotional power of such an image is heightened by the director's decision to cut back to this photograph when Joseph is discussing his anger that the important role played by Antillean troops in Provence in August 1944 was not referenced in the post-war period in the displays of the Mémorial du débarquement de Provence at Mont Faron.[29] At that moment in the film, Joseph explains:

> They have completely wiped us off the map. Personally, that was a terrible shock and I began to sob. Sobbing with rage. I was enraged to see that I had lost a leg 5 kilometres from there and we did not even get a thank you, hidden once more.

Another means of replacing the partial, even missing, nature of archival footage used by Palcy are the historical recreations of the sea journeys undertaken by the Dissidents between Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guyane and the English Antillean islands. In colour, and therefore contrasting with the black and white archival images, and in moonlight to emphasise the necessarily clandestine nature of their trip, groups of young men in fishing boats and large canoes are shown rowing across the sea. In these segments Palcy has placed Creole songs, with

French language subtitles, that recount the same journey, 'Fly, my canoe, fly, take me to save the Motherland, Fly, my canoe, fly, Father De Gaulle is shouting for help.' The use of Creole songs[30] as testimony themselves, and the release of these songs on a CD at the same time as the film's release, demonstrate the role of earlier cultural production in the preservation and transmission of this story in the Antilles. These lyrics also testify to the particularity of the Antilles relationship to the Free French cause, which is bound up in a colonial and infantilising discourse of France as the mother country and of De Gaulle as a protective father figure to his colonial subjects.

Testimonies: Reasons and Emotions

So how does Palcy build upon this archival footage, real or reconstructed, with her choice of interview footage? What stories and emotions does she seek to highlight? The importance of hearing and preserving the testimony of war veterans and survivors of the Holocaust has been understood and promoted by the organisations that work to educate the public about World War Two in France. In 2006, The Fondation de la Shoah worked with Institut National de l'Audiovisuel to create over 300 hours of interviews with 110 witnesses, 20 of which are freely available online,[31] the others are available to researchers. As the honorary president of the Fondation de la Shoah, Simone Veil, explained in 2006, 'This will allow future generations to listen to the voices and to see the expressions of those who lived through humiliations, persecutions, deportations and the loss of their parents and families'.[32] Reflecting on the use of transmission of testimonies in cinema, anthropologist Roxanna Waterson claims that 'Filmed testimony also offers us clues to be read in the speaker's manner of self-presentation, with all its attendant dimensions of non-verbal communication: the style of speech, the pitch, tone and

tempo of voice, pauses, hesitations, facial expressions, body language, gesture and all that these tell us about emotion and state of mind.'[33]

Palcy appears acutely aware of the power of such filmed testimony and its importance as a tool for transmission of memory, especially the power of the 'expression'. The camera never shies away from depicting the raw emotion of her interviewees, documenting numerous tears and expressions of anger and disgust. The camera continually pans in from head and shoulder shots to close-ups to re-enforce such emotions on the faces of the interviewees. Palcy has claimed that she made her film 'to allow them (the Dissidents) to evacuate all of this sadness', therefore acknowledging the often cathartic nature of testimony especially after so many years of silence.[34]

The twenty-one interviews for the documentary all take place at the interviewees' homes, gardens or in other personal spaces (one takes place on a *Dissident's* boat). Often documentaries seek to place their interviewees in landscapes relevant to their testimony, especially if there is no suitable archival footage to fulfil such a task. This is made more difficult by the fact that these Dissidents are now elderly men and women who live thousands of miles away from the battlefields of North Africa, Italy and France. Only at the very end of Parcours are some of the protagonists filmed within a setting that could be linked to their story. The final minutes of the film show several of the Dissidents standing on a beach looking out to sea next to a young child (maybe their own grandchild). These images echo the landscapes from which they set off clandestinely in small boats and speak to the wish for a transmission of memory from one generation to another.

There are clear parallels to be drawn between Palcy's use of the interplay between archival footage and interviews and the then initiative documentary techniques to be found in Marcel Ophüls' watershed documentary about France during the Occupation, Le Chagrin et la Pitié

(The Sorrow and the Pity) (1969). Brett Bowles argues that this technique enabled Ophüls to maintain the appearance of historiographical objectivity, through the act of discrediting the most extreme of the interviewees' testimonies by juxtaposing them with archival footage.[35] Palcy at no point tries to catch her interviewees out, instead archival footage is used to confirm and contextualise their words. Unlike Ophüls' documentary Palcy's work includes a voice-over commentary, narrated by French actor Gérard Depardieu.[36] Its main role is to explain the wartime and post-war context, at the very beginning and the end of the film, however, the testimonies take precedence in the main body of the work.

Testimony to highlight lack of state recognition

The most important of these testimonies is that of Guy Cornély, one of the few French soldiers or sailors to land on the Normandy beaches during D-Day. He is most outspoken and critical about the French authorities' post-war attitude towards the Dissidents. Following his wartime service, Cornély held an important post as a biologist at the Institute Pasteur in Guadeloupe and on retirement became a prize-winning poet and novelist. In an interview with Eric Jennings in 1997, he related how his father, who had fought and been gassed in the trenches of World War One, had encouraged him to join La Dissidence to 'earn medals of his own'.[37] Yet Cornély, in common with all but one of the Dissidents in the film, is not shown wearing his medals, despite being one of the most decorated of the Dissidents interviewed.[38] Such a choice reveals much about his disillusionment with the lack of state recognition or commemoration of La Dissidence. On Palcy's personal website, the film's blurb claims that 'Forgotten by history, the time has come at last for the survivors of this courageous and perilous adventure to tell their story to the world'.[39] The existence of what Françoise Vergès has labelled as the 'negated memory and marginalized history'[40] of France's overseas territories is a recurring theme

throughout the documentary. Virtually every one of the interviewees discusses the adverse impact of such negation and marginalisation on their personal lives, citing disinterest from family members; 'Young people treat us with contempt', and on their identity as a French citizen, stating that rejection from their nation caused pain and trauma: 'We were not even thanked, we were hidden. They rejected us, that hurts. No one takes any interest in us'.[41]

This negation and marginalisation appears to be felt even more strongly as the Dissidents all emphasise that they were not conscripted, as were most of the FFL's colonial army of North and West African troops, but left the islands because of a patriotic desire to fight for the motherland; 'We went, were not called'[42]; 'In Martinique, we were all very patriotic and we all cried when Pétain signed the peace treaty with the Germans.'[43] These testimonies contradict the claims of the Guadeloupean historian Elaine Sempaire who has suggested that the Dissidents were mainly motivated by anti-colonial sentiment, because of the increased severity of colonial rule under the Vichy government, while the white and béké Resistors were fighting for France.[44] Palcy's film makes no such racial divides, interviewing and therefore labelling as Dissidents, two béké cousins, Michel and René de Reynal. Equally the interviewees in Palcy's film speak little of such anti-colonial sentiment, instead testifying to universal messages of the internal and external Resistance; patriotism, family ties (with other Dissidents) and a youthful search for adventure.[45] The passing of the years and an understandable sense of personal pride have undoubtedly shaped the narratives of the Dissidents. However, such testimonies also underline both the potency of discourse of the mission civilisatrice[46] and France as the mère patrie, under which the Dissidents grew up in the 1920s, 30s and 40s and the Antillean territories' contemporary position as part of the French Republic. Both Palcy and the Dissidents are seeking to underline what makes them undeniable French.

As well as emphasising the universal, Palcy also wants to underline the historic and singular nature of many of her interviewee's actions. Cornély is particularly aware of and wishes to

transmit the uniqueness of his own story 'I am the first Black,[47] I was the first French Black to land at Ouistreham and to take part in **Free France** (his emphasis) and in the (Normandy) landings'. He is aware of both the centrality of this event (the Normandy landings of June 1944) to the story of the Liberation of France, but also of the ignorance surrounding the participation of an Antillean sailor in these landings. Cornély is a wonderful story teller, giving an insight into his post-retirement life as a conteur. He works hard on the tempo of his story, mimicking the sounds of D-Day; the waves, gun and shell fire. While Palcy does intersperse his testimony with archival American footage of the landings, Cornély's account is far more evocative and most importantly provides a French and Antillean viewpoint of this mainly Allied dominated event.

Another of Palcy's preferred interviewees is Barthélemy Pineau. His testimony opens the film and sets the tone for the entire work. He claims not to have been motivated by heroism, but to have 'done my duty without wanting to kill', a sense of duty that was inspired by his French literary education, 'I had read too much of Horace by Corneille' he says brandishing the said book, an ode to the idea of patriotic duty. He holds nothing back from the audience, tears often roll down his face, such as when he recounts taking his first German prisoner during the fighting for the pocket of Royan in April 1945. He then smiles and says that he is sure that this soldier told the story to his own children, who therefore 'no longer are frightened of black people'. This short remark says much about the racism that Pineau would likely have encountered from both the enemy and some sections of the French public. Fanon recounted in his letters home the racially motivated distrust of Antillean troops that he experienced during the liberation of Eastern France from both within the Army and from civilian populations.[48]

Apart from Cornély and Pineau's testimonies, most the interviews are cut into one to two minute segments and grouped together around a common subject, for example the Dissidents' arrival in Fort Dix in the USA, with the obligatory showers, haircuts, new uniform, and being

measured and weighed. This sheer mass of testimonies is used by the director to lend weight and credibility to the statements of the Dissidents and the director's own political activism. Palcy is aware of the possible future uses of this documentary as a historical document and therefore wishes to insist on themes of patriotism, sacrifice and the need for recognition of the Dissidents' unique history by the French state.

Palcy and social engaged film making

The subject matter and filming techniques of these testimonial interviews demonstrate how Palcy's documentary Parcours aims to give a voice and increased visibility to former members of the Free French drawn from the French Empire, who feel that their story is not told elsewhere. As early as November 1944, Hélène Legotien, cinema critic and Résistante, writing in the Resistance newspaper Combat, stated that:

> Each one of us has been marked (by the war) and what we expect, from French cinema, is that it examines this reality whose consequence have not stopped influencing the lives of individuals and peoples.[49]

Therefore, the role to be played by French cinema in the recording of the multiple stories of the war and its lasting consequences on populations was deemed to be of central importance before even the fighting itself had finished. Film was meant to have a role in popular education for the public,[50] though the subjects to be examined were to be heavily controlled by the French Provisional Government, to produce 'films in the national interest'.[51] René Clément, the director of the most well-known of early films about the Resistance, La bataille du rail (1946), described his intention to 'give via film a vision of the struggle undertaken which will act as testimony for future generations'.[52]

Palcy's documentary can therefore be read as a continuation of such a post-war education programme which sought to restore order and social cohesion within the French nation; a desire to bear witness to the events of the war and its aftermath on veterans, to educate future generations, as well as the public more generally. However, she aims to provide, through Parcours, what Bruno Levaisseur has termed 'original counter-vision of nation-states'.[53] Palcy's counter-visions of the French nation state claim a central space for La Dissidence within the story of the external Resistance. They therefore runs counter to the dominant, national French narrative, which even in the post-colonial period, presents the history of metropolitan France as predominant and as a separate narrative to its colonial history in its school curricula, museum displays and acts of state commemoration.[54] From the 1990s onwards, there have been re-examinations of French colonial history launched by French historians[55] and numerous attempts by the French state to legislate on how colonial history should be remembered, taught and commemorated.[56] Post-colonial pressure groups (such as Les Indigènes de la République and the Conseil Représentatif des Associations Noires (CRAN)) who felt that their stories and those of their ancestors, have been marginalised by the French state during both the colonial and post-colonial periods, also entered these debates.[57] The term 'Memory Wars'[58] has been used to describe the numerous and conflictual representations and debates in the French press, and political and academic circles surrounding French colonial history of the 1990s and 2000s. In the Antilles, most of these memory war debates have focused on the questions of slavery and its enduring, if often unacknowledged, legacy in contemporary Antillean society. While undoubtedly vital, such an emphasis on slavery further marginalises other historical moments of Antillean history, such as the Second World War.

The aforementioned post-colonial pressure groups, such as, have used websites and blogs, self-publishing and short documentaries, to circumvent the traditional French publishing and media

industries and to publish their 'counter-vision'. Palcy's documentary fits such a trend. Although she can be said to have entered the cinema elite, she still reports having difficulties gaining funding for her ventures from the traditional funding bodies for French cinema.[59]

This film can also be read as part of Palcy's wider oeuvre which seeks to (re)inscribe black French history from the former territories of the French empire in the story of French cinema, through films such as Sugar Cane Alley and television drama such as The Brides of Bourbon Island (2007). For Palcy the resonance of these stories can be felt far beyond the French nation. She makes numerous references to their transnational nature and implications. On her personal website she insists that the Dissidents have always wished to 'thank the United States for having welcomed and trained us so well to become the worthy soldiers who operated in virtually every theatre of battle in North Africa and Europe'.[60] This description of a favourable American welcome, which is re-enforced in numerous of the testimonies on the documentary, is in direct comparison with other testimonies within the film that speak of the racist attitudes of the French coloniser, through the figures of FFL officers, who the Dissidents claim were angered as the Antillean troops were wearing superior uniforms, carrying better kit and had received more in-depth training. In their testimonies during the Palcy documentary, the five female Dissidents recount how they were made to sit basic literacy and numeracy tests by their metropolitan French superiors on their arrival in Morocco, despite their numerous school diplomas, demonstrating still further entrenched racial prejudices. The Dissidents do highlight the racial segregation that they, like African-American soldiers were subjected to in the United States,[61] but they also stress that they were regarded first and foremost as French soldiers, because of the France badge on their American uniforms and therefore afforded great respect. Palcy is also keen to link the story of these Dissidents[62] to that of the all African-American Tuskegee Airmen, which can be viewed as a desire to place them within a wider Black and American history of World War Two. This echoes the Créolité literary movement of

Chamoiseau and Confiant and Palcy's own career that has included both English and French language filmmaking about a number of different aspects of transnational Black history.[63] It also echoes the fact that the first recognition of African-American World War Two veterans coincided with the release of Palcy's documentary, when in 1997 President Clinton awarded the Congressional Medal of Honour to seven members of this group.[64] This was exactly the type of official recognition that Palcy was seeking from the French government for the Dissidents.

The documentary's after-life

This article has demonstrated that Palcy intended her documentary to be both a historical and political tool to raise awareness of the story of La Dissidence. How has she achieved this aim in the decade following its release?

The documentary was first screened on a television channel France Ô, which is aimed solely at populations living in or from France's Overseas territories, in January 2006 in the middle of the, aforementioned, memory wars.[65] The next year it was screened on state television in metropolitan France, but only in a very late night spot, which limited its audience.[66] There was very little coverage in the press of these showings and no link was made to wider contemporary debates about colonialism. It was therefore the targeted, official screenings (which took place in the years following the 2006 television screening) that have been the most politically effective. Palcy recounts, on her website, the sustained lobbying that she has undertaken with government officials to have the documentary screened within their ministry or organisation. In 2011, the Director of the National Office for War Veterans and Victims of War (ONACVG) announced that following the screening of Parcours at the Ministry of Defence, an injustice of which the institution was unaware would be repaired: a panel in homage to the

Dissidents would be placed at the Provence landings museum at Mont Faron.[67] While the new explanatory panel was undoubtedly welcome, the fact that such a high ranking military official could claim that the National Office for War Veterans was unaware of the role of hundreds of Dissidents in the Provence landings says much about French state's attitude towards its former colonial troops.

In 2012, the Académie de Paris produced a comprehensive set of teaching resources for secondary school history teachers, based on Palcy's documentary.[68] It might seem surprising that a metropolitan French, and not Antillean, local education authority commissioned such resources. However, it reflects the fact that many of the Antillean diaspora live in the Greater Paris region. In 2008 the French national statistics agency (INSEE) estimated the number to be around 175,000 island-born Antilleans (1 in 4 Antilleans), to which the same number of the second generation must be added.[69] On the 1 May 2014, the Ministry for Education revised these teaching resources and made them and the documentary freely available to secondary school teachers both in metropolitan France and in the overseas territories.[70] The documentary is therefore now recognised as an important pedagogical tool, for French school children in the Antilles and in the metropole.

So, it was in 2014, the year of the 70th anniversary of the Normandy (6/6/1944) and Provence (15/08/1944) landings, that the documentary was acknowledged as an important vector of memory. On the 1 June 2014, Parcours was screened at the Elysée Palace in front of President Hollande, numerous government ministers and a small number of Dissidents who were still alive. The following day, several, but not all, of the Dissidents featured in the film received the Légion d'Honneur from President Hollande.[71] On the 6 June 2014, the documentary was again screened, this time at the commemoration ceremony at the landing beach of Ouistreham, in memory of the aforementioned Guy Cornély who had served on the only French warship, Le Courbet, which took part in D-Day. The presence of numerous world leaders at this event gave

the film the official, transnational resonance that Palcy had been seeking. This was not the first time that one of Palcy's documentaries had been used in an official state ceremony. Her earlier documentary about Aimé Césaire had been used for the entry of Césaire's body into the Pantheon in November 2011.[72]

These high-profile screenings in Paris and Normandy meant that the story of La Dissidence was covered for the first time by evening news programs of the three main French television channels. Each of the news reports featured clips from Palcy's documentary to discuss the Dissidents' stories.[73] The journalists' decision to use documentary films itself as a primary source again highlights the paucity of other available images and eight years after the film was made, the ever-dwindling number of Dissidents still alive to interview.

Palcy accompanied six elderly Dissidents (M. Salinière Segor, M. Léopold Leon, M. Rémy Oliny, M. Alexandre Lepasteur, M. Eugène Jean-Baptiste, Mme Jeanne Catayée) to all of these ceremonies. She was personally credited by the then Minister for Overseas Territories, George Pau-Langevin for having 'remind us of the sacrifices of the Dissidents'.[74] During the same ceremony on the 2 June 2014, a small plaque was inaugurated in the courtyard of France's Les Invalides, its national Army museum, with the inscription; 'To the Dissidents of Guadeloupe, of Martinique and Guyane, refusing defeat, they braved the ocean to join the Free French and fought like heroes to save the country'. While a plaque at Les Invalides (the symbolic home of the French armed forces) inscribes the history of the Dissidents onto that of the French Army in general, the fact that such a plaque remains relatively invisible to the eyes of the general public is problematic. Such commemorative events testify to François Hollande's policy of inclusivity and reconciliation[75] in memorial policy and his wish to make le devoir de mémoire a central part of his presidency.[76] In fact Hollande ended his presidential terms by promising, during his last official engagement, that a museum and memorial to slavery would be built in central Paris.[77]

However, there still does not exist a national monument[78] or memorial in either mainland France or any of the territories of the Antilles to the Dissidents. This is despite these national ceremonies of recognition in June 2014 and the promises made by the then President Nicolas Sarkozy during a visit to the Antilles in 2009; 'to repair an injustice, to honour an unjustly forgotten page of our national history'. George Pau-Langevin also announced in 2014 that a memorial would be placed on the Quai Henri IV in Paris, another project that has, as yet, failed to come to fruition.[79]

Conclusions

Euzhan Palcy's documentary can therefore be seen to have several aims. Its central intent is to transmit the story and memory of these Dissidents both within the Antilles and in metropolitan France to younger generations who are judged to be unaware of the sacrifices of their ancestors. Equally it is meant to educate a non-Antillean public, as the story of La Dissidence has remained fragmented and under-explored, in academic and public circles, in the seventy years since the end of World War Two, in contrast to numerous other facets of the external French Resistance. A study of the specific combatant and logistical roles played by the Dissidents, as well as their treatment by their French officers during the war and by French authorities post-war, broadens and enriches the history of the external Resistance. It demonstrates the global nature of this movement, problematizes the movements' interactions with France's Empire and allows us to understand in more depth the multitude of reasons that motivated people to join the Free French Forces.

The portrayal of the roles played by La Dissidence with the use of supporting archive footage, from both official and personal sources, as well as interviews with veterans of both genders, demonstrates that the documentary was meant to become a historical document and therefore

a central part of the future memory of La Dissidence. This role is especially important because of the paucity of existing archives (both written and audio-visual) that portray and document the story of La Dissidence. Therefore, the widespread use of Palcy's documentary in the 2014 commemorations and their media coverage, as well as its centrality in pedagogical materials and the continuing lack of bricks and mortar memorials to La Dissidence, despite numerous promises made by French national officials, demonstrates the extent to which this cultural work has taken on the role of a visual memorial to these fighters' sacrifices, becoming itself a site of commemoration. However, it is questionable whether a documentary can ever address the vital human need to have a tangible representation of their sacrifice and suffering and a place to congregate for these veterans or a site of pilgrimage for their descendants.

There are omissions and absences in the documentary's narrative. Palcy speaks very little of the different treatment received by white béké (such as the De Raynal cousins in her film) and the black Dissidents. Equally, although the documentary does highlight the presence of female Dissidents, there is very little discussion of their specific wartime experiences after the Provence landings. Most strikingly, the documentary paints an entirely positive depiction of the role of La Dissidence and the Dissidents within the External Resistance. Neither the voice-over nor the testimonies hint at any internal disagreements, political differences or ethical ambiguities which are likely to have existed within this group, just as they did in other Resistance movements. It is likely that these issues have been edited out by Palcy and her team or glossed over in order to depict the Dissidents solely as forgotten and worth heroes of the External Resistance and therefore of the French nation.

Notes on Contributor

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[1] See Lindeperg, *Les écrans de l’ombre,* Dominé, “Les représentations successives de la Résistance” and Hewitt, Remembering the occupation in French film.

[2] For the annual celebrations to mark France’s National Day (14 July), there is a military parade in central Paris. The 8 May is a bank holiday in France which commemorates the end of the Second World War. The CHRD is an education programme run by the French Ministry for Education, to encourage school pupils to engage with the history of the Resistance and the Holocaust. Teachers in the Antilles have been forced to adapt the topics of the CHRD in order to discuss La Dissidence with their pupils. One example of this is a project undertaken by school children in Saint-Pierre, Martinique in 2005/6, where they studied this topic, under the general heading of ‘Resistance and Rural Life’. http://cms.ac-martinique.fr/lpsaintjames/articles.php?lng=fr&pg=63. Consulted 15/03/2017.
On the Fondation Charles de Gaulle’s website there is no mention of the Antillean troops in the composition of the FFL. http://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/pages/l-homme/dossiers-thematiques/1940-1944-la-seconde-guerre-mondiale/les-forces-francaises-libres/les-ffl/composition-des-ffl.php. Consulted 01/02/2017.

[3] See Miot. “Le retrait des tirailleurs sénégalais” 77-89. Miot considers the wealth of reasons that motivated the French military hierarchy to withdraw their Sub-Saharan African troops from service, from concerns over their ability to withstand the cold to worries about contact between such troops and the French population following incidents during the campaign of Italy.

[4] The estimated number of Dissidents varies between 2500 (Palcy and Jennings, “La dissidence aux Antilles”, 56) and 4500 (Chauvet in Macey, Frantz Fanon: a life, 80).

[5] This old colonies were conquered in the first period of French colonisation prior to the French Revolution.

[6] This is representative of the field of French colonial history in general where there is a greater focus on the former colonial territories of North and West Africa, especially those of Algeria and Senegal.

[7] For the sixtieth anniversary of the Provence landings (15/08/1944), President Chirac invited the leaders of all the former French colonies whose soldiers fought in the Forces Françaises Libres. There was no specific representative for the soldiers of the Antilles, La Réunion, New Caledonia or Tahiti.

[8] Vergès, “Overseas France”, 166-167.

[9] Palcy has also gained recognition as being the first female Black director to win a French César award and to be elected to the Council of the Oscars.

[10] Aimé Césaire: une voix pour le XXIe siècle/ Aimé Césaire: a Voice for History (Palcy, 1994)

[11] These twenty-one are composed of interviews with sixteen male and five female Dissidents. There are also interviews with two inhabitants of the British islands to which the Dissidents travelled, one with a fisherman from Saint Lucia and another with a banker from Dominica, which recount the arrival of the Dissidents on their islands. It has not been possible to discover how and why these interviewees were chosen, though it must be noted that fifty years after the end of the conflict, Palcy would have had to work with an ever-decreasing number of participants.

[12] Sempaire, La dissidence an tan Sorin, 17. I discuss the uses of the terms Dissident and Résistant in the Antillean context in more detail in my blog entry – “Dissidents or Résistants: What is in a name?”, www.frenchempireww2.wordpress.com, entry published 14/06/2016.

[13] Macey, Frantz Fanon: a life, 93.

[14] Stromberg Childers, Kristen. Seeking Imperialism's Embrace, p.35

[15] Macey, Frantz Fanon : a life, 103.
[16] Toureille. Julian. "La dissidence dans les Antilles françaises", 71.
[17] Jennings, "La dissidence aux Antilles", 71.
[18] Ibid, 72.
[19] Paech, "The Mummy Lives!", 59.
[20] Langlois, Suzanne, "Images that matter", 465
[21] Interview with Romain Letchoumaen, exact wording.
[22] http://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/media/pdf/cnrd_2004_complet.pdf, 9. Consulted 01/02/2017.
[23] Ellen Hampton, Women of Valor: The Rochambelles on the WWII Front, New York and London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. 1939-1945, combats de femmes : Françaises et Allemandes, les oubliées de l'histoire, Evelyne Morin-Rotureau (eds), Paris : Autrement : Ministère de la défense, Secrétariat général pour l'administration, Direction de la mémoire, du patrimoine et des archives, 2001. In a talk entitled "Femmes d'Outre-Mer dans la guerre" at the Musée du Général Leclerc de Hauteclocque et de la Libération de Paris on 10/03/2012, Christine Levisse-Touze, devoted only a few lines to the female Dissidents, but talked for more than twenty minutes about the Rochambelles.
[24] Deroo, Eric, La force noire. Thomas, The French Colonial Mind.
[25] Deroo, *L'Illusion colonial.*
[26] Childers, "Departmentalization, migration, and the politics of the family in the post-war French Caribbean", 187
[27] Despite their devotion to duty and their extraordinary achievements, many French (white) female fighters also struggled to gain official recognition at the Liberation.
[28] Henry Joseph has been one of the leading campaigners, in his role as President of the association for Dissidents and veterans of the FFL in Martinique, for state recognition of the role played by the Dissidents. He co-authored a history of La Dissidence with Lucien-René Abénon, Les dissidents des Antilles dans les Forces françaises libres combattantes, 1940-1945. Fort-de-France: Association des dissidents de la Martinique, 1999.
[29] The history of the Provence landings, on the webpage dedicated to the museum on the Chemins de Mémoire website, suggests that little has changed as of all the colonial troops involved in the landings it is only those from the Antilles who are not explicitly named. (http://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr/fr/memorial-du-debarquement-de-provence-mont-faron - consulted 10/01/2017).
[30] New musical arrangements for these wartime songs were written for the film's release.
[31] http://grands-entretiens.ina.fr/consulter/Shoah
[32] Simone Veil, Présidente de la Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah, December 2006, Press release for Grand Entretiens project. http://grands-entretiens.ina.fr/consulter/Shoah.
[33] Waterson, Roxanna, "Trajectories of Memory", 61.
[34] http://www.euzhanpalcy.fr/parcours-de-dissidents
[35] See Brett Bowles, "'Ça fait d'excellents montages': Documentary Technique in Le chagrin et la pitié", French Historical Studies, 31 (1) (Winter 2008): 117-158.
[36] The choice of Depardieu is problematic. Although the benefits in terms of publicity of using a well-known French actor can be imagined, he has no documented personal connection to either the Dissidents or the Antilles. It also echoes colonial stereotypes that the only legitimate voice of authority is that of the French.
[37] Jennings, "Monuments to Frenchness?", 566.
[38] It is only Fernand Aumis that wears his medals and the FFL insignia during his interview. One of these medals was awarded for his period of service during the Indochinese War (1946-54). The fact that he served for a longer period in the French army than most of the Dissidents would maybe have strengthened his connection to the French Army and influenced his decision to wear his medals.
[39] http://www.euzhanpalcy.net/the-journey-of-the-dissidents
[40] Vergès makes this claim about the colonial history of France's overseas territories more generally. Vergès, "Overseas France", 169.
[41] Both statements from Roger Gamess.
[42] Testimony of Roger Gamess.
[43] Testimony of Jeanne Catayée.
[44] Sempaire, La dissidence an tan Sorin, 24. Because of the limited number of studies into La Dissidence, it has proved impossible to gauge to what extent these Dissidents are representative of the entire wartime cohort.
[45] Muracciole, Jean-François, Les Français libres.
[46] France's civilising mission preached that France had the right and the duty to colonise in order to take civilisation to its colonies.
[47] It is difficult to arrive at a satisfactory translation for nègre.
[48] Macey, Frantz Fanon: a life, 96.
[49] Lagotien, quoted in Langlois, "Images that matter", 467.
[50] Langlois, "Images that matter", 467.

[51] Ibid, 471.
[52] Clement quoted in Langlois, "Images that matter", 472.
[53] Levaisseur, "De-essentializing the Banlieues", 97.
[54] Sandrine Lemaire, "National History, Colonial History, Parallel Stories", 426.
[55] Many of these historians have grouped together as part of the ACHAC association (www.achac.com). In the early 1990s, Benjamin Stora claimed that he wanted his documentary Années Algériennes to shock the French public to the same extent as Max Ophüls' Le Chagrin et la Pitié (1971). https://benjaminstora.univ-paris13.fr/index.php/articlesrecents/limage/339-le-documentaire-l-annees-algeriennes-r-par-guy-lagorce-in/-lexpress-10-septembre-1991.html, consulted 28/02/2017.
[56] There have been a series of memorial laws passed by the French parliament to legislate on the memory and commemoration of events such as Transatlantic slavery (Taubira law, 2001) and French colonisation (Mekachera law of 23 February 2005).
[57] Chabal, A divided republic, 74. On the Indigènes de la République see http://indigenes-republique.fr/, consulted 24/09/2017 and Lotem, "Anti-racist activism". The Representative Council of Black Associations - https://le-cran.fr/, consulted 24/09/2017.
[58] See Veyrat-Masson and Blanchard, Les guerres de mémoires, Stora, La guerre des mémoires and Gensburger, Sarah et Sandrine Lefranc. A quoi servent les politiques de mémoire?
[59] Foster, Women Film Directors, 297-298.
[60] http://www.euzhanpalcy.fr/
[61] Black and Thompson detail how the majority of the 1.2 million African-Americans who served in World War Two served in support units, and 'did not train, camp or serve with White soldiers', "A War within a War", 33-34.
[62] At least in the English language version of her website.
[63] Gill, "The films of Euzhan Palcy", 374.
[64] Black and Thomas, "A War within a War", 42.
[65] Screened on France Ô on 23/01/2006 at 8.35pm.
[66] Screened on France 3 on 7/5/2007 at 11pm.
[67] http://www.euzhanpalcy.fr/
[68]www.ac-paris.fr/portail/jcma/p2_927400/parcours-de-dissidents-lhistoire-meconnue-des-resistants-antillais-pendant-la-seconde-guerre-mondiale, consulted 20/11/2014.
[69] www.insee.fr/fr/themes/document.asp?ref_id=ip1389, consulted 04/02/2015.
[70] https://www.reseau-canope.fr/parcours-dissidents/
[71] This partial awarding of the Légion d'honneur to the Dissidents is in contrast during the Presidency of François Hollande, there has been a campaign to award the Légion d'honneur to all surviving Allied troops who took part in fighting in France in 1944/45. https://uk.ambafrance.org/Legion-d-honneur-for-British-World-War-II-veterans, consulted 24/09/2017.
[72] Aimé Césaire: A voice for history (Palcy, 1994). Screened at the Pantheon, Paris on 6/11/2011.
[73]http://www.francetvinfo.fr/france/debarquement-du-6-juin-1944/video-seconde-guerre-l-epopee-des-dissidents-antillais_617141.html
[74] http://www.martinique.pref.gouv.fr/content/download/5189/28582/file/Discours%20GPL-%20c
[75] See "Hollande au Chemin des Dames pour réconcilier « les mémoires" http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2017/04/17/hollande-au-chemin-des-dames-pour-reconcilier_5112488_823448.html#1vuMicWzyzMMvewG.99 (consulted 21/09/2017) and his speech on the 19 March 2016 for the Journée nationale du souvenir Algérie-Maroc-Tunisie. There has, as yet, been relatively little academic work published on the Hollande Presidency, apart from two special issues, Modern and Contemporary France 22: 4 (2014) and French Politics 12:2 (2014), which mainly looked at foreign and economic policy as well as his Presidential election campaign. Dr Jim House briefed the presidential team in advance of his Algeria speech of March 2016 and has provided me with an insight into debates around memory politics in the Elysée at this time. Nicola Firth has stated that Hollande has engaged in a policy of 'strategic forgetfulness in the name of national unity' in regards to the memory of slavery, by refusing to discuss the question of reparations. Firth, 'Saving the Republic', 218.

[76] http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/politique/20121017.OBS6031/comment-hollande-s-est-empare-du-devoir-de-memoire.html, consulted 21/09/2017.
[77] http://discours.vie-publique.fr/notices/177001044.html, consulted 21/09/2017.
[78] A small stele in memory of the Dissidents was affixed to the war memorial in Trois-Îlets (Martinique) in 2010.
[79] http://www.martinique.pref.gouv.fr/content/download/5189/28582/file/Discours%20GPL-%20c