

Academic Freedom under attack

France and the United Kingdom

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INTRODUCTION¹

Academic freedom (AF) came under attack in several countries at the beginning of the 21st century.² In the European Union (EU), when the buttressing of AF began first in its Eastern part,³ it was not anticipated that such a menace would expand westward, and all the way across the Channel, in post-Brexit Britain. France and the United Kingdom (UK or Britain in this report) can boast a long tradition of AF, but have recently joined the ranks of countries where academics and students feel that they might not be able to exercise the full freedom to teach, learn and research to which they aspire. Both countries have a long history of parliamentary democracy and their politics are broadly marked by a liberal ideology. Since 2010, the British conservative government has boosted its neoliberal policy (first introduced in 1979), while in France President Emmanuel Macron has been fast-tracking neoliberalism since 2017. Currently, the two countries are riddled with protests. In the meantime, France and Britain have experienced waves of attacks against AF, as analysed in this report. AF vulnerability, it should be noted, did not occur in a vacuum but in a general environment besieging other liberties as well. Thus, the present report first outlines the general political contexts framing these developments. We study the attacks against AF and academics in France and Britain. We pinpoint who are the main actors behind the attacks. We analyse the methods and contents of the attacks, and identify which categories of academics and which areas of research and teaching are targeted. We also examine how and on what grounds academics respond to these attacks.

The discussion that follows is premised upon two key postulates. First, that the production and dissemination of knowledge is a public good which benefits the whole of society (EHEA Rome 2020).⁴ Second, that scholarly research and researchers are subject to relations of power within and outside the university. Indeed, AF needs to be protected from interference from multiple sources, which can include governments, university administrators and trustees, funding bodies, business interests, pressure groups and lobbyists, politicians, political activists, religious forces, the media, hegemonic ideas and ideologies, and restrictive norms. This report is dedicated to AF in France and Britain, two countries which have displayed the highest level of concerted attacks from the state against AF in western Europe. This provides one strong reason for submitting them to closer scrutiny, with the added dimension that the study includes the testimony of one EU member and one country outside the EU. Moreover, Britain tends to be part of a wider Anglo-Saxon world that includes the USA. Those features might therefore permit some generalisation regarding liberal democracies.

This report remains limited in time and breadth. We circumscribed our study to France and Britain in the 21st century, countries which have witnessed an eruption of debates on AF. In France, we concentrate on the mandates of President Macron, from 2017 onwards, and in Britain, on the Conservative government from 2016. We have selected the most symptomatic episodes during this period rather than aim for an exhaustive survey. We highlight salient features pertaining to attacks and defence related to AF, through a few emblematic examples. The majority of our sources draw on the media wherein the voice of politicians, academics and other protagonists were conveyed. We also rely on some publications, communiques, legal texts and data gained from inside academia and other sources. Social media were not taken into consideration, as such rich data would deserve a report of their own.

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND

AF is part of broader socio-political developments. For several decades, the UK has been pursuing uninterrupted neoliberal economic policies, and France followed suit at a later stage. More recently in the 21st century, the two countries were targeted by terrorist attacks, followed by laws restricting democratic liberties. France and Britain have both witnessed the development of social movements in a challenge to austerity and neoliberal policies, while, in the wake of #Metoo and Black Lives Matter born across the Atlantic, anti-racist and feminist movements have attained renewed visibility in the two countries. Government responses to these events invariably have been laws and policies that impacted democratic freedom and AF.

France

Over the last decade, France was shaken by recurrent turmoil of various kinds, which public authorities answered through increasing restriction of democratic rights, whereby academics were also impacted. The year 2015 was traversed by a series of major terrorist attacks in Paris/Ile de France: Charlie Hebdo, (journal headquarters, 7 January), Hyper Cacher (supermarket, 8 January), four restaurants/Bistrots, one concert Hall (the Bataclan) and the Stade de France (13 November);⁵ and in Nice on 14 July 2016.⁶ This led to the introduction of a two-year long state of emergency promulgated on 20 November 2015 and prolonged six times.⁷ When the state of emergency ended in November 2017, many of its instruments were integrated into regular law, that brought about further encroachment into democratic processes (31 October 2015).⁸ Meanwhile, a wave of social disputes erupted in response to enhanced neoliberal policies (Ruffin 2022). In 2016, massive social protests were deployed against new labour legislation (8 August 2016).⁹ From the end of 2018 and well into 2019, an enduring and vast social movement, the ‘Gilets jaunes’ (Wieviorka 2021; Jeanpierre 2019), which retained high public support throughout, generated an insurrectional atmosphere that struck fear into the establishment.¹⁰ Societal issues with regards to racial discrimination and police violence were also taken up as testified by demonstrations which, although prohibited during Covid lockdown, brought out 20,000 people in one Parisian rally, to demand the truth about the death of a young Black man at the hands of the police four years earlier (19 March 2022).¹¹ The Pension Reform Bill mobilized hundreds of thousands opposing it in late 2019.¹² These demonstrations were accompanied by an escalation of police violence that jeopardized the freedom to demonstrate through hardened police doctrine, and the use of lethal semi-war weapons, condemned by several international bodies in 2019.¹³ An even greater menace to democratic freedom arose with the passing of a comprehensive law on general security, ‘*Loi sur la sécurité globale*’ (Law on General Security, May 2021).¹⁴ Moreover, in 2020, new decrees allowed the police to retain a large amount of data, not only on people’s activities but also on their opinions pertaining to philosophy, trade-unionism, religion, politics and health.¹⁵ Other human rights were jeopardized. In the field of asylum, France was condemned by the European Court of Human Right with regards to asylum seekers gathered around Calais (dubbed ‘the Calais jungle’) (February 2019),¹⁶ and a legal investigation is currently ongoing about asylum-seekers drowned in the Channel because they were not rescued (November 2022).¹⁷ In addition, the government overstepped Parliament and

democratic debates through the repeated use of *Ordonnances*¹⁸ and the Constitution's Article 49.3, making it possible to summarily force through laws that ought to have been debated in Parliament. By 16 March 2023, the 49.3 had been used 11 times¹⁹ since September 2022. Resistance to neoliberal policies was again illustrated by repeated demonstrations and strikes, which brought several million protesters out in the street against the 2023 pension reform (whose adoption became possible through the 49.3²⁰). Last but not least, the Covid pandemic period resulted in multiple restrictions to the freedom of movement and gathering. These generated modes of governance which further limited the democratic functioning of French society. Indeed, under the *Etat d'urgence sanitaire* (State of Public Health Emergency), much of the political and legislative decision-making took place outside the National Assembly, and within a *Conseil de Defence* (Defence Council) installed by the President in 2020.²¹

The second leg of state action pertains to a cultural war, linked to older and continuing political controversies on immigrants and national history in French society. The first political party that depicted as dangerous the presence of immigrants from former colonies was the *Front national*, renamed *Rassemblement national* in 2018 (National Rally) (Bertossi 2016; Wieviorka 1992). The main right-wing party, by the current name of *Les Républicains* (The Republicans), soon followed suit, seizing upon the 'problem of communalism' (Joly 2007), which it pitched against '*la République indivisible*', (the indivisible Republic, Article 1 of the French Constitution).²² Thereafter, the Socialist Party joined ranks with these other parties on the battlefield of *laïcité*²³ and Islam (Baubérot 2014). Indeed, the question of immigrants and Islam occupy front stage in the political arena and gave rise to a number of laws and Circulars, which largely crystallized around Muslim women's dress code (Joly and Wadia 2017).²⁴ These laws and policies garner a major reinterpretation of *laïcité* towards greater restrictions of religious practice, which all target Islam and Muslims. Furthermore, the deleterious image of Islam and Muslims was heightened after the 2015 terrorist attacks and the murder of a history teacher in October 2020. This was translated into the *Loi confortant les principes de la République* (Law strengthening the Republic's principles) (24 August 2021),²⁵ and its clause on an obligation of 'engagement républicain' (commitment to the Republic), imposed on all associations that receive public funding. We shall see that the government attempted to impose a similar commitment to academics, thereby striking AF. Moreover, other laws and policies concur to control immigration and asylum. These issues have largely dominated public debates in the last 20 years and feed political discourse from the extreme right to the social democratic left and also the media, generating a kind of moral panic about Islam. These few examples although non-exhaustive, suffice to make the point. This report is not the place to elaborate on the multiple facets of such long-standing polemics. However, it is worth establishing that they provide major underpinnings to current threats against AF, since the targets of attacks are academics who research into germane areas, such as Islam and Muslims, as analysed below. These developments will assume all their significance in the discussion on the French government's offensive against academics, which combines neoliberal policies with a cultural war.

The United Kingdom

The UK was, much earlier than France, subjected to neoliberal policies (from 1979 onwards), and hit by terrorist attacks. The murderous 7 July 2005 bombs in the London public transport brought about its own trail of anti-terrorist legislation and Islamophobia (Kapoor 2013: 1030). However, the question of Islam has receded in the face of Brexit debates since the 2016 referendum on EU membership, although this did not deter protest on racial and religious discrimination issues, against the Windrush scandal, anti-Islamic hate crimes, and asylum policy (respectively in May 2018, April 2018, and January 2023).²⁶ What recently came to the fore was the questioning of austerity and neoliberal policies through numerous strikes and protests, after decades of undisputed ideological domination since the 1979 Thatcher government. This gave rise, in 2022–2023, to reawakened countless protests and strikes *inter alia* on the railway, the underground, in the Royal Mail, schools, universities, hospitals (nurses and doctors), British Airways, the public service, etc.²⁷ In their wake, an anti-strike bill is being processed (March 2023)²⁸ and legislation was put in place to strengthen police powers: the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022,²⁹ which includes the offence of ‘intentionally or recklessly causing public nuisance’; augmented with the Covert Human Intelligence Sources (Criminal Conduct) Act 2021.³⁰ A new Bill of Rights was introduced to the House of Commons in June 2022 to repeal and replace the Human Rights Act 1998;³¹ it has been argued that one of its aims was to curtail the implementation of the European Court on Human Rights.³² The Bill has reached its second reading in 2023. This panoply of new restrictive laws and measures undermine democratic freedoms of which AF is an integral part.

Nonetheless, what mostly destabilized the establishment and the Conservative government was the unexpected wave of support garnered by the Labour Party’s radical anti-austerity programme in 2017. The stupefaction arising from the Labour Party’s better than expected 2017 elections results, and the popularity of the left-wing Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn, engineered a large-scale and successful offensive to discredit the latter. This coalesced around a campaign nourished by allegations of anti-Semitism, exacerbated and amplified by both partisan competition between Labour and Conservatives, and intra-partisan conflict within Labour itself (Shaw 2021). The Conservative government adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism in 2016,³³ which, as seen below, impacted academics and AF. Meanwhile, the government initiated new laws and other initiatives to better consolidate its power. The Judicial Review and Courts Act 2022³⁴ introduced limits to courts’ prerogatives and, according to the Law Society, it posed the risk to ‘ringfence government decisions beyond the reach of the courts’.³⁵ Likewise, the Elections Act 2022³⁶ was held by the Electoral Reform Society as a ‘government assault to democracy’.³⁷ Finally, the UK ‘hostile environment policy’ for immigrants, announced by Theresa May, Home Secretary in 2012,³⁸ led to the Windrush scandal that began in 2018,³⁹ and the initiative to transfer asylum-seekers off shore to Rwanda in 2022. The latter was suspended on account of a European Court of Justice decision but it has been brought back on the agenda in 2023.⁴⁰

Unlike France, Britain has had a well-established anti-discrimination policy and recognition of ethnic and religious minorities since the late 1960s (Joly 2007). Furthermore the Scarman Report 1981⁴¹ and MacPherson Report 1999⁴² had led to recognition at the highest level of government that structural racism underpinned the

racial and social disadvantage of ethnic minorities. However, these two reports were seriously undermined by the Cabinet's Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparity (CRED) and its Sewell Report, attributing the disadvantage of ethnic minorities largely to family, culture and religion (March 2021).⁴³ This publication drew the disapproval of the UN High Commission on Human Rights which stated: 'Stunningly, the Report also claims that, while there might be overt acts of racism in the UK, there is no institutional racism. The Report offers no evidence for this claim' (April 2021).⁴⁴ Moreover, a major research project directly challenged the findings of the government-commissioned Sewell Report and it argued the latter downplayed the existence and impact of structural and institutional racism in the UK. The survey found 'strikingly high' levels of exposure to abuse across a wide range of ethnic minority groups, as well as a high prevalence of racial discrimination and inequality of outcomes in education, the workplace, housing and interactions with the police.⁴⁵

Naturally, these few lines on the French and British contexts are not a survey of the general situation in these countries, but focus on a few freedom-related dimensions in order to present the background which surrounds AF. The scene has now been set for addressing the object of this report: AF in France and Britain at the beginning of the 21st century.

ATTACKS ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM

The production, transmission, dissemination and use of knowledge invariably take place in a particular social context and are subject to power relations. So is Academic Freedom, which furnishes the bedrock to such production. This section is dedicated to the different modes of pressure that have been used to control or undermine academics in the exercise of their AF in France and Britain, and outlines a repertoire of the forms and contents of attacks against AF. The agitation and media coverage concerning protests against particular lectures and seminars, and students' agitation (Wieviorka 2021), is not the object of this report which primarily deals with threats from political and government actors. The state may use several methods to attack AF and academia: managing funding in a particular way, controlling academics through regulations, pressure on institutions and laws; delegitimizing and intimidating through discourse and threats in multiple forms such as laws, decrees, investigations, etc. Even when attacks do not take the shape of laws or regulations, the establishment of pervasive norms instituted through dominant narratives casts doubts or suspicions on the scientific value of academics' findings. This is a process which has been called 'infra-laws' by a French constitutionalist lawyer (January 2022).⁴⁶ As a consequence, the recurrent disparagement of academics by politicians or other sources, reflected in the media, may eventually result in the perceived non-acceptability of some research themes and findings, which in turn may also lead to self-censorship. Broadly speaking, academics in France and Britain have been targeted through a double economic and cultural front of attacks emanating from the state, in other words through policing resources and policing ideas.

France

Neoliberal policy and the Law on Programming Research

Adequate resources are central to quality teaching and research. Higher education funding in France has not been commensurate with the increase in students' numbers.⁴⁷ In addition, employment stability in higher education continues to be jeopardized with between 30% and 70% precarious posts in universities, according to sectors concerned.⁴⁸ In April 2023, it was revealed that 60% of teaching staff held precarious contracts, twice the amount of staff on permanent contracts.⁴⁹ Adding to this recurrent predicament, a new law governing universities and research, *Loi de programmation de la recherche* (Law on Programming Research, 2020), promulgated on 24 December 2020, seems to have aggravated the situation, opting for a funding agenda guided by a clear neoliberal orientation.⁵⁰ This law put forward the principle of competition both between individual researchers and between Higher Education Institutions. The competitive agenda behind the law was heralded by Antoine Petit, president of the *Centre national de la recherche scientifique* (CNRS, National Centre for Scientific Research), who praised 'an ambitious, unequal law – yes unequal, a virtuous, Darwinian law that stimulates the most internationally performing scientists, teams, laboratories' (November 2019).⁵¹ The Law did not increase the number of *Maîtres de conférences* (lecturers) and Professors' posts, which are secure civil service positions, but endorsed the creation of two different types of temporary positions. This new scenario is likely to fragment the teaching corps, weaken the stability and continuity of research and teaching; and it will unquestionably deteriorate the safety of employment. Finally, it can be surmised that staff on temporary contracts might not feel free to engage in critical scrutiny of the establishment, for fear of losing their jobs.⁵² In addition, the choice of a 10-year funding plan without front-loaded resources raised concern.⁵³ These few examples give some clues about a much vaster field dealing with the political economy of AF.

Policing ideas

An ideological war against AF was explicitly launched by government representatives, with some allies from academia. A red thread runs through the socio-political and academic realms and shows up the crisscrossing between the two domains. It seems that in order to attack academics, political and government circles have found some allies in academia itself, and reciprocally: representatives of the state have combined with, and supported, a posse of academics against AF.⁵⁴ Government's attempts at controlling researchers through regulatory/legal mechanisms were not successful, as seen below. Consequently, anti-AF devices were contrived to delegitimize and intimidate academics. Social sciences and humanities have been in the eye of the cyclone and, in particular, academics who developed specific research themes and theoretical approaches; namely, Islam, racism and race, slavery, colonialism and gender. This is what we examine below.

The ground for the offensive linking academia and Islam has been laid *mezzo voce* for a while. One important milestone was the creation of a political movement, which brought together politicians, journalists and some prominent academics, namely the *Printemps républicain* (Republican Spring) founded in March 2016. This movement targets the extreme-right and political Islamism and poses as a champion of *laïcité* and the Republic; it claims to combat ‘deleterious ideologies’ dispensed by alleged ‘identity entrepreneurs’.⁵⁵ Its creation was followed by and directly linked with *Vigilance Universités* (University Vigilance), which constitutes the academic leg of the Republican Spring. However, the general offensive against AF was triggered by President Macron’s statement on social sciences, within the scope of a cornerstone speech on Islam (Les Mureaux, 2 October 2020), that was the launching pad for a major law on ‘Separatism’, directed at Muslims and Islam in French society.⁵⁶ On that occasion, he made a point of introducing a disparaging comment on ‘certain theories in social science’, and blamed the university for the ‘ethnicization of the social question’ (11 June 2020).⁵⁷ This appears to have given a signal to further attacks in both the political and academic worlds, which initially crystallized around notions linked to Islam and Muslims, and were instrumental in turning the academics targeted by these accusations into an ‘enemy from within’; an operation that several academics have equated to a newly found form of McCarthyism (May 2021).⁵⁸ Accusations of *islamo-gauchisme* (Islamism-Leftism) became a kind of rallying cry against universities in the discourse of several government Ministers. It began on 22 October 2020, with then Minister of Education, Jean-Michel Blanquer, who condemned Islamism-Leftism, both in the university and in the ranks of a political party, *La France insoumise* (France Unbowed) on Radio Europe 1: ‘What one calls Islamism-Leftism is wreaking havoc [...] It is wreaking havoc at university, it is wreaking havoc when, in the ranks of *La France insoumise*, you find people of this tendency [...]. These people promote an ideology, which, little by little, leads to the worst possibility.’⁵⁹ Blanquer then moved on to be more ‘inclusive’ through a broad condemnation of social sciences in general (25 October 2020).⁶⁰ These declarations were followed by a group of 100 academics and journalists, also clamouring against ‘Islamism-Leftism’ (*Le Monde*, 31 October 2020).⁶¹ MPs from *Les Républicains* (LR, The Republicans) joined in to denounce, *inter alia*, powerful Islamism-Leftism trends in higher education and requested a mission of parliamentary information (a kind of inquiry, 25 November 2020).⁶² The LR MP for Vaucluse, Julien Aubert, even attacked *ad hominem* seven University members on the same basis (November 2020).⁶³

The cycle continued with attacks in the political arena, akin to what constitutes a core component of the main thrust of attacks against academics, namely *laïcité* and Islam. It is worth noting that *laïcité* was erected as a standard bearer of the Republic by President Jacques Chirac (July 2007), and was identified by some researchers as the main tool utilised to earmark Islam and Muslims as the ‘other’ in France (Bertossi 2016). It was also advanced that this confirmed the perception of Islam not only as a potential source of terrorism but also as a cultural threat to ‘our’ civilisation, pitching ‘them’ against ‘us’ (Bertossi 2016). On the one hand, the government regained total control of the official discourse on *laïcité*, closing down the Independent Observatory of *Laïcité* on 31 March 2021. Its president, Jean-Louis Bianco, who had been denounced for ‘tolerance towards Islamism’, did not hesitate to declare: ‘We disturb a good number

of people because we are independent’ (*France Inter*, 4 April 2021).⁶⁴ In lieu of this independent Observatory, the *Comité interministériel de la laïcité* (the Interministerial Committee on *Laïcité*) was set up on 4 June 2021 (Decree 2021-716), and falls directly under the aegis of the Prime Minister.⁶⁵ On the other hand, in January 2021, the *Observatoire du décolonialisme et des idéologies identitaires* (Observatory of Decolonialism)⁶⁶ was set up with the backing of Education Minister Blanquer. It clearly drew from and strengthened the broad theme first denounced in Macron’s speech at Les Mureaux (October 2020, mentioned above). Contrary to what its title might imply, the Observatory of Decolonialism is not designed to engage in decolonial studies but to combat them, and it released an undisguised attack against academia with the support of a few academics.⁶⁷ To that end, the Observatory of Decolonialism report is said to have listed out around 800 writings somehow related to any kind of discrimination, or themes to do with equality, racism, sexism or intersectionality, including historical and theoretical ones.⁶⁸ The noose continued to tighten around academics and culminated with then Minister of Universities and Research (*ministre de l’Enseignement supérieur de la Recherche et de l’Innovation*), Frédérique Vidal, announcing on CNews (14 February 21) that she had asked the CNRS to carry out an investigation into Islamo-Leftism in the universities; she later confirmed this in the National Assembly (16 February 21).⁶⁹ Vidal went as far as stating that Islamo-Leftism spread as a ‘gangrene’ in universities, an epidemiological term with eschatological overtones; in our view, it could indeed be inferred that the investigation she requested into this alleged phenomenon was designed to eradicate all those who were carriers of the disease. She also claimed that ‘some academics were hindered by others in the conduct of their research’.⁷⁰ This was reinforced by Minister of the Interior, Gerald Darmanin who extended his support to Vidal on the condemnation of Islamo-Leftism in the university (21 February 2021).⁷¹ These declarations cannot be taken lightly in a country that had been hit several times by terrorist violence, causing the loss of numerous lives. In this respect, the most lethal blow was from Education Minister Blanquer who had explicitly condemned some academics for ‘projecting a world vision on our society that converges with the interests of Islamists’ (25 October 2020).⁷² This allegation was far from inconsequential, and in order to fully appreciate its potency, it is worth pointing out that it was uttered shortly after the decapitation of a school teacher by an Islamist terrorist (16 October 2020), an event which sent shockwaves of horror throughout French society.⁷³ The Education Minister cast the same accusation against a student union, *Union nationale des étudiants de France* (UNEF), who according to him was ‘promoting an ideology that leads to the worst’.⁷⁴

Values against science

On another level, various arguments were advanced to disparage academics and portray them as a danger. The political establishment claimed the moral high ground and erected jealously guarded ‘higher values’, as a means to condemn a number of academic concepts, epistemologies and themes of research. Although we concentrate on president Macron’s mandates in this report, it is useful to quote earlier attempts to curb research on moral grounds. Commenting on riots that tore France apart in November 2005, former President Nicolas Sarkozy indicted and discarded scholarly efforts to analyse the riots for ‘excusing what was inexcusable’.⁷⁵ This position was replicated by then Prime Minister Manuel Valls, who after the 2015 terrorist attacks declared for the benefit of researchers that ‘explaining is already tantamount to wanting to excuse’.⁷⁶

President Macron adopted a similar position and blamed social scientists for ‘breaking up the Republic into two parts’, condemning their ‘ethnicization of the social question which can only lead to secessionism’ (*Le Monde* 11 June 2020).⁷⁷ Conveying his alarm in the face of ‘a society that is being racialised’, he then cast off the ‘intersectional approach’ because, in his view, it caused fractures in society and stood against French ‘universalism’.⁷⁸ It is useful to situate these attacks within the general political context in France: President Macron was seeking the support of a large political spectrum on the right, in a competition with Marine Le Pen’s extreme right National Rally (*Rassemblement National*). The same thread of thought was followed by the Minister of Education who accused academics of jeopardizing the ‘republican model’ (October 2020).⁷⁹ Some academics followed suit, going as far as to call for the ‘political control’ of those not in conformity with republican ideals, as well as measures of detection to report on such cases (Wieviorka 2021: 307). This issue raised such important stakes that an amendment, supported by the Universities Minister, was introduced by Senator Laure Darcos into the 2020 Bill on Programming Research, to the effect that ‘academic freedom is exercised in the respect of the values of the Republic’; its aim was to write into law that these ‘values, *laïcité* being the first one, constitute the bedrock on which academic freedom rests and within which it is expressed’.⁸⁰ In our opinion, had this amendment been adopted, it would have meant that a number of research areas were kept out of academics’ critical scrutiny, such as the Republic itself and any ‘republican values’, that the governing powers might decide were closed to critical examination and study by social scientists. Although criticisms generally concentrated on academic staff throughout this period, students were also subject to serious condemnations, as when Minister of Education Blanquer denounced the internal activities of a students’ union whose non-mixed meetings, he considered, led to ‘something that resembles fascism’; thereby suggesting that it constituted a threat to French democracy (March 2021).⁸¹ Last but not least, Minister of the Interior Darmanin pursued his own crusade, proclaiming that he was not going to ‘yield to the intellectual terrorism of the extreme-left, which reverses values’ (*Journal du Dimanche* 2 April 2023).⁸²

Alien social science

It appears that a number of research approaches and themes have become politically undesirable. According to President Macron, some social theories were unwelcome because of their foreign character, because they pertained to ‘the Anglo-Saxon tradition [with] another history, which is not ours’ and were identified as ‘totally imported from the United States with their problems’ (October 2020).⁸³ The theories Macron referred to were subsequently itemised and sometimes presented as the object of an ideological combat. The Education Minister set up the Laboratoire de la République (Laboratory of the Republic, 13 October 2021), with the objective of ‘winning the battle of ideas’, particularly in the academic field, ‘that had to suffer the thrust of wokism and cancel culture’.⁸⁴ These accusations were largely reflected in the right-wing media, such as by *Le Figaro* (19 February 2021), attacking *ad hominem* academics, journalists and writers in a condemnation of ‘wokism’, ‘race’ and ‘gender’.⁸⁵ In January 2022, an entire conference that included 60 essayists and researchers was organised with the backing of the Education Minister to ‘reconstruct social sciences and culture’ against the threat posed by a number of research themes and approaches, leading to the concerted condemnation of the very items earlier tackled by government representatives: namely

pell-mell, cancel culture, race, decolonial thought, gender theory, intersectionality, neo-feminism and ecofeminism.⁸⁶ One participant even equated ‘wokism’ with an ‘ethnocide’.⁸⁷ For the sake of transparency, we should note that this conference’s funding came from the Observatory of Decolonialism. We can observe that the notions alleged to be imported from the USA and strongly criticised are at no point defined or explicated by their detractors. With regards to the ‘national’ character of acceptable social research and the dangers attached to importing US trends, one might wish to refer to Lilti (2019) on the back and forth of some concepts; he suggests that the presumed US gender theory actually found its origin in France. Moreover, countering those who fear the dangers emanating from academics who use concepts such as wokism and cancel culture, Lilti (2019) points instead to the ‘cancel culture’ exercised by the extreme right. Political discourse against academics was taken up in the media and social media with a vengeance, unleashing an avalanche of threats against academics, *ad hominem*, and including at least one death threat denounced in *Le Monde* (21 December 2022).⁸⁸

Militant ideology and ‘pseudo-science’

An important marker used to disqualify academics consists in denying the scientific validity of their research. This is what happened when academics were charged with pursuing an ideological rather than a scientific agenda. Vidal, Universities Minister, declared that the investigation she had requested from the CNRS aimed to identify ‘what stemmed from activism’ among academics, thus casting doubts on the legitimacy of their research. She subsequently made it more explicit, stating that ‘there are people in universities who can use their titles and aura [...] to convey radical or militant ideas’ (Senate, 16 January 2021).⁸⁹ In our view, this was as good as accusing them of intellectual dishonesty, if not worse. In the same vein, the Observatory of Decolonialism declared that one of its aims was to fight ‘pseudo-science’, a goal thereafter substantiated in its 2021 report, entitled ‘Report on Ideological Manifestations in Research and at University’ (22 January 2021).⁹⁰ French MPs Julien Aubert and Damien Abad, from the LR party, also denounced ‘ideological drifts’ in university circles (December 2020).⁹¹

In the wake of Government Ministers, a few academics took up the very same formulation, indicting an ‘activist agenda’ in the university, that they claimed ‘led astray teaching and research ‘through ‘courses, articles, seminars, conferences’ that are ‘nothing more than activism’. To which they added the condemnation of what they called ‘pseudo-science’ (22 February 2021).⁹² The same type of denunciation was explicated by an art specialist in a radio interview. She spoke of the threats from within, resulting from the ‘penetration of ideologies cultivating the porosity of frontiers between knowledge and opinion, between scientific truth and belief and between political conviction and the reproduction and transmission of knowledge’ (May 2021).⁹³ These allegations constitute a serious blow to academics’ authority, since it is broadly accepted that denying the scientific quality of an academic’s work is nothing short of a disqualifying coup de grace. Some themes of research were disparaged as ‘unscientific’, with the claim that they did not constitute a legitimate object of research. Such an argument was put forward regarding studies of racism: social research into the performativity of the notion of race and racial discrimination did not appear legitimate in the eyes of the Universities Minister since ‘in biology, we have known for a long

time that races do not exist' (January 2021).⁹⁴ Similarly, the term 'Islamophobia' was largely judged as too inadequate to be submitted to interrogation from a scientific point of view, on the grounds it did not appropriately express social reality; moreover, connotations of suspicion have been attached to those who study it.⁹⁵ Mockery and trivialisation were also used as additional tools of disqualification when applied to some epistemologies or areas of research: following on from the politicians' denigrating comments mentioned above, some academics published a tribune wherein they labelled the study of 'state racism' a 'woolly theory', they called the concept of 'whiteness' a 'flashy neologism' and they derided researchers who adopted an intersectional approach for 'their discovery of the moon' (*Le Monde* 2 February 2021).⁹⁶

The United Kingdom

Neoliberalism against AF

In Britain, AF has suffered under an enhanced neoliberal approach that has guided budgetary decisions. Although this report is not the appropriate place for a study of public funding awarded to universities, it is worth quoting a Parliament Research Briefing on higher education funding in England that delivers recent figures displaying a particularly sharp fall: 'the 2021–22 total for teaching is 78% below the 2010–11 figure in real terms'.⁹⁷ This has entailed the reduction or elimination of courses and departments, complete with the planning of redundancies. The government imposed a 50% funding cut to arts subjects at higher education (HE) level in England in 2021. In his letter to the Office for Students (OfS), which distributes government funding, former Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson explained: 'The OfS should reprioritise funding towards the provision of high-cost, high-value subjects [...] We would then potentially seek further reductions in future years'.⁹⁸

Several disciplines were particularly affected, such as social science and art subjects, management studies and political economy.⁹⁹ A few examples will suffice to illustrate the outcome of such a policy. In May 2021, the University of Leicester handed compulsory redundancy notices to 26 members of staff across several schools and departments (Arts, Business, Neuroscience, Psychology and Behaviour), which included staff from student services and four members of library staff. The Vice Chancellor justified this move by the need to manage resources efficiently.¹⁰⁰ In October 2021, Goldsmith College announced 52 professional and academic staff redundancies, initially in the departments of History, English and Creative Writing, with forthcoming threats to the Centre for Caribbean and Diaspora Studies, the Centre for Philosophy and Critical Thought, the Decadence Research Centre, the Centre for Comparative Literature, the Centre for the Study of the Balkans, the Centre of the Body, and the Centre for Queer History.¹⁰¹ In July 2021, Sheffield University confirmed the closure of the archaeology department.¹⁰² Four staff redundancies hit the University of East London in February 2021, to be added to 82 staff cuts from the previous year.¹⁰³ Furthermore, the reduction of funding was accompanied by the casualisation of staff: in UK universities, around 75,000 academic staff are on insecure, temporary contracts, whilst 18% of institutions employ staff using zero hours contracts. The University and College Union (UCU) contended that such funding and employment policies severely undermined AF, 'one of the fundamental pillars of excellence in teaching and research',

as stated by the Joint Committee of Experts of UNESCO and the International Labour Organization, which also raised concerns about both ‘political interference and deference to market-driven priorities’, and particularly policies to ensure ‘value for money’ (March 2022).¹⁰⁴ As for students, they had been directly impacted since 2010, when home students’ fees were raised to 9,000 pounds a year.

Control, delegitimize and intimidate

The second leg of the offensive against AF in the UK involves the control, intimidation and discrediting of academics. It sometimes took the shape of laws and regulations, while also operating through political discourse and menace. The Conservative government set out to control academics through two main instruments, complete with sanctions attached. The most powerful blow lies in the legislative field in the shape of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Law presented by the government in 2021 and entering into effect in 2023. In the regulatory domain, the government put pressure on universities to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) and threatened sanctions if they failed to do so.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, these instruments were accompanied with different methods that delegitimated and intimidated academics, a process also fed by various additional actors, including students and some academics. As in France, the main thrust of the attacks bears on social sciences and humanities.

Higher values trump scientific enquiry

Government circles called upon ‘higher values’ to disqualify some research approaches and themes. First, national history and the memory of the British Empire were highlighted as areas imperilled by scientific investigations. At the Universities UK Conference (8 September 2021), Williamson, then Education Minister, launched a frontal assault on universities with the accusation that they ‘seem more interested in pursuing a divisive agenda involving cancelling national heroes, debating about statues, anonymous reporting schemes for so-called micro-aggressions and politicising their curricula’.¹⁰⁶ In a move to counter research on national values, the academics concerned had their lectures cancelled, were ‘stepped down’ from a position, or kept out of a post; all of which are measures belonging to a panoply of undeclared control and intimidation. For instance, Professor Priyamvada Gopal, from Churchill College (Cambridge), a scholar of British colonial history, saw her invitation withdrawn to speak to Home Office officials on the links between the Department’s policies and recent colonial history, including the Windrush nationality scandal (October 2021). The right-wing politics blog, Guido Fawkes, claimed credit for the cancellation.¹⁰⁷ In May 2021, then culture secretary, Oliver Dowden refused to reappoint to the Royal Museums Greenwich Board, Dr Aminul Hoque (Goldsmith College), an advocate of decolonising the curriculum, amid reports of a government-sanctioned culture war.¹⁰⁸ On another occasion, a report produced for the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty (National Trust) on the wealth it accrued from colonialism and slavery, attracted the ire of 50 conservative MPs, alongside historians such as Andrew Roberts who indicted the trust for ‘wokery’. These MPs took exception to the report’s references to Winston Churchill’s role in colonial administration and his opposition to Indian independence. In addition, it was announced that Corinne Fowler, Professor of colonialism and heritage, who had been involved in the National Trust report, might be barred from further research funding.¹⁰⁹ This led her to caution that ‘academics working

in the humanities have begun to be personally targeted’ and that attempts were being made ‘to misrepresent, mischaracterise, malign and intimidate academics in clear efforts to damage the professional reputations of people for evidence-based scholarship’.¹¹⁰

Additional clues help to elucidate what academics may come up against, and give a clear indication of what are deemed undesirable themes of research; such was the reprimand addressed to the National Trust by Dowden, then Secretary of State for Culture, when he summoned 25 independent heritage bodies and charities to Whitehall for a ‘summit’ at which they were castigated for ‘doing Britain down’ – in other words, disparaging the most sacred value, Britain itself.¹¹¹ Another injunction, even more telling, was addressed to schools and school teachers, namely the Department of Education’s extensive Guidance Note on school’s political impartiality. It focused on schools’ duty to keep out ‘partisan’ views, such as ‘topics relating to empire and imperialism, on which there are differing partisan political views, and which should be taught in a balanced manner’. The Guidance Note then warned against teaching about specific campaigning organisations, such as the Black Lives Matter movement, drawing attention to the fact that this might cover ‘partisan political views’. One particular line disclosed the spirit of the whole document, comparable to what is mentioned above about France: according to the Guidance Note, discourses and contributors are permitted ‘provided they do not undermine fundamental British values’. Nor should schools promote ‘victim narratives that are harmful to British society’ (a phrase directed at critical race theory, as seen below).¹¹² The Conservative government dealt a momentous blow to universities and academics when it called into question their respect of free speech, a charge judged serious enough to warrant the introduction of a law of its own. Moreover, it went as far as evoking a potential menace to democracy emanating from academics. The government expressed its concern and ‘upheld’ freedom of speech as a central ‘value’ anchored in democracy, ‘the lifeblood of democracy and the cornerstone of a free and liberal society’, in the words of Williamson, Education Secretary, when he presented the Higher Education: Free Speech and Academic Freedom Bill (popularly known as the Freedom of Speech Bill) to Parliament (February 2021).¹¹³ In the same vein, Michelle Donelan, former Universities Minister, heralded freedom of speech as a fundamental value of which ‘Britain is the home’ and expressed her alarm at the growing threat that ‘academic freedom in universities was being undermined in a way that endangered our entire democracy’ (speech to the Policy Exchange, a conservative think tank, in April 2022).¹¹⁴ This exemplifies the tone which pervades government debates on freedom of speech and universities. Standing up against alleged pernicious trends in academia, the government accordingly submitted the Higher Education: Free Speech and Academic Freedom Bill in 2021, with the imperative ‘to protect freedom of speech on campuses up and down the country, for students, academics and visiting speakers [...] and help to stamp out unlawful silencing’.¹¹⁵ Justifications for this bill were communicated in stark terms from Education Secretary Williamson who advanced the need of ‘countering the chilling effect of censorship on campus once and for all’, citing examples of ‘students, staff and invited speakers feeling unable to speak out’. He also exposed plans to ‘hold universities to account’.¹¹⁶ In the same breath, Williamson posited free speech as a ‘basic human right’.¹¹⁷ The tenor of such discourse clearly implied that universities, academics and students had violated highly prized values such as freedom of speech, democracy and human rights, so that it had become necessary to

regulate and control their activities. Presented to Parliament by Secretary of State for Education in February 2021, the Freedom of Speech Bill passed the House of Commons on 13 June 2022 and the Lords on 13 December 2022.¹¹⁸ After being amended in the Commons and the Lords, the Bill received Royal assent on 11 May 2023 and is awaiting implementation.¹¹⁹

The Bill proposed a tightening up and strengthening of the duties of Higher Education Providers (HEP), with regards to free speech. It can be summarized as follows. A Free Speech and Academic Freedom Champion will be appointed as a member of the Office for Students (OfS) Board with responsibility to enforcing free speech and to monitor and investigate alleged breaches related to freedom of speech and AF. The Champion will also make recommendations on potential breaches to the OfS Board, with a view to issuing sanctions; and will have a role in ensuring that individuals whose freedom of speech has been unlawfully suppressed within a higher education context are able to secure redress. The OfS will be able to apply sanctions, including fines, to Higher Education Provider and Students' Unions that breach the requirements imposed on them in relation to free speech. The HEPs will have a duty to promote freedom of speech on campus for members, students and employees of the establishment, and for visiting speakers. The Bill covers any space occupied by a Students Union (SU), a clause that epitomises a significant rupture with former legislation, since SUs will see, for the first time, legal duties applying to HEP extended to them. Finally, a statutory tort has been introduced that would give any private individual a right of redress and compensation for loss.¹²⁰

The enemy within

Historically, one well-worn technique used against intellectuals consists of conjuring up the danger of an enemy within, and 'protecting' those whom it endangers. A number of academics and their research approaches were submitted to processes of this kind. For instance, Kemi Badenoch, then Undersecretary on Equality, denounced critical race theory (CRT) and purported to stand in defence of black minorities, on the grounds that such theory was 'associating being black with negativity, oppression and victimhood in an inescapable way. It's creating a prison for black people'.¹²¹ Incidentally, these comments concurred with the CRED report published in March 2021 (see above) that she defended,¹²² but which tried to 'normalise white supremacy', in the words of a UN human rights expert who also cited considerable research and evidence of institutional racism.¹²³ The allegedly perilous character of research was clearly signified when, at the end of Black History Month (October 2020), Badenoch asserted in the House of Commons that 'the government stands unequivocally against critical race theory', which, she professed, represented a 'dangerous trend'.¹²⁴ She also claimed to defend British social cohesion, when she criticised authors drawing on CRT (Robin DiAngelo and Reni Eddo-Lodge), who, she maintained 'actually want a segregated society'.¹²⁵

Another significant area whereby AF is threatened involves issues of anti-Semitism. On 12 December 2016, the UK Government formally adopted the IHRA working definition of anti-Semitism and its 11 examples of anti-Semitism. This had a significant impact on AF as the government put pressure on universities to adopt this particular definition.¹²⁶ At least, one hundred of them did so and several events on related questions were cancelled on campuses.¹²⁷ In 2019, the UN addressed anti-Semitism as

a human rights issue.¹²⁸ Undoubtedly, the horrors of the holocaust in 20th century European history have turned any allegation of anti-Semitism into a major blame. Made-up accusations of anti-Semitism in Britain have come to constitute an authoritative channel of attacks against academics. First, it can be posited that the moral weight of this charge alone is synonymous with an exclusion from the academic community, or even from democratic society. Second, academics working on issues that can be easily and unduly brought under the umbrella of anti-Semitism, such as those studying matters related to Israel, the Middle-East, racism or Islamophobia may find that the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism limits the perimeter of their analyses in ways that represent an infringement on AF. Third, it seems that this definition could prompt several Jewish Students Societies to attack academics and demand investigations. For instance, in 2021, the Union of Jewish Students urged the University of Warwick to reaffirm its adoption of the IHRA definition ‘including its use in disciplinary processes’, a definition which it employed against academics by wrongfully accusing them.¹²⁹

Although few such accusations resulted in institutional or legal guilty verdicts, they nonetheless induced serious adverse consequences for some academics. At Bristol University a lecturer was dismissed based on an accusation of anti-Semitism from the Union of Jewish Student (October 2021). Although the person concerned won his appeal against the university, he was not reinstated in his employment. He explained: ‘although the Queen’s Council had decided in both cases that not a word or comma or sentence that I’d used was anti-Semitic, the second investigation concluded that I had upset students’.¹³⁰ The Union of Jewish Students made a similar denunciation against Warwick University academics in 2021. This led the university to launch disciplinary action against its staff. The fact that the action was eventually dropped and the academics involved cleared of all charges does not detract from the fact that they were submitted to unsettling pressures over several months (Interview, 20 January 2022). A weightier form of threat directly originated from the political arena when Jonathan Gullis, MP, purporting to defend Jewish students against anti-Semitism at Warwick University, requested the dismissals of several academics, with the apparent support of then Chair of the Education Committee, Robert Halfon, and Minister for Universities, Michelle Donelan (27 April 2021): ‘Stuart Croft, the Vice Chancellor, was the biggest embarrassment to students at his University, we need to go further than just fining, we need to start sacking people and Stuart Croft, and Dr Goldie Osuri, and Professor Virinder Karla [sic] need to go, to be quite frank’.¹³¹ (The correct name is Kalra.)

Finally, the Prevent strategy against terrorism, developed within the framework of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, did not spare academia. During the Conservative-Liberal government (2010–2015), Theresa May, then Home Secretary announced in 2014 that universities and other Higher Education Institutions, together with other public bodies, were placed under the obligation to identify and report their students and staff, if there were suspicions of radicalisation or signs that they may be vulnerable to radicalisation.¹³² In response, researchers have pointed out the potential stigmatisation of Muslim and ethnic minority persons in academia, as well as the risk of curtailing their AF.¹³³

Scientific quality under pressure

One grave attack against AF is to deny the scientific legitimacy of research and teaching. This happened when then Universities Minister Donelan in February 2021 made a damning comment on decolonial perspectives, claiming that ‘courses’ were facing ‘decolonisation’ by tutors who, she complained, were ‘censoring history’, like in the Soviet Union.¹³⁴ In the Western world, such a reference to Jdanovian control of science and history are equivalent to a total dismissal of scientific validity.

The government seized upon a few no-platforming incidents in universities as a major justification for the Freedom of Speech Bill. In response, its opponents contended that the government’s primary objective was to gain greater control of academia and AF, so that no-platforming issues were blown out of proportion mostly to provide arguments in favour of the Bill.¹³⁵ It could also be advanced that the Bill’s conflation of freedom of speech with AF signified a denial of academics’ scientific authority. A distinction is called for between the two.¹³⁶ On the one hand, the freedom to express one’s opinion (freedom of speech) is a legally protected democratic right of all citizens. Academics, like every citizen, enjoy the right to voice their views in the public arena. However, this does not apply in the same way in the academic realm, because academic discourse is predicated upon rigorously conducted scientific research, independently of any undue outside interference. The suggestion that free speech and AF are one and the same thing may lead to the conclusion that all opinions are equally legitimate in a University setting. As a consequence, the failure to distinguish AF from the related but different question of freedom of speech, undermines the scientific quality and authority of academics. Indeed, universities and academics have a duty to verify that speakers and contributors, in a university environment and whenever academics deliver their research, meet scientific criteria. Accordingly, as argued by Scott (2019) universities ought not to give the floor to just anyone’s views.¹³⁷ The potential risks involved in the Freedom of Speech Bill were displayed when Donelan, Universities Minister, declared that universities would face a legal duty requiring them to give the floor to the likes of historian David Irving,¹³⁸ a well-known holocaust denier, with fines attached if they failed to do so. Finally, this caused such an outcry that Boris Johnson’s spokesman contradicted Donelan and declared: ‘Holocaust denial is not something that the government would ever accept’.¹³⁹

Another controversial theme pertains to gender issues which opposed gender theorists to transgender scholars.¹⁴⁰ On the one hand, gender critical feminists have used the concept of academic freedom (while conflating it with freedom of speech) to argue that they are being shut down by transgender rights activists within academia through tactics such as no-platforming and the likes.¹⁴¹ Trans and pro-trans scholars, on the other hand put forward that they were attacked by a group of academics because they did not subscribe to a binary view of sex and gender and that they were not able to exercise their AF as a consequence of ‘threats of hostile legislation, and attempts to halt research or publication through malicious complaints to managers, funders, and journal editors’.¹⁴² One transgender scholar went as far as declaring ‘The gender critical movement is the biggest threat to academic freedom in a generation’, a threat she stated came from ‘university administrators, an insurgent anti-intellectual media, and powerful celebrity professors’.¹⁴³

France and Britain: subverting the language and attacking AF on the pretence of defending it

Elusive manners of speaking can be used by a variety of actors to hinder research on certain politically unwanted topics. Confusion is sometimes created through the subversion of terms: the plea for a collegial open stance and for free speech may serve to create a space for all kinds of opinions such as racist, misogynist or anti-Semitic views. A technique commonly used subverts the lexicon in a blaming-the-victim fashion.¹⁴⁴ For example, a reversal of concepts casts racialized minorities themselves as racist, indicting them for allegedly foisting the tyranny of minorities on victimized majorities: white conservatives are hence portrayed as victims of academics' left-wing and anti-racist intolerance (Bruckner 2020). Academics who study racism and discrimination are accused of being racists: Wieviorka, well-known for his research on racism was indicted by a collective of academics for being 'the arsonist fireman of anti-racism' (*Marianne*, 5 May 2021).¹⁴⁵ One academic in charge of a research project on cybercriminals was condemned by the Observatory of Decolonialism for making the 'apology of cybercriminality'.¹⁴⁶

Another way to undermine AF takes the shape of purporting to defend it: French Universities Minister Vidal posed to defend AF while launching an investigation into researchers (February 2021).¹⁴⁷ Several French MPs claimed to be safeguarding the university when they asked for a parliamentary mission of information (inquiry) into Islamo-Leftism (December 2020).¹⁴⁸ In Britain, MPs posed as protectors of Jewish students, while dealing out an untold attack on Warwick academics (April 2021). Badenoch purported to defend Black minorities in the same breath as condemning CRT and proposing to remove anti-bias training in public services (December 2020).¹⁴⁹ Lexicon instrumentalization is well illustrated by two reports from the influential right-wing think tank Policy Exchange, entitled 'Academic Freedom in the UK: Protecting Viewpoint Diversity', which provided the justification for the Freedom of Speech Bill, and the Government's wider 'war on woke'.¹⁵⁰

ACADEMIC RESISTANCE

Academics in France and Britain have expressed their protest in the face of attacks against AF. They made use of conventional means such as strikes, petitions, demonstrations and legal recourse. In addition, they were particularly incisive through the written and spoken word: a great number of articles appeared in newspapers and journals, books were published, appearances on the radio and on the television took place. This rich documentation furnishes the contents of academia's major concerns regarding AF.

Defending AF against market hegemony

Although AF *per se* might not seem to directly include issues of funding and conditions of employment, these have emerged in a different guise. We showed above how a neoliberal agenda underpinned university and research funding policies, to the

detriment of AF. In this context, employment and conditions of work are paramount, either as a result of economic endeavours or simply as a tool of control.

In Britain, the University and College Union (UCU) quoted UNESCO and the International Labour Organization (ILO) against ‘deference to market-driven priorities’, and, in particular, various policies devised to ensure ‘value for money’ (March 2022).¹⁵¹ UCU provided evidence on how the casualisation of contracts impacted AF (March 2022),¹⁵² adding that ‘the truth is that widespread precarious employment strips academics of the ability to speak and research freely’ (May 2021).¹⁵³ Various forms of protests against staffing curtailments and reduction of funding were staged in the UK in 2021.¹⁵⁴ The Campaign for the Arts petitioned against the 50% funding cuts to Arts subjects in Higher Education (2021).¹⁵⁵ A boycott was called by UCU at the University of Leicester (May 2021), as academics questioned the university redundancies selection, which they perceived was determined by neoliberal management rather than out of concern for high quality research. They signalled that funding was used to covertly promote an ideological agenda, adverse to the critical management approach adopted by the colleagues removed (January 2021).¹⁵⁶ UCU collected 47,000 signatures in a petition against the closure of the Archaeology Department at Sheffield University (July 2021).¹⁵⁷ Redundancies were challenged by a strike at the University of East London (February 2021)¹⁵⁸ and at the University of Liverpool (August 2021).¹⁵⁹ UCU’s general secretary and academic colleagues supported Professor Peter Armstrong when Leicester University threatened to annul his Emeritus title after he had, on social media, criticised the University’s disinvestment policy.¹⁶⁰ Professor Frances Corner, Warden of Goldsmith College, was sent an open letter with 4,347 signatures, to oppose employment severances (October 2021).¹⁶¹ These are examples of the numerous protests against funding policies.

In France, the 2020 Bill on Programming Research faced generalized contestation. All University presidents, presidents of CNRS sections, the Conference of University Presidents, the Science Academy and the Permanent Commission of the National Council of Universities opposed the reform (2020).¹⁶² Massive protests took place in the shape of continuous strikes and demonstrations in 2020.¹⁶³ A collective of women researchers denounced a ‘neoliberal reform against women and science’ (*Le Monde* 10 February 2020).¹⁶⁴ Academics also reasserted the intrinsic link between AF and the safety of employment, upon which high quality work and critical thinking rest (July 2020).¹⁶⁵ It was argued that critical thinking ran the risk of being impaired for casual staff, whose safety of employment might be jeopardised if they questioned the establishment. A *Syndicat national de l’enseignement supérieur* (SNESUP) conference showed up the clear connection between issues of funding, the Law on Programming Research and AF (February 2020). Eventually, the government took advantage of Covid lockdowns and university closures to pass the Law on Programming Research, using an accelerated procedure.¹⁶⁶ Moreover, academics stressed the need to finance fundamental research, in opposition to the mode of funding implemented by the French *Agence nationale de la recherche* (ANR, National Agency of Research) which had been introduced under President Hollande’s mandate¹⁶⁷ and was bolstered by the new law. Academics opposed this funding approach on the grounds that it awarded grants on the basis of calls determined from outside, and prioritised applied policy-linked projects. Another way to secure AF protection is to gain full participation in higher institutions’

governance as attempted by the *Syndicat des agrégés de l'enseignement supérieur* (SAGES), an association of academics that took its case to the European Committee of Social Rights.¹⁶⁸

Opposing political and government interference

The sanctuarisation of university and research as well as the need for protection from undue outside interference have been proclaimed central pillars of AF by academics, in particular with respect to political interventions. Against encroachments from political power, academics made use of legal and regulatory tools at their disposal to fight back against attacks on AF and on their integrity, sometimes successfully. When the French Universities Minister demanded an investigation, six academics took the case to the *Conseil d'État* (State Council) 'for abuse of power', arguing that this investigation 'trampled on academic freedom and threatened to submit to political control, all research, not just social sciences'. The Minister was given two months to show that this was not the case (July 2020).¹⁶⁹ No response came forth until 17 March 2023, when the Higher Education Ministry revealed that no investigation had ever been carried out. This incident seems to demonstrate that the Minister had announced an investigation solely with the aim of intimidating the academics concerned. A referral to the *Conseil constitutionnel* (Constitutional Council) won the day when the '*délit d'entrave*' (crime of hindrance) clause added onto the Bill on Programming Research had to be removed. Academics contended that it would impede open debate in the university. The clause included a penalty of up to 45.000 Euros fine and three years' imprisonment against any person in a university, who had the intention to 'perturb the tranquillity or good public order', the latter remaining undefined and extensible at will. It is noteworthy that this legal formulation was aimed at sanctioning intentions rather than offenses actually committed.¹⁷⁰ The Constitutional Council censored this clause (December 2020).¹⁷¹ A similar scenario can be observed in Britain. When the British government stated that research regarding issues of national heritage and slavery would not be funded any longer, the Royal History Society recalled the Haldane principles, according to which the government could decide upon the funding envelope of a university but not the courses or research conducted (March 2021).¹⁷²

More generally, political attacks as well as the deleterious strategies against AF presented above have generated a great deal of contestation from academics. In France, the *Commission Permanente du Conseil National des Universités* (CP-CNU, Permanent Commission of Universities' National Council) expressed unconditional support for academics targeted by political attacks, and requested from Universities Minister Vidal that she extend her ministry's protection to cover possible court cases, when academics were attacked *ad hominem* by MPs and the press, and delivered to 'popular condemnation' (November 2020).¹⁷³ Jean Chambaz, Sorbonne's president, strongly protested against accusations of Islamo-Leftism aimed at university members and stood up against threats to ban the teaching of some disciplines, quoting government slogans reminiscent of a 20th century sombre period, when 'judeo bolshevism' was alleged indiscriminately against universities. He compared this situation to Soviet times and to what is currently happening in Hungary and Poland. He countered the allegation of 'gangrene' in the university, through an indictment of 'discrimination, ghettoisation, social inequality and the failure of public policies'. In

the name of AF, he demanded a change in the attitude of the government vis-à-vis universities (February 2021).¹⁷⁴ Some 600 academics, including well-known scholars, such as economist Thomas Piketty¹⁷⁵ and sociologist Dominique Méda,¹⁷⁶ denounced the investigation requested by the Universities Minister, which they deemed synonymous to ‘intellectual repression’. They compared such manoeuvres with those in Orban’s Hungary and Bolsonaro’s Brazil, where decolonial, postcolonial, racial discrimination, gender and intersectionality were similarly disparaged; these academics condemned ‘what must be called a witch hunt’ (February 2021).¹⁷⁷ Several academics denounced the new instances of ‘McCarthyism’ which pointed the finger at inside ‘enemies’, their ‘accomplices’, their ‘fellow-travellers’ and their victims, thus conjuring up reminiscences of another dark period traversed by AF (February 2022).¹⁷⁸ Confronting the ongoing offensive, a French research laboratory reasserted one essential prerequisite of AF, namely the ‘epistemological principle of the independence of science with respect to political, economic or religious power’ (February 2022).¹⁷⁹ French higher education trade unions issued a joint communiqué to protest against the Universities Minister’s interference, when she announced the investigation into Islamo-Leftism in the university (February 2022).¹⁸⁰

In Britain, the Freedom of Speech Bill was categorically rejected by UCU’s general secretary. He squarely discarded allegations that staff and students represented a threat to AF and hauled up the government: ‘There are serious threats to freedom of speech and AF on campus, but they come from the government and university managers, not staff and students [...] This bill [Freedom of Speech Bill] should be seen for what it is: the government using freedom of speech as a Trojan horse for increasing its power and control over staff and students.’ In addition, UCU cited further sources of concerns endangering AF: ‘Free speech and academic freedom are threatened more widely on campus by government interference in the form of the Prevent duty, and attempts to impose the IHRA definition and examples of anti-Semitism on universities’ (May 2021).¹⁸¹ Social scientists riposted with the British Sociological Association’s (BSA) unequivocal statement that ‘It is inappropriate for politicians to interfere in academic debate’ (October 2021).¹⁸² The British Universities’ Russell Group initially found it necessary to recall that ‘the academic freedom of teaching and research staff is protected through clear contractual arrangements, and in legislation’ (May 2021).¹⁸³ The BSA also underlined that ‘matters of staff and student conduct will be dealt with fully and fairly by higher education institutions’, ringfenced away from political intrusion (October 2021).¹⁸⁴ Direct political menace spawned the indignation of Warwick academics when an MP requested summary dismissals from the university (April 2021);¹⁸⁵ as a consequence, Warwick university UCU forcefully demanded *inter alia* that the MP concerned ‘withdraw his anti-democratic call for political interference in university life’. They also called on MPs Donelan and Halfon to commit themselves ‘to upholding the principle that scholarly research should be free from political interference’ (April 2021).¹⁸⁶

The examples quoted above demonstrate the vigour of academics’ response to political intervention and also reaffirm one essential tenet of AF: the freedom to teach and research independently of political power’s influence, which includes the freedom to choose one’s epistemology and themes of research and teaching.

Safeguarding critical thinking and scientific quality

A *sine qua non* attribute of AF repeatedly stressed in response to attacks from political or other sources is the freedom to exercise one's critical thinking. In both France and Britain, strong opposition was levelled at political schemes that attempted to impose an official narrative constraining research. In order to ensure academic integrity, AF is needed, which in turn is contingent on the unimpeded ability to challenge orthodoxy within the scholarly body and to secure critical thinking (Scott 2019).

In France, academics rose resolutely in defence of critical thinking and scientific quality. The *Conférence des présidents d'université* (CPU, Conference of Universities' Presidents) forcefully challenged political attempts to include a clause imposing that academics adhere to the 'values of the Republic', which they characterised as a violation of AF, since it would hinder scientific investigations related to these undefined 'values' (November 2020).¹⁸⁷ Academics also stood firm on the importance of scientific quality in research. The CNRS, in a communiqué of 17 February 2021 rejected the investigation it was asked to conduct by Minister Vidal on Islamo-Leftism, precisely on the grounds that this term was a political slogan which 'did not correspond to any scientific reality' and which, furthermore, was tinted with extreme-right connotations; a statement supported by several academics (November 2021).¹⁸⁸ Higher education trade unions issued a similar protest,¹⁸⁹ as did several other academic bodies (February 2021).¹⁹⁰ Athena, the *Alliance thématique nationale des sciences humaines et sociales* (National Thematic Alliance of Human and Social Sciences), equally rejected Vidal's investigation because it did not respect the 'foundational rules of scientific research', and would question the pertinence or legitimacy of fields of research and cast doubts on the scientific integrity of some colleagues' (February 2021).¹⁹¹ One research laboratory sent a letter to Minister Vidal asking her to uphold the independence of science and AF, and quoting the principle institutionalised by the Constitutional Council (Decision n°83-165 DC), which in their view was defied by the investigations launched from and supported by the highest ranks of government.¹⁹² On 25 January 2022, the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS, School for Higher Studies in Social Science) and the Ligue des droits de l'homme (League for Human Rights) responded to political attacks with the organisation of a round table entitled 'Academic freedom threatened: in defence of critical knowledge'(participant observation). On 17 March 2022, another conference was organised by academics entitled 'Tools for free university and research', with the aim of creating an association for the defence of AF¹⁹³ (participant observation). The protection granted by the Constitutional Council was mentioned but deemed insufficient in view of enhanced threats ranging from political interference to online harassment. One proposal called for an organic law for the protection of academics (March 2022).¹⁹⁴ The trade-union SNESUP-FSU organised two conferences in defence of AF and freedom of research (February 2020 and 2022).¹⁹⁵ The CPU left no ambiguity on the guarantors of AF, stressing that peers were the only acceptable judges competent to decide upon the quality of academics' work, and concluding that this is their exclusive prerogative (February 2021).¹⁹⁶ One academic warned against the possibility of a purge by outside organisations and advocated for debates with one's peers to avoid it (February 2021).¹⁹⁷

Academics in Britain equally upheld scientific quality and critical thinking. The Committee of Universities Chairs (CUC) placed AF at the heart of the UK's higher education sector and highlighted universities' essential aim to conduct 'the advancement of understanding and pursuit of truth' (30 November 2022).¹⁹⁸ It celebrated universities for 'driving forward research and innovation', as well as 'providing students with the opportunity to think critically and engage with different perspectives' (30 November 2022).¹⁹⁹ The British Russell Group of Universities pledged the commitment of universities 'to the open and rigorous contestation of ideas', which they considered fundamental to the *raison d'être* of academic institutions, helping to drive knowledge and discovery in research and education: 'The autonomy this provides helps protect research and ensure that curricula are diverse, considering the competing merits of different schools of thought';²⁰⁰ however, the Russell Group subsequently showed readiness to soften its criticisms of the government. In defence of academics, Warwick Staff Assembly spotlighted their freedom to go against the grain of generally accepted views: 'This Assembly calls on the University to [...] ensure that academic staff have freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs and privileges'.²⁰¹ The UCU summary of the Joint ILO/UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers (CEART) report emphasised the need to preserve the right of higher education teaching personnel to carry out teaching and research 'without constriction by prescribed doctrine' (March 2022).²⁰² UCU also warned that free speech and AF were threatened by the government's endeavours to impose the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism on universities (May 2021).²⁰³ Warwick academics were at the forefront of defending scientific research against imposed doctrine, when the university staff Assembly voted 'overwhelmingly' in favour of a motion challenging the IHRA working definition of anti-Semitism and its adoption by the university (21 June 2021). In defence of scientific research, Warwick academics decided, on the strength of the 'well-documented legal and scholarly criticism of the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism, and the admission by some of its authors such as Kenneth Stern that it was never intended to curtail AF or free speech, to call on the University not to use the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism in disciplinary procedures or in investigations into allegations made against staff or students'.²⁰⁴ Indeed, this definition can turn into a weapon against academics, as pointed out by University College London (UCL), whose academic board withdrew its decision to adopt the IHRA, because it was alarmed that the latter had 'potentially deleterious effects on free speech, such as instigating a culture of fear or self-silencing on teaching or research or classroom discussion of contentious topics' (February 2021).²⁰⁵

However, academics also considered that it was necessary to establish a clear distinction between, on the one hand, research and teaching which need to abide by rigorous scientific rules and, on the other hand, the expression of opinions which is their right as citizens: thus they concluded that 'it is not the role of the university to investigate expressions of opinion by its members on social or political issues in which they take an interest, provided that they do so within the law'.²⁰⁶

Freedom to choose: themes, theoretical approach and methods

The need to protect yet another pillar of AF is unveiled by the attacks examined above: the freedom to select theoretical approaches, methodology and themes of research. Academics are intent on preserving the possibility of studying any subject of their choice without fearing adverse consequences. This was countlessly reiterated by academics on an individual and collective basis. In France, higher education trade unions protested against the '[government] right of control over research at university', sought by political power; and against the stigmatisation of 'studies on gender, sexuality, migration, forms of domination and long-term effects of colonisation', alongside demands that the 'witch hunt' be abandoned (February 2021).²⁰⁷ The CNRS condemned the delegitimising of various fields of research, such as postcolonial and intersectional studies or research on the question of 'race' and any other field of knowledge.²⁰⁸ The president of Sorbonne University upheld that 'there are no taboo subjects for research and science. We are allowed to work, to seek an understanding of complex mechanisms, to revisit the history of our country, colonialism, the non-integration of children of immigrants in the third generation' (February 2021).²⁰⁹

In Britain, the Freedom of Speech Bill was denounced for erecting obstacles to academic debates on controversial issues, because it would entail 'that every lecture, every seminar, every guest speech could end up in court action', which undoubtedly represented a significant dose of intimidation (May 2021).²¹⁰ What was at stake was the freedom to choose the research themes and approach, which academics stood up to defend as illustrated by the following examples. A petition in support of Professor Miller, a specialist of islamophobia gathered more than 40,000 signatures against his dismissal from Bristol University (Autumn 2021).²¹¹ Sir Charles Dunstone resigned from the Royal Museum Greenwich board presidency in support of Aminul Hoque, a decolonial scholar, who had been removed from the board by the Culture Secretary (1 May 2021).²¹² The BSA opposed the Freedom of Speech Bill, affirming that 'the democratic importance of free speech is being misappropriated to advance reactionary politics' and reasserted, against the British government's attacks, the valuable contribution of CRT, 'a collection of theoretical frameworks used by sociologists and other scholars to examine racism' (October 2021).²¹³

Social responsibility and public good

The positing of absolute axiological neutrality advocated by some academics²¹⁴ was countered with arguments in favour of situated research. In France, several scholars' collective bodies affirmed the social responsibility of academia unambiguously: 'The autonomy of the scientific field constitutes the condition for a free production of knowledge which has the capacity – through scientific and plurality approaches – to feed public debate and contribute to the emancipation of all and to the progress of our societies' (February 2021).²¹⁵ One French research laboratory put forward that academics have a social responsibility in their delivery of knowledge as a public good (February 2021). It justified the 'political role of science to participate in the advent of a world more lucid and more just', and expressed the suspicion that political endeavours against such an approach signified endangering 'the emancipatory project of social sciences'.²¹⁶ In Britain, the BSA made a clear statement along similar lines: 'The BSA

exists for the advancement of public education through the insights gained from sociological study, research and critique. We support the principle – rather than the ideological wielding – of freedom of speech and the expression of diverse views, providing that the speech and expression protects the human rights, preserves the dignity, and acknowledges the lived experiences of individuals and protected groups’ (October 2021).²¹⁷ It so happens that the academics under attack often work on themes that involve disadvantaged groups and contribute to bringing to light social and other injustices. This is an additional reason for safeguarding their AF.

CONCLUSION

This comparison between France and Britain yields a number of findings which raise serious concerns. It is clear that France and Britain offer a different scenario to that of countries such as Hungary where the state holds an utmost control on universities and academics, Turkey where exercising one's critical thinking may entail incarceration or Burma where the dictatorship kills and 'disappears' academics. Nevertheless, this study can serve a useful purpose as a pointer to potentially similar developments that might take place in other liberal democratic countries.

In both countries, the government and the political sphere more generally, sometimes accompanied by allies from academia (either staff or students), were identified as mighty actors behind attacks on AF and academics. Political interference was conveyed from the highest level of government, including President/Prime Minister, Home Secretary and Education Ministers, in addition to various organizations and pressure groups. This delivered the message that all kinds of attacks against AF were legitimate. Attacks broadly targeted social sciences and humanities, with a focus on specific approaches and themes of research. Our analysis unpacked the types of methods adopted to strike at academic staff and students, teaching and learning. The management of funding from a neoliberal standpoint led to restrictions on AF, evidenced by financial insecurity, attached to insecure contracts and short-term projects. Controlling academia was attempted or implemented by way of regulations and laws. Intimidation was exercised through implicit and explicit threats including financial sanctions and investigations. Political and dominant discourse served to delegitimize academics and their work, depicting them as ideology entrepreneurs potentially dangerous for society, and hence denying the scientific validity of their findings. This practice coincided with similar attacks against the left of the political spectrum. Once reflected in the media, such prevalent discourse contributed to the establishment of unwritten norms, one possible outcome being self-censorship.

In France, although the Government did not present a comprehensive bill addressing AF *per se*, bids to govern academia were enacted through specific clauses within a general university law (Law on Programming Research). The latter failed with regards to clauses designed to control academia, but was successful in its implementation of a wide-ranging financial scheme detrimental to AF, and in denting autonomous governance. The main lines of attack against academics were therefore delivered through delegitimizing and intimidation, mostly out of government/political discourse and menace, accompanied with some academics' contributions. The main themes of research and teaching under attack were Islam, racism, colonialism, gender, wokism, intersectionality, decolonial and post-colonial approaches; academics involved in these areas of research were targeted, and were also blamed for spreading 'cancel culture'. One major investigation was announced by the Universities Minister with regards to the 'gangrene' of Islamo-Leftism in the university, and a convergence was implied between academics and Islamist terrorism. This was completed with accusations of undermining the Republic and *laïcité*. The broad public image perpetrated was that of dangerous actors in a position to influence the youth and public debates.

In Britain, political power pursued compelling methods of control on academia through laws and regulations that menace AF. First, the government put through a Free Speech law which includes a Free Speech Champion appointed by the government. This entails that university staff and students are to be placed under surveillance, their activities monitored and financial sanctions implemented, under recommendations from the Champion. It is still difficult to envisage the magnitude of this law's impact on AF, but it will unquestionably be significant. Secondly, the government put pressure on universities to accept the IHRA definition and examples of anti-Semitism, which have already proved to be an efficient regulatory instrument harmful to academics; resulting into one dismissal and a disciplinary procedure, together with several calls for dismissal and investigations. Both government actions worked as a kind of authorization to intimidate, giving free rein to a variety of actors such as politicians, media and students. The official discourse surrounding the Freedom of Speech Bill also runs the risk of delegitimizing AF, because it could foist non-scientific interventions onto university campuses, giving these equal value to those of scientific studies. This constitutes a sure weapon to debilitate scientific authority and AF. The major research themes under attack have been CRT, colonialism, slavery, racism, gender and transgender studies. Political justifications for the Free Speech Law produced the inference that academics opposed free speech, AF and democracy. Furthermore, some were accused of damaging British society and the image of Britain, while others were submitted to suspicions of anti-Semitism, all of which might induce academics to self-censor. Although this report covers only France and Britain, its findings find a resonance in other parts of the world, and in particular the USA, according to a specialist of the Anglo-Saxon world.²¹⁸

Having documented the actors and contents of attacks on AF in France and Britain, this report helps to identify priorities in defence of AF, as seen through the eyes of academics and their resistance. First of all, academics opposed the neoliberal drive behind governments' funding strategies; they insisted on the importance of employment security and the imperative necessity of sufficient long-term financing, characterised by money without strings, to be awarded to all the disciplines. They jealously defended the independence of teaching and research against all forms of political and administrative interference. They reaffirmed their commitment to critical thinking and the complete unhampered ability to challenge orthodoxy within the scholarly body, while squarely combatting the imposition of any kind of doctrine, with its concomitant threats and intimidation. The freedom to choose research themes and approach was posited as a *sine qua non*. Scientific rigour and quality were emphasised, to be solely evaluated by peers and protected from interference from outside bodies. Finally, academics stressed their social responsibility as well as their commitment to the emancipatory project of science and the advancement of knowledge as a public good. The safeguarding of AF is essential for the preservation of democracy. Indeed, AF is one important marker and a guardian of democracy. On the one hand, the wellbeing of a democracy can be evaluated by the yardstick of its AF. On the other hand, AF safeguards democracy because academia is one of the last bastions of critical thinking: it provides scientific knowledge (facts and data against fake news), scrutiny of the establishment and policies, challenges to dominant ideas, an ideational counterpower. While AF and respect for science help to fight fake news, populist discourse and extreme right-wing views, the discrediting of academics and the peddling of anti-intellectualism feed conspiracy theories,²¹⁹ AF is a definite rampart against rampant populism.

The resistance put up by French and British academics has reaped uneven results. Neither scored much success against the neoliberal funding agenda. They vigorously combatted other forms of attacks and reasserted fundamental tenets of AF to which they were attached. One must nonetheless take note of some differences between the two countries. The British government undoubtedly won the day in the legal and regulatory field, with the passing of the Free Speech law and the imposition of the IHRA definition on a good number of universities. The French government, on the other hand, has so far failed to introduce legal and regulatory mechanisms against AF. One may hazard a hypothesis to account for this discrepancy. France holds a constitution which frames laws. Although it can be changed, this is a complicated exercise which requires the approval of two thirds of the two chambers rather than a simple majority in the National Assembly as in the British Parliament. The Constitution is guarded by institutions such as the Council of State and the Constitutional Council.²²⁰ We noted in this report that academics appealed to these institutions sometimes with positive results. Neither constitutions nor concomitant institutions exist in Britain. At another level, civil society and its associations are stronger in France than in Britain, where they have been debilitated since Margaret Thatcher's famous declaration 'Who is society? There is no such thing!'²²¹

The powerful offensive against AF in France and Britain cannot be elucidated without calling on developments presented in the first section of the report. The author of this report posits that, in the face of increasing contestation in the social and cultural domains, political power seems to have found an answer through a conservative agenda designed to introduce a cultural coherence between the neoliberal model and the national narrative, which aims to cement a redesigned national consensus and provide a justification of its policies. The cultural war engaged would thus help to protect neoliberal economic interests.²²² In France, this agenda is built around reinterpreted conservative notions of the Republic and *laïcité*, concentrating on national identity above class and social cleavages, and excluding sections of the population such as immigrants and Muslims. This endeavour coincides with the government's attempts to compete with the increasing influence of the extreme right-wing National Rally party, whose candidate scored 41,45 % in the 2022 presidential election and gained 89 deputies in the National Assembly.²²³ These notions are the cornerstone of the conservative national consensus the French state is trying to impose on its citizens. According to a member of the prestigious French Academy, 'identity republicanism' has chosen its version of the Republic so that some populations have been assigned the role previously attributed to 'dangerous classes', and are said to occupy 'lost territories' (of the Republic).²²⁴ *Mutatis mutandis*, the same pattern is replicated in Britain where this cultural project is built around memories of the great Empire, also nourished with Brexit tropes on revitalised links with the Commonwealth.²²⁵ Academics are undoubtedly a thorn in the flesh of governments when their research challenges national history's established interpretation and broader political interests. This explains why their scientific authority is denigrated and/or controlled. Furthermore, it has been argued that this cultural war resembles the ultra-conservative project emanating from the USA.²²⁶ What has been shown above is that the academic debate has been warped by interference from without, through the concerted intervention of the highest circles of power in both France and the UK. We have thus demonstrated forcefully one central

tenet of AF, which is in dire need of protection: the independence of academics from outside interference and in particular from political power.

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