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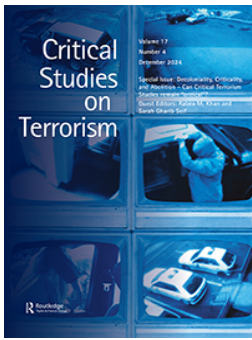
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French normalisation of exceptional powers as a response to terrorism post-Paris attacks

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the crystallisation of counterterrorism emergency powers and the normalisation of the “exceptional” in the French context. It scrutinises the framing of the terrorist threat within political discourse in the aftermath of the attacks of 13 November 2015, to the enactment of the Strengthening Homeland Security and Fight against Terrorism (SILT) bill in October 2017. The article aims to challenge the prevailing paradigm of urgency and the concept of desecuritisation by exploring the sustained normalisation of extraordinary powers. This reveals a colonial continuum intrinsic to the practice and exercise of extraordinary powers. Indeed, the state of emergency in the French context directly emerges from a colonial law (Law of 1955) enacted during the War in Algeria as a response to the Front de Libération National Algérien in November 1954. In the contemporary era, extraordinary and emergency powers are utilised, extended and institutionalised. Thus, the article explores this paradox between the exceptional, unprecedented terrorist threat and the forever application of exceptional powers, expressed through the discursive and political constructed temporalities which render desecuritisation unattainable. The article advocates for the necessity of examining the colonial origins of such powers and techniques within the broader context of counterterrorism.

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Introduction

France experienced a series of terrorist events in 2015. In response, the French decision-makers declared a state of emergency and framed terrorism as a securitised exceptional and unprecedented threat post-attacks of November 13th. The framing of terrorism is inherently intertwined with the measures implemented at a given time of crisis, particularly times of unprecedented danger (Johnson and Basham 2023). But what makes a time dangerous? Who and what constructs it as dangerous, unprecedented and exceptional and how does it evolve into normalised dangerous time? What makes these dangerous times normalised and extended threatening periods in which to normalise the

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exceptional and emergency powers? By exploring the state of emergency, this article scrutinises constructed temporalities through the framing of terrorism within French political discourse. To that end, I problematise the constant utilisation of emergency powers when dealing with terrorism and dissect the context of emergency powers application (and activation) intertwined with its colonial origin.

The article thus questions: how is counterterrorism strategy embodying a continuation of colonial policies with a particular focus on France's response in the domestic space through the state of emergency? How do emergency politics reinforce or invigorate coloniality? The article argues that the state of emergency embedded in a colonial continuum is not only due to its temporality but to its spatial dimension, context and structure. It suggests exploring "how the discourse on 'terrorism' [is] a racialised phenomenon" and how it reproduces the dominant discourse on terrorism serving the "project of Western colonial modernity" (Khan 2021, 498). Following a post-Copenhagen School revised approach, the securitisation of the terrorist issue is shown to be a co-constitutive process embedded in a specific context, as an evolving process. This continuum is defined in its temporality and durability and by the endurance of colonial structures. Lambert (2024) advocates for the utilisation of a "colonial continuum", understanding it as "a surface on which time and space are inseparable [...] a curved surface where we designate as past, present and future all exist together". More than the immediate context, it is important to analyse it in its historicity. It questions the constructed temporalities of the application of exceptional powers: from an unprecedented threat seen as a ruptured moment in discontinuity with the "normal" time, to exceptional moments, towards a normalisation and routinisation of the exceptional as a timelessness application (Jarvis 2008).

By uncovering the origins of emergency powers, argued to represent a permanence of the colonial repertoire, this article dissects the discourse surrounding "temporality" and "urgency" when constructing terrorism from 2015 to 2020. In essence, it proposes an exploration of the political rhetoric's formation of a "moment of rupture", aligning with the Paris attacks, and the concept of "temporal linearity" intertwined with colonial heritage and the prolonged application of emergency powers. The article proposes an investigation into how political discourse replicates colonial powers and language, and how colonial legacies are perpetuated through contemporary counter-terrorism policies: to discipline the body and securitise the domestic space. Terrorism as a term is colonial. The study does not suggest that each counter-terrorism measure is an expression of colonial legacies; however, certain measures are and it requires further analysis to reveal the colonial and racial underpinnings associated with terrorism per se. That is, to reveal how coloniality embodies the continuation of colonial forms of domination and marginalisation (Mignolo 2011) in the French response to terrorism. The article also demonstrates how it ultimately restricts and responds to political resistance. Hence, the article focuses on the application of the state of emergency, created in 1955 during the war in Algeria under French rule.¹

Numerous works have discussed the response to political resistance by the French police and military police, such as the Algerian resistance, the Kanak resistance, and the youth from the banlieues resistance towards police and military police (Bancel et al. 2022; Blanchard, Bancel, and Lemaire 2006; Lambert 2021, 2024; Rigouste 2021). The article is interested in how emergency powers, rooted in a colonial continuum (past, present and

future), have evolved from 1955 to the present to suppress resistance by linking it to terrorism, as first used by French authorities against Algerians who they labelled “rebels” and “terrorists” (Bancel et al. 2022, 696). Thus, the study examines the French context, understanding context as a broad framework and proposes to expand its investigation to incorporate historical and local context by specifically looking at existing, and reminiscences of, colonial powers, structures, narratives and language (i.e. the emergency powers, the orientalist discourse, the label “terrorist”, the over-securitisation of the body, governmentality of body, etc.).

While this article acknowledges the efforts and research within Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS) scholarship to deconstruct imperialist and colonialist structures from a decolonial and postcolonial stance (Jarvis 2023; Khan 2021, 2024; Majazi 2018), we need to further push the scholarship to engage with post/decolonial approaches to investigate terrorism/counterterrorism and the legacies intertwined in such tools and language. It appears necessary to shed light on tools within the everyday that remain unquestioned and are applied, reifying such structures as the product of colonialities. Using a decolonial approach involves critiquing the ways in which Eurocentric ideas and historiographies inform social and political thought categories (Barkawi 2016). The article argues that the securitisation process is deeply embedded in Western and Eurocentric paradigms, (re) producing, reifying and excavating colonial tools to respond to terrorism. By integrating decolonial perspectives, it challenges traditional securitisation theory, arguing that the exceptional has become normalised, complicating the concept of desecuritisation in the French context. The article challenges traditional, state-centric narratives and the framing of terrorism as an existential threat. That is, it examines the evolving frames delineating the threat of terrorism as a permanent issue, shifting the narratives from the exceptional and unprecedented threat of terrorism to a normalisation of exceptional powers and securitisation of the everyday life in France. This normalisation reflects colonial legacies, demonstrating how the French counter-terrorism measures, particularly the state of emergency examined in this article, are deeply rooted in historical colonial practices.

For that purpose, the article proposes to focus on language and depictions made by the political actors in the French context post-attacks of November 13th. The study draws on Fairclough’s approach to critical discourse analysis. The study findings are not constrained to isolated lexicalisations and representations within each political statement by the French decision-makers, but cumulatively explore the representation patterns across the entire corpus of political speeches selected in the timeframe of 2015–2020. Specifically, the qualitative examination of the texts guides the analysis of how the terrorist threat is portrayed throughout the corpus and within various political narratives. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) sees the use of language as a form of social practice (Fairclough 1995). The primary objective of this approach is to scrutinise the intricate interplay between textual elements constructing the threat of terrorism and its evolution, and the societal construction and application of counter-terrorism measures. Terrorism is posited as a social construct rather than an absolute reality (Jackson et al. 2011), and the impossibility of defining what is terrorism highlights the critique and problematic of the concept, even a refusal to use the word “terrorism” and replace it with political violence (Khan 2024).

I investigate the dynamic between political discourse and the fabricated reality within a specific milieu: the hyper-securitised terrorist threat and France’s

counterterrorism efforts following the attacks of November 13th, its evolution and its historicity. CDA concentrates on how discourse structures, constructs, perpetuates, or contests power dynamics within society (Van Dijk 2015, 467). This qualitative approach is adopted to trace the evolution of securitising language in the French landscape in 2015, the normalisation of exceptional powers, the inherent challenge in desecuritising the terrorist threat, and the enduring colonial implications it carries.

In particular, this study conducts a textual analysis of 301 texts encompassing speeches, statements, and media interviews by members of the French government from January 2015 (post-Charlie Hebdo attacks) to November 2017 (enactment of the SILT bill - *Strengthening Homeland Security and the fight against Terrorism*) either in front of Parliament, on TV and radio, and in others public settings (see Appendix) to January 2020 which corresponds to the end of the study² through a search on viepublique.fr. The timeframe was designed to encapsulate the moment prior to the activation of emergency powers – post-Charlie Hebdo attacks in January 2015 – and the introduction of some exceptional powers within the ordinary law corresponding to what I interpret as the normalisation of emergency. A search-key word was then created to trace the evolution, the language, the transformation and nuances within political narratives. Specific nodes are designed to investigate narratives, translated hereafter in English:

- Urgency, exceptional, unprecedented, état d'urgence (i.e. state of emergency)
- Long-term, permanent, normalisation, institutionalisation and extension
- War on terrorism
- Terrorist, identity, fanaticism, extremism, Islamic, Muslims
- French, French values, identity, freedoms

These texts expound upon the threat of terrorism as an enduring concern, undergoing a transformation in narrative that shifts from depicting it as an “unprecedented” and “extraordinary” threat to the establishment of exceptional powers as a routinised exceptional threat. This shift further underscores the integration of securitisation language and practice into the everyday logic in France. Hence, it prompts an investigation of the prevailing temporality paradigm, central in this article. It is central to the political narrative of exceptionality of the terrorist event, of the extended threat depiction, which becomes normalised and routinised. It is also central to the activation of the state of emergency and its extensions legally speaking (12 days to 3 months, etc.). Temporality is central to these concepts, particularly when examining the emergence of the state of emergency during colonial times. This state has historical roots and a legacy of continuity. It reflects colonial practices intertwined with temporality, being continuously implemented and reactivated, persisting from colonial history to the present. As Lambert (2024) argued, it is not a rupture between past, present and future but rather these temporalities are inseparable. This article analyses the evolution of the terrorist threat, shifting from an unprecedented exception (sections 1 & 2) to an ongoing, permanent state, thereby creating a paradox. It transitions from an exception to normalised exceptions, deeply intertwined with colonial legacies (section 3).

The 2015 context of terrorism in France

Throughout the past decade, France has suffered significant terrorist attacks. Notably, from January 7–9, 2015, the Charlie Hebdo attacks unfolded in the Ile-de-France region. The violence began with an assault on the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo in Paris by the Kouachi brothers, affiliated with Al Qaeda, resulting in 12 deaths and multiple injuries. This was followed by the killing of a police officer in Montrouge and a hostage crisis at the Hypercaher supermarket, where four people were killed. The perpetrators were eventually found and killed in a confrontation in Dammartin-en-Goele. Later, in the same year, on 13 November 2015, Paris and Saint-Denis experienced the deadliest coordinated terrorist attacks in France since World War II. These assaults spanned multiple locations, including two suicide bombings near the Stade de France and shootings at various restaurants and terraces across Paris. The violence culminated in a mass shooting and hostage situation at the Bataclan concert hall. These attacks collectively resulted in widespread death and injuries, marking a pivotal and tragic moment in France's modern history. Subsequently, the former French president declared on 16 November 2015, highlighting a logic of exception, the enactment of exceptional powers:

France is at war. The acts committed Friday evening in Paris and near the Stade de France are acts of war. (...) We must therefore defend ourselves, both urgently and over the long term (...). On Friday night, (...) I declared a state of emergency. (...) (Hollande, 16th of November 2015, author's translation³)

On 16 November 2015, President François Hollande declared war on terrorism, reflecting the shock, fear and anxiety gripping French society after the Paris attacks. He highlighted the serious repercussions of such acts and framed terrorism as a new, urgent and exceptional threat, necessitating the activation of emergency powers through the state of emergency. Hollande also stressed that terrorism had long been ingrained in French society, underscoring the protracted nature of the conflict and the need to recalibrate counter-terrorism measures. His rhetoric revealed the central paradox of this study: the securitisation of terrorism as an unprecedented and urgent threat requiring the continual use of exceptional and emergency measures over the long term.

The construction of an exceptional and securitised terrorist threat

By uncovering the colonial origins of the emergency powers (re)emerging, the article dissects the discourse surrounding "temporality" and "urgency" from a post/decolonial standpoint. In essence, it proposes an exploration of the political rhetoric's formation of the "moment of rupture", aligning with the Paris attacks, and the concept of "temporal linearity" intertwined with colonial heritage and the prolonged application of emergency powers towards their routinisation. Temporality is key to the article's argument, linking the exceptional nature of terrorist events and the normalisation of prolonged threats to the state's emergency powers, rooted in colonial practices that persist today.

The French historical regime of exceptional powers

In this article, exceptionalism is understood by political actors as the implementation of emergency measures due to an urgency and existing situation that necessitates their

activation. In practice, the state of exception is activated and rests upon three elements: deviation from higher norms, dependence on special conditions and subjection to a temporal limitation (Manin 2004). To be legitimised and justified, exceptional policies need to be constrained by a temporal limitation strictly defined as “necessary” due to the imminent peril, threats to the public order and the life of the Nation (Codaccioni 2015). Additionally, owing to a specific threat and urgency, there exists a legal authorisation to temporarily deviate from constitutional norms, extending beyond the realm of “normal” politics, as the circumstances require it (Manin 2004). The emergency paradigm, and consequently the dichotomy of “normalcy versus emergency”, relies heavily on temporal limitations and is central to its legitimacy.

The article unpacks how the concept of exceptionality is a political strategy used to invoke emergency powers that extend beyond the norm, with the roots of this state of emergency in the French system tracing back to the colonial era of 1955, as an enduring phenomenon and persistence of the state of emergency qualified as a tool of repression of state power (Guénif-Souilamas in Lambert 2021, 19). In the French context, emergency powers and the regime of emergency originate from the war in Algeria within the Law of 1955 no.55–385.⁴ The state of emergency was crafted by the governments of Pierre Mendès France and Edgar Faure to respond to the 1954 insurgency. In response to a series of terrorist attacks by the *Front de Libération Nationale Algérien* in November 1954, the law of 1955 was created and gave birth to the contemporary regime of the *état d'urgence*. The law of 1955 gave a legal framework to measures used by the French police and the military powers at that time to avoid the *état de siège*.⁵ The state of emergency grants military-political powers without declaring war across the whole territory (Guéguin 2022; Rigouste 2021). Under French colonial rule, Algeria was part of French territory, prompting political actors to create a framework of urgency and exception (Lambert 2021, 72). In 1955, Algeria, with its three departments, was still officially part of France, enabling undeclared warfare. The 1955 law extended beyond the 1938 law, which organised the country for wartime, allowing targeted war measures in specific zones without a full declaration of war, which would have legitimised the enemy (Rigouste 2021).

This marked the birth of the *état d'urgence*. Military power alone was insufficient to stop what was labelled terrorism, so French colonial authorities resorted to house searches, administrative oversight, and movement control to prevent Algerians from joining the FLN (Thénault 2007), shifting from military action to policing. It highlights all the exceptionality of such powers. The purpose was to activate any military action not as a battlefield setting, but rather to give to the representative of the State (prefects in the departments: for instance, in the case of Algeria it was the general governor in Algeria) a variety of powers to implement certain dispositions, i.e. to impose a curfew, to regulate movement and residence in certain geographical areas, to issue travel bans and house arrests against individuals, to close public places, to prohibit meetings or gatherings, to seize the firearms held by individuals, to control the press, publications, radio broadcasts, cinema screenings and theatrical performances (Lambert 2021; Thénault 2007), as a way to discipline, survey and control. These measures, rooted in the state of emergency, are still used in counterterrorism today. Curfews, movement restrictions, house arrests and searches, once applied against the FLN, were reinstated in 2015 and remain in use with the normalisation of exceptional powers. Therefore, the regime of state of emergency has a geographical element: a space which is located in the domestic space; and a

temporality, an emergency character to be limited in time. It reflects on the definition of Lambert's (2024) colonial continuum which signifies the complexity of a surface where time and space are inseparable. The law of 1955 is a colonial bill, whose reactivation is part of a post-colonial logic (Thénault 2007).

Reflecting upon historical settings of emergency powers, the French decision-makers declared the state of emergency three times since 1955. That is, it was activated three times during the Algerian War context and its creation: on the 31st of March 1955, in certain parts of colonised Algeria (6 months); on the 16th of May 1958 in the French metropolitan area (3 months); and then on the 22nd of April to the 21st of May 1963 (769 days). The state of emergency was also implemented to suppress the movement of resistance against colonial powers in France's Outre Mer territory: in Kanaky also known as Nouvelle Calédonie on the 12th of January 1985 to the 30th of June 1985; in Wallis and Futuna on the 29th of October 1986; and the Polynesian archipelago and the Iles du Vent a Ma'ohi Nui on the 24th of October 1987 to the 5th of November 1987. The emergency powers were also implemented during the uprisings in the *quartiers populaires* in 2005–2006.⁶ Following the death of two teenagers caused by police neglect, insurrection flared up right across the country in the *quartiers populaires* and the duration and intensity of violence prompted the government to declare a state of emergency (Horvath 2018). Emergency powers were in effect from 8 November 2005, to 4 January 2006.

The fourth example is the case of Islamic terrorism post-attacks of 13 November 2015, analysed in the following section. The past application of emergency and exceptional powers questions different elements: the length of the application and the target of those measures. In principle, emergency powers are time-limited and justified by the urgency of the circumstances. However, the Law of 1955 stipulated that extension of that 12-day period is possible through the enactment of a law (Article 3). Decision-makers have, legally, in each of the cases extended their application beyond the originally specified 12-day period. This article argues that these examples highlight not only the deliberate expansion of temporal scope for political purposes but also a pattern of continuity in its application. This continuity enables increased control, surveillance and the discipline of bodies within domestic territory under the guise of terrorism and security. Since January 2024, state of emergency measures have been used against the Kanaks in Kanaki as a repressive tool against those resisting police and settler colonial policies. Similarly, SILT provisions were applied in the banlieues following Nahel's death in June 2023, outside counterterrorism purposes (Guéguin forthcoming). This shows the normalised use of state of emergency measures as colonial techniques persisting in contemporary contexts.

The target of racialised and securitised internal bodies cannot be dissociated from its practice and critique of the activation of emergency powers. Both in its past and contemporary examples, the dispositif of exceptional and emergency powers is deeply rooted in racist and orientalist construction of the body to suspect and target. Looking at the targets of those measures – the securitised bodies – it is necessary to recall that the emergency and exceptional powers are activated as a domestic measure to deal with security issues. Deepening the analysis and looking at previous and historical instances of the application of emergency powers, a consistent pattern emerges wherein the deployment of exceptional powers has been primarily geared towards securitising the bodies and their correlated spaces. These policies not only securitise the domestic physical space but also contribute to the

securitisation of internal groups labelled as “others” in comparison to the self, thereby perpetuating a distinction reminiscent of a “postcolonial enemy within” (Rigouste 2011, 182).

Within the national self, it creates a dichotomy between the internal self and the internal other (Guéguin [Forthcoming](#)).⁷ Significantly, not only does the political discourse perpetuate colonial structures, counter-terrorism measures also expose and reinforce these colonial structures with the debates on stripping individuals of their citizenship in 2015 (Guéguin [Forthcoming](#)). In this context, presumed outlaws were threatened with revocation of French nationality as a means of controlling national identity and territory. This involved surveillance of physical spaces and individuals deemed unworthy of being French by political actors. It highlights therefore a superiority-inferiority nexus and recreates a hierarchy of the French nationality to reinforce the superior identity of the French national self as different from what they called “French by paper” (*Français de papier*), which is a constant narrative embedded in far-right ideologies and right-wing politics.

Similarly, in colonised Algeria in the 1950s and 1960s, differences were made between French nationals, citizens, indigenous and the corresponding codes (i.e. Code de l’Indigénat) and processes associated with them, deeply embedded in the colonial matrix (Guéguin [Forthcoming](#)). Under French rule, people were categorised into groups like “French nationals” (those born in France), “citizens” (those with full legal rights under French law) and “indigenous” people (often referring to native Algerians, who had limited rights; this also applied to Kanaks, etc.). These systems of classification and out-grouping reflected and reinforced colonial power structures, with privileges favouring the French nationals and citizens while marginalising indigenous Algerians and/or Algerians during French rule. The state of emergency rests upon racial presumptions and draws from a historical continuum rooted in colonial practices. Empirically, the utilisation of emergency powers initially targeted Algerians resisting colonial rule; for instance, police forces did not profile and arrest Algerians who “look like [they are] non-orientalised”, that is, if they were wearing “European clothes” (Lambert 2021, 64) and fully assimilated to the “French culture”. It was extended to securitise Kanaks seeking autonomy through a colonial resistance movement and revolt.

A pivotal shift occurred in 2005 when political actors cast the perceived threat within French metropolitan boundaries, singling out the youth from marginalised neighbourhoods (quartiers populaires and banlieues), necessitating the tightening of security measures on both the individual and territorial levels. In 2005, political figures propagated the notion that youth from marginalised neighbourhoods were being manipulated by “radical Islamists” (Lambert 2021, Guéguin [Forthcoming](#)). The racialised youth were described with the same depictions used to describe their grandparents when fighting against colonial powers in the Maghreb and/or sub-Saharan Africa (Lambert 2021, 240). This narrative evolved further in 2015 when the target of securitisation shifted inward, labelling terrorists as originating from France and carrying out acts of terrorism on French soil – an identification that aligns with the concept of a “postcolonial enemy within” (Rigouste 2011). The framing and targeting expanded to include French citizens of immigrant backgrounds and Muslims, who were wrongly associated with terrorism after 2015 (European Islamophobia Report 2018, Lambert 2021). In 2015, the Sentinelle forces profiled French Muslims, closed places of worship, profiled women wearing the hijab,

men with a beard and/or white individuals who had converted to Islam (Bayrakli and Hafez 2018) as a process of surveillance directly linked to the measures of the 1955 bill.

The discriminatory and stigmatised dimensions of emergency powers are underscored by the particular focus on Islam and religious aspects within political discourse, highlighting the emergence of the “Islamic radical other”. The discourse also reinforces the narrative of “good” versus “bad” Muslims, rooted in racist and Islamophobic Western narratives that associate terrorism with Islam and vilify both Islam and the Muslim community (Jackson 2007). It draws upon the logic of a “suspect community” reinforced by the segregation of Muslims in *quartiers populaires*, when political actors securitised the sub-group by singling it out. This requires from the French Muslim community a performance to be perceived as “good” and deserving of the nationality to be considered a “normal self” within the self. The racial othering measures, discourse and practices are deeply embedded in French politics through the use of raids, house arrests, closure of mosques and house searches (Guéguin forthcoming).

Additionally, when looking at terrorism by white terrorists such as Bretons and Corses in the 1960s and 1970s, the government never activated or implemented emergency measures. This “type” of terrorism (or resistance) does not participate in the colonial continuum that I discuss in this article, while seeking anti-colonial ideologies. It further emphasises this dynamic of self versus other within the self category demonstrated above. The Breton or the Corse terrorist does not fit the criteria set up by French political actors of the other within the self; it does not correspond to an oriental terrorist construction. It further demonstrates the stigmatised, discriminatory, racial and colonial continuum of counterterrorism approaches and in particular, the state of emergency policy and the targets/securitised bodies they focus on. Examining the securitised domestic space is not the purpose of this study, but it cannot be ignored when arguing for the continuity of emergency powers’ application. While the locus of application is on the domestic, within such domestic space particular loci are targeted: Algeria; the Outre Mer territories; the *quartiers populaires* in 2005 where emergency powers were territorialised only to these distinct areas and not in the bourgeois city centre; and to the private space such as house searches and places of worship stigmatising, discriminating and targeting the French Muslim (Lambert 2021, 264; Rigouste 2023a) where they police their own cities, quartiers and private spaces.

A manifestation of this historical continuity is also found in the persistence of emergency powers, which can be seen as a “survival” from the French colonial empire (Vergès 2019, 18), now repurposed in the present as a counterterrorism tool. The exercise of emergency powers, wielded by the executive branch, remains inherently entwined with racist underpinnings, thereby racialising and stigmatising both bodies and spaces, more specifically, French Muslim bodies. The concept of the *état d’urgence* serves as a revealing lens through which the colonial continuum is brought to light, echoing the deployment of colonial powers that persistently manifest in contemporary times, perpetuating the racialisation of spaces and bodies. This is similar to what happened during the war in Algeria, the constant surveillance and restriction of protests, or even in Paris to restrict and forbid any protest organised by Algerians. Indeed, similarly to what I discussed previously – the use of anti-terror tools in the everyday (closure of mosques, house searches and house arrests), to restrict protest and dissident voices against the State, particularly protest emerging from the *quartiers populaires*, resisting racial police brutality and profiling –, this same restriction

of protests and violence emerged and was observed in imperial French history and was particularly embedded into an “anti-Algerian character” (Einaudi 2022).

In May 1950, May 1951 and July 1953, protests were suppressed through violence, torture and mass arrests. By 1959, internal camps were established to place Algerians under house arrest. Similarly, in 2015, house arrest referred to confinement at a designated residence, typically the individual’s home. In the 1960s, police violence against Algerians escalated, marked by humiliation, drowning and torture, culminating in the violent repression of the 17 October 1961 demonstration. During this event, police killed and threw hundreds into the Seine, hunting people on the streets of Paris based on their profiles as “Muslim immigrants from Algeria” or other racist labels (Einaudi 2022, 599), which I choose not to detail in this article. The history remains dark on the exact number of people killed; undeniably, it remains the product of colonial violence within the streets of Paris, legitimised due to the permanent state of emergency declared in 1955. Similarities can also be drawn with the surveillance and control of the population by the police, with the everyday surveillance of the public and private spheres by the Sentinelles (Guéguin *forthcoming*), as a way to control movement and rights of the constructed “other”.

In conclusion, the notion of time and the construction of temporalities are crucial when examining political discourse and the application of exceptional powers. Although justified by political actors as limited to a strict timeframe, in reality, these powers are extended and embedded in: 1) a continuum of application, and 2) a historical colonial lineage that perpetually securitises and targets the “postcolonial enemy within” (Rigouste 2011) and their associated spaces (e.g. former colonies, suburbs, places of worship). Indeed, some cycles of emergency powers, with their violent radical approach towards the constructed enemy and their length, participate, therefore, in the routinisation and survival of the state of exception. Therefore, the legal dispositions containing the state of emergency are the expression of legacies (Lambert 2021, 136). It excavates the inheritance of these measures from the colonial period, replicated in the post-colonial era. Reviewing the past use of emergency powers and related techniques shows that political violence against the state is consistently met with such measures to silence resistance, especially when racialised bodies are central to the conflict.

Beyond the limited-temporal exception

Temporality is a core element of this study, specifically, focusing on how political actors discursively construct it. While the political construction of fear and danger is significant and explicit within the literature, the construction of time is equally essential but less apparent in the framing of threat by political actors, yet it still serves to manoeuvre acceptance and implementation of counter-terrorism powers. Within the CTS scholarship, time has not been as central to research as the existential threat narrative, for instance. Just as with the politics of fear, danger, or the existential threat narrative, the construction of temporality within political discourse is performative in producing and constituting specific counterterrorism responses (Jarvis 2008, 2023). Jackson (2005, 100) also notes that discourse establishes temporal dimensions concerning the threat of terrorism in the “present and future, the immediate and the imminent (...) a super-supreme emergency”.

Nonetheless, temporal dimensions should be investigated in their historical context, considering historical cycles and the duplication of post-colonial legacies and associated

colonialities. Jarvis (2021) highlights the importance of temporality in specific crises, arguing that engaging with the politics of temporality is essential for a comprehensive understanding of security issues in both Security Studies and Terrorism Studies. While Jackson (2005) and Jarvis (2008, 2021; Jarvis, Marsden, and Atakav 2020, 2023) explore temporal aspects to advance the analytical and normative goals of Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS), they overlook the intrinsic connection between coloniality and temporality. This omission fails to account for the colonial roots of counter-terrorism powers and their role in constructing time. The discursive construction of temporality is central to coloniality, whether through references to colonial legacies and structures or the reproduction of colonial settings as a temporal continuum – replicating the past in the present.

In the process of framing a threat, the role of political discourse and therefore language cannot be neglected. The language is colonial (Khan 2024). To begin, to activate emergency powers, the political actors seek to construct the threat as exceptional, urgent and unprecedented. Despite the political discourse portraying the threat as “unprecedented”, there exists a political interest in framing the terrorist threat as “new”, “imminent”, “emergent”, “urgent” and “unprecedented” following the attacks of November 13th. It is necessary to examine the preliminary depiction of the terrorist threat in the aftermath of November 13th, which prompted the activation of the Law of 1955. After the attacks, the state of emergency was invoked for a duration of 12 days as stipulated by the law. However, on 20 November 2015, the Parliament decided to extend the state of emergency for a period of 3 months. The justification given for this extension of the original legislation was to modernise and adapt to an unprecedented threat. While I acknowledge the legal disposition to extend the application of emergency powers, it is also compelling to look at how the temporal concept is subject to interpretation and deconstruction through political discourse, aiming to extend the application of exceptional powers to an “unprecedented” threat. De Wilde (2018) highlights a tendency to frame crises as unprecedented, prompting equally unprecedented emergency responses.

However, I challenge this notion of novelty; disconnecting emergency powers from their historical applications is misleading, as they are part of a continuum. Of interest are the concepts of temporal discontinuity and temporal linearity of the application of emergency powers in the French context. Initially, the threat of terrorism is portrayed as existential, imminent and unprecedented, necessitating exceptional and temporary measures that embody the concept of an exceptional break with the normal, which underlies the notion developed by Jarvis (2008) regarding temporal discontinuity or the “rupturing moment”. The exceptional nature of the threat, coupled with the scale of the attack, enables political actors to emphasise urgency, danger, peril, thus legitimising the activation of exceptional powers as a temporal discontinuity. In November 2015, the threat was both exceptional and unprecedented, but the focus was placed on its urgent nature, the novelty of the *modus operandi* (acts of war), the target (French *art de vivre*) and the scale of the attacks.

This discursive construction legitimises the activation of the state of exception in France. For instance, despite the threat being qualified as exceptional in the context of the Charlie Hebdo attacks (January 2015), emergency powers were not activated *per se*, but the securitisation had started. The attacks of November 13th served as a landmark for these counter-terrorism policies, acting as a discursive resource for political actors to discuss the “rupturing moment”, dividing the period

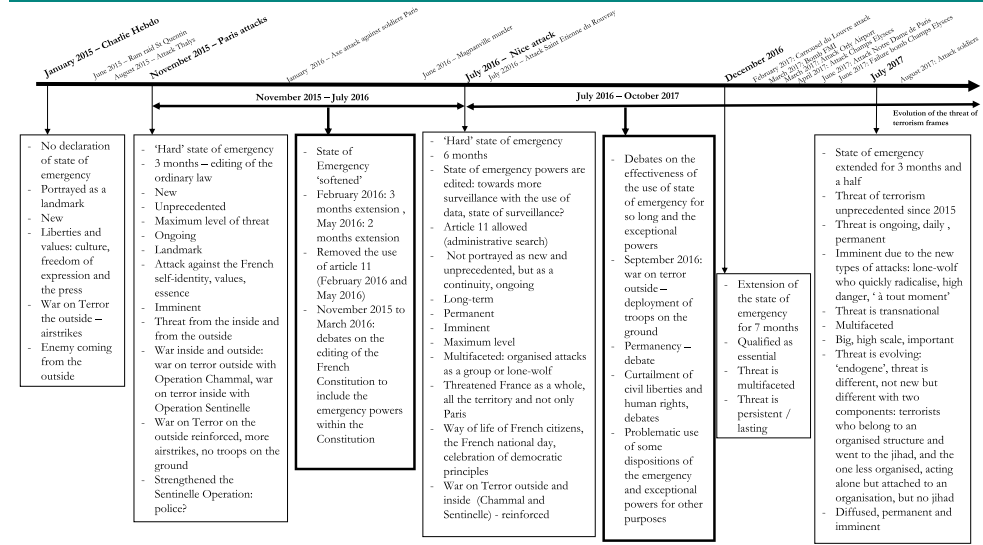
before and after the attacks (Jackson 2005; Jarvis 2008). Reflecting on the “rupturing moment” concept neglects what happens before and after the moment. This is similarly what happened with 9/11. By decentring research from 9/11 and more broadly from the so-called rupturing moment, it allows and enables the shedding of light on the colonial matrix of power which structures policing, racialised othering and counter-terrorism techniques across the globe but particularly in France.

Moreover, Barad (2007, 182) understands temporality as “the sedimented historicities of the practices through which it is produced as a part of its ongoing becoming, time has a history”. We cannot disconnect time and temporality from history. Equally, we cannot dissociate emergency powers from temporality. Therefore, we cannot disconnect emergency powers from history; it is inter-connected. Placing the terrorist event enables evaluation and analysis of the evolution of terrorism’s discursive function both in its temporality, historicity and coloniality. In the same way, we must move beyond the orbit of 9/11 and its construction as a temporal marker (Grennan and Toros 2021; Livesey 2023, 80–81), to move beyond the rupturing moment and the exact aftermath but look at the broader context and historicity of such concepts, events, and powers.

Genealogising terror means placing these events within their temporal context. Rather than viewing terrorism as moments of “temporal rupture” – the typical starting point for analysis – it should be seen as an evolution of its discursive function. While the scale of certain attacks may be unprecedented, the threat of terrorism has long been persistent and imminent. The threat of terrorism in France is not new, evident in both attacks and responses, such as the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attacks. This is further illustrated by French counterterrorism strategies and military interventions, including Opération Barkhane in the Sahel (2013) and Opération Chammal in Syria (September 2014), aimed at addressing the growing threat in these regions and beyond. The President underscored this point in his speech. Those military interventions were legitimised by the decision-makers through the framing of the threat posed by terrorist foreign fighters for France’ safety. In the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo attacks, Hollande, the former French president, declared “France has been threatened by terrorism for years...” (Hollande 2015a). Le Drian (2015), former Foreign Minister, stated “Yes, the threat is very high ... it’s at a very high level”. Significantly, Hollande underlined the character of the threat being deeply embedded in the French society since summer 2014⁸:

The threat was prior to that ... we knew there was a cell in Syria created to perpetrate terrorist attacks in Europe ... “Particularly on those dirty French” since mid-2014 ... every single day we were under threat, the threat was here ... we did not know where, when and how they were going to hit us.

These discursive empirics challenge the notions of temporal discontinuity and the “rupturing moment” embedded in political discourse of the aftermath of the attacks of November 13th. They reveal how political actors use constructed discourse around time to legitimise measures. The threat is depicted as both unprecedented and enduring, creating a paradox. The concept of temporality holds significance in political discursive constructions following the attacks, influencing the framing of the threat and the measures taken, both theoretically and empirically. This leads to what Fisher (2013) terms a “plateaued of timeless exception”. The *état d’urgence*, initially presented as a temporary

Table 1. The discursive evolution of the threat framing in France (January 2015 – SILT bill 2017).

response to the attacks of November 13th, becomes intertwined with timeless theoretical constructions, portraying a long-lasting and enduring threat within the French political discourse (see Table 1). Valls (2015a), former Prime Minister, stated “... We are at war, and we are only at the beginning ...”, while in the aftermath of the attacks, Hollande, former French president, declared:

[F]rance is at war. The acts committed Friday evening in Paris and near the Stade de France are acts of war. (...) In this war, which began several years ago (...). We must therefore defend ourselves, both urgently and over time. (...) But we must go beyond the emergency.

(...) And yet we are at war. (...) you are going to extend the state of emergency beyond twelve days – for three months – but after the state of emergency, we will have to be fully in a state of law to fight against terrorism. Since the threat will weight lastingly and the fight against Daesh will mobilise us for a long time to come on the external front as well as on the internal terrain. (...) (16 November 2015b)

Consequently, the exceptional counterterrorism powers should be regarded as long-lasting. The context of the Charlie Hebdo attacks facilitated the activation of emergency powers post-attacks of November 13th; the securitising language is used to construct the threat of terrorism as exceptional, unprecedented, of serious risk for security and safety. This language participated in qualifying politically the attacks of November 13th as a “rupturing moment”, following the same logic of the 9/11 construction. Additionally, despite legitimising counter-terrorism powers as “temporary” through the activation of emergency powers, it actually implies long-lasting measures. These exceptional measures are not limited to a specific moment “m”, but rather have historical roots, a legacy and a linear application which started before the attacks of November 13th.

This reflects what was discussed previously: genealogising terror means to trace and understand terror events associated within their specific historical and social contexts. By placing these events in their temporal context, the idea is to analyse them not just in isolation but as part of a larger, evolving history. Time has a

history; we need to move beyond the logic of rupture, and see the web of linkages between time, context and history. By constructing something as a ruptured moment, it breaks with the historical origins of such powers and application, and critical scholars need to engage with and move beyond the orbit of the ruptured moment and “address the fullness of terrorism’s historicity” (Livesey 2023, 81) and I will add “counterterrorism”. The starting point of this analysis should not be confined to the study of why the attacks of November 13th are constructed as exceptional, but rather, should look at the evolution of counterterrorism and terrorism framing in the political discourse. While the attacks can be considered a unique occurrence in terms of the *modus operandi* and the scale of the attack, the threat of terrorism itself is not “unprecedented” or new.

Therefore, it becomes important to consider the second temporal shape outlined by Jarvis (2008, 250): temporal linearity. This study demonstrates that the situation is better understood as part of a continuum rather than being confined to a limited and constrained timeframe. It is a strategic approach for political actors to portray the threat within a linear and enduring timeframe, enabling extensions and fostering a sense of insecurity to legitimise securitisation over an extended period. The context of terrorism since January 2015 has amplified fear among the population in France. This context also enables the elevation of the terrorist threat to a securitised level, beyond the realm of “normal” politics. While the Charlie Hebdo attacks contributed to the securitisation of terrorism, it did not prompt French officials to activate emergency powers at the time. Consequently, rather than seeing the attacks of November 13th as a point of rupture or radical temporal discontinuity between the two attacks, this article argues it should be perceived as a continuum process where both events are interlinked through discourse, where no rupture moment *per se* exists. In November 2015, the threat is framed both as an existential threat, a long-lasting and infused change from temporary measures to long-lasting policy. The articulations of and production of time through discourse is useful to influence and sell measures to the audience. Thus, the response to terrorism by French decision-makers had to fit with the new reality of the threat.

On the night of November 13, Hollande declared a 12-day state of emergency, which was extended to 3 months on November 20 through a new law. French political actors adapted and constructed the temporal scope of emergency powers to align with contemporary realities, updating the 1955 law. The French discourse on terrorism is paradoxical: counter-terrorism policies are justified by the urgency of an unprecedented threat but embedded in an enduring war on terror, resulting in a continuous state of exception. Similar to the 1955 context in Algeria, the law targeted and framed “terrorists” (Mitterrand 1954, Lemaire, Blanchard, and Bancel 2022, 534), without declaring war on French territory, which included Algeria. This created a “permanent war” until 1962 (Einaudi 2022). By avoiding the term “war,” France denied Algeria’s status as a nation seeking independence, labelling its fighters as rebels and terrorists disrupting public order. Similarities can be drawn with the post-November 13 attacks, where the language and justification reinforced the colonial nature of these powers. The context of securitisation must be scrutinised, as the threat is constructed not just in isolated moments but through continuity.

The normalisation of the exceptional: from an exception to exceptions

The implementation of extraordinary counter-terrorism measures disrupts the conventional understanding of emergencies by expanding the state of exception and constructing a specific perception of time and threats. Rather than desecuritising or reducing emergency powers, these measures are normalised, creating a paradox: a threat framed as both unprecedented and enduring, managed by exceptional powers that become routine over time.

Emergency powers: a timelessness legacy

The construction of temporalities in political discourse holds great importance when justifying and legitimising counterterrorism law making. Fisher (2013) argues that narratives of “time” assume a stabilising role within political discourse, especially when framing exceptional security practices, a dynamic observable within the French political context post-2015 attacks. In contrast to mere temporal responses to terrorism and discontinuities, the French utilisation of emergency powers implies, firstly, a progressive temporal linearity. This is not a “stabilising role”; it is moving, evolving and transforming. The construction of different temporalities attached to the threat of terrorism, almost co-constitutive, also needs to be comprehended in its historicity. Not all spaces are securitised and disciplining of all bodies, but this continuity never stops and it refers to the colonial continuum.

The temporal limitations of exceptional practices evolved through political narratives and were subsequently adjusted in terms of their duration through multiple activations of emergency powers. From 2015 to 2017, emergency powers were activated in six instances and led to a cumulative period of 23 months under emergency powers:

- on the 14th of November 2015,
- on the 20th of November 2015 (3-month),
- on the 19th of February 2016 (3-month),
- on the 20th of May 2016 (2-month),
- on the 21st of July 2016 (6-month),
- on the 19th of December 2016 (7-month) and
- on the 11th of July 2017 (3-month).

Emphasising this nexus, despite the SILT bill’s introduction in October 2017, Parliament debated extending the state of emergency for another year after July 2017 or reactivating it after the 2018 Trèbes attack (Hennette Vauchez 2019). Any perceived threat to French domestic public order triggers the activation and reinforcement of these exceptional police measures. History has demonstrated this effectively, but contemporary events illustrate this strategy: to repress social movements in 2023 with the use of anti-terror tools, or the activation of emergency powers against the Kanaks in 2024 during their fight against settler colonialism. It questions the concept of temporal policies and the emergency paradigm. Instead of reverting to a status-quo ex ante, it establishes a new norm where emergency powers assume the role of the new norm in securitising everyday life. When examining previous instances of the application of emergency powers, the duration of their application holds significance in every case by activating and enacting legally their extensions (as per Article 3 of the Law of 1955). The application of emergency powers consistently extends beyond the

initial 12-day limit. During the Algerian War, for example, emergency powers were extended for 769 days. Similarly, following the Paris attacks, they remained in effect for 719 days – over 23 months – highlighting a comparable pattern. The discursive shift in counterterrorism within its “temporality” framework is significant. While the November 13th attacks were portrayed as a radical break from the past, the response evolved into a temporal continuity through repeated extensions of emergency powers, moving from rupture to an ongoing response. This “temporal linearity” suggests a progression where the terrorist threat is seen as an extension of the past (Jarvis 2008). Yet, framing the threat as permanent, evolving and multi-faceted, combined with the reactivation of emergency powers, aligns with Jarvis’s (2008) third shape: timelessness.

Empirically, exploring evidence drawn from the critical discourse analysis of the corpus of texts (see Table 1), we observe that in February 2016, the application of emergency powers was extended to May 2016 with a threat delineated as “present”. In July 2016, prior to the Nice attack, the threat is depicted as “continuous”, “ongoing”, “long-term”, “permanent” and “imminent”, and at its “highest level”. After the Nice attack in July 2016, the threat is portrayed as “targeting the entire territory” and not limited to Paris and, therefore, securitising the space even more broadly to encompass the entire domestic space. In December 2016, the threat was presented as “persistent”, “lasting” and “multi-faceted”. Finally, in July 2017, political actors depicted the threat as “ongoing”, “daily” and “permanent”, normalising the securitised threat as a means of securitising the everyday life. The threat is portrayed as imminent due to a new *modus operandi*, with the terrorist enemy described as rapidly radicalised, transnational, multifaceted, capable of large-scale attacks, evolving, diffuse and diverse.

Through the various extensions of the *état d'urgence*, the framing of the threat evolves, being delineated as permanent, essentially constructing a new status quo. More specifically, analysing the political discourse post-attacks of November 13th highlights a dichotomy where terrorism is portrayed as a long-term phenomenon addressed with emergency and temporary powers, which further illustrates the paradox between the narratives and the practicality of counter-terrorism measures in this context. Hollande (2015b) declared “we must therefore defend ourselves *urgently and over time* . . .”. Not only do they suggest the urgency to respond, but they also emphasise the persistence of the threat, embedded in everyday life as a long-lasting aspect. It highlights conflicting and paradoxical temporal construction. While in the aftermath of the attacks of November 13th, the discourse indicates a rupture from the norm, a discontinuity, and a temporal linearity, the extensions of the exceptional powers suggest a timelessness temporal shape (Jarvis 2008).

The concept of timelessness is evident in the repeated activations of emergency powers as ongoing and perpetual strategies, solidifying the perception of the terrorist threat as enduring and promoting long-lasting policy (Fisher 2013). The timelessness should not only be understood as what is immediately after the rupture moment through extensions, but it is embedded in a bigger picture by looking at the historicity of such a construction, such securitisation of spaces and racialised bodies. Indeed, not only is the space constructed as under attack, but it creates a constant surveillance and control/discipline of the bodies moving within those spaces. Additionally, the bodies under “suspicion” are the bodies the state targets with the measures, e.g. the racialised body, the French Muslim, the non-white proletariat, via house searches and closure of mosques.

The securitisation of everyday life raises concerns about the state of exception becoming the norm, where counter-terrorism strategies serve as a constant tool of coloniality, disciplining bodies in domestic spaces through perpetual surveillance and control under the guise of preventing potential terrorist threats. The lengthy response to terrorism “over time”, as stated by Hollande, is not only expressed through the activations and extensions of exceptional powers but is also illustrated by a declaration of a French War on Terror. Similarly, in the Algerian War context, the war is not declared on the domestic territorial space. It follows the same approach: enactment of emergency powers within the domestic space and the war strategies on the non-domestic spaces. In the aftermath of the November 13th attacks, Hollande described them as acts of war. Simultaneously, the threat of terrorism is unprecedented and sudden which needs the enactment of emergency and exceptional powers in a limited temporality. The temporal paradox is reinforced by decision-makers’ use of war rhetoric; while not a traditional war, the ongoing “war on terror” contradicts the notion of being unprecedented and exceptional, as often described in relation to terrorism.

Despite declaring a War on Terror, the measures implemented remain within the framework of a state of emergency, drawing striking parallels to those used during the Algerian War. There is an explicit intention to not declare a war as such in the domestic territory against an “enemy within”; rather, the state of emergency gives enough power to the security actors to control, securitise, survey, discipline this “enemy within” with extensive powers without declaring a war, that is a conventional war. Because we are talking about the internal space with an internal body, it reduces the possibility for the political actor to actively create a state of war; rather, a never-ending state of emergency allows for more power and room to repress people. Hollande declared in the attacks of November 13th trial:

... We’ve already had attacks, but here we’re facing a meticulously planned operation ... to label it an act of war as I do, to wage war in a manner prepared like a commando action of war ... they were essentially waging war against us directly ... (2021)

Valls (2015a); Valls (2015a) , former Prime Minister, similarly described the attacks as “ ... We are at war, and we are only at the beginning ... ” and it “ ... is going to be a long war ... ”.

Advocating for a war waged on France helps political decision-makers frame the threat at its highest level, thereby bolstering the identity of the securitised and constructed terrorist enemy (Guéguin 2022). It also serves to legitimise these frames to the general public. Such framing facilitates the promotion of counter-terrorism policies for an extended duration. This, in turn, perpetuates their exceptional and temporal nature. Describing the terrorist threat as a war emphasised the necessity for additional measures which extend beyond normal politics. While political actors called for an unprecedented, exceptional and urgent response requiring emergency powers, they also implemented a long-lasting (internal and external) war on terrorism. The war lexicon triggers emergency powers within the domestic territorial space, whereas the measures of the French War on Terror are implemented externally.

Consequently, rather than considering it as a temporal discontinuity or a discursive rupture, emergency powers unveil continuities in their application and structure in the present-day response to terrorism. Legacies are expressed through the tool used and

structure of the law of 1955 itself. The continuum and coloniality are exposed and expressed through the length of the application of emergency powers (over-extended), but also the temporal shape and ultimately the historicity of emergency powers where time, history, coloniality and exceptional powers cannot be dissociated. Legacies of coloniality are evident in the targets of policing, violence and surveillance – racialised, postcolonial “enemies within” – and in the spaces they occupy, such as suburbs and quarters. This underscores the continuity of control in everyday life.

Crystallisation of the exceptional threat into permanent emergency policies

After the six extensions of emergency powers from 2015 to 2017, French decision-makers argued for the necessity to end this special public response and to equip France with what they labelled “new” means to respond to terrorism. The legislation SILT 2017 was justified by the government as a way to control the exit of the *état d'urgence* without depriving the state of the means to counter terrorism (Sénat 2017). To legitimise the normalisation of those dispositions, the political decision-makers framed the threat as permanent. Normalisation of the exceptional can comprise two processes (Flyghed 2002): first, the normalisation of the threat, and second, the normalisation of the response, means and policies. In practice, the French case study illustrated the normalisation of the threat which was depicted as being a sustainable, long-lasting, long-term phenomenon. Additionally, it showcases a normalisation of the response with the routinisation of the exceptional powers through its six extensions, reaching its paroxysm with the creation of a new anti-terror legislation: the SILT bill in October 2017. It demonstrates the benchmark of normality, the very institutionalisation of the exceptional. Philippe (2017), former Prime Minister, described terrorism as “A threat that has become lasting” and Collomb (2017), former Interior Minister, stated that “threat does not seem to weaken...”.

The normalisation of threat and response is not new. Codaccioni (2015, 15) identifies the Algerian War as the matrix for exceptional measures, where the judiciary extended beyond the state of exception into peacetime, routinising certain derogatory practices. Similarly, in 2017, exceptional measures were institutionalised and legitimised through the SILT bill. It justifies, therefore, the analysis of the French counterterrorism mechanism from a double angle: the colonial heritage and continuum, i.e. the emergency measures per se (re)implemented on specific cases towards a postcolonial enemy within (Rigouste 2011, Guéguin Forthcoming) –; and the constant adaptation and normalisation of the exceptional as a progressive and the evolutive securitisation framework or the colonialities of power (Mignolo 2011; Quijano 2000).

Looking closely at the frame given to the threat in the long-run, French decision-makers built it as a permanent and diffused threat. From that analysis, terrorism should be understood as a non-desecuritized threat, resting upon a long tradition of institutionalising the exceptional. Desecuritisation is delineated as a process wherein an issue is deescalated or no longer treated as an existential threat to the values represented by a referent object, thus reinstating the status quo by discontinuing the application of exceptional measures to address the securitized concern (Buzan and Waever, as cited in Buzan, Waever, and De Wilde 1998, 4; Coskun 2008, 405). In theory, emergency powers should end once the threat is neutralised and normalcy restored, maintaining a clear separation between emergency and normal conditions (Greene 2018; Neal 2020, 12).

However, this promise becomes unattainable with a prolonged terrorist threat. If desecuritisation counters securitisation, a persistent threat means it is no longer exceptional, implying a return to normalcy. In France, the prolonged nature of the threat has led to emergency measures being embedded in ordinary law; the state of emergency formally ends but continues in practice through new legislation. Instead of having a process of desecuritisation, emergency powers are normalised and are not questioned. It therefore enshrines the exceptional into an enduring continuum and I argue time cannot be disconnected from history, from a context and from coloniality. Emergency politics are a syndrome, a heritage and a legacy of this colonial continuum. This is what the paradox highlights: an impossibility to truly desecuritize the threat of terrorism, in the French context and more broadly the securitised language is always used, reified, through exceptional measures or other.

Hansen (2012, 539–544) outlines four forms of desecuritisation: stabilisation, replacement, rearticulation and silencing. However, the French case demonstrates the limits of this framework. There is no gradual shift away from securitised discourse towards political engagement or recognition of terrorism's legitimacy (stabilisation); no other issue replaces terrorism in the securitised narrative (replacement); no political solutions to the threat or grievances are proposed (rearticulation); and terrorism remains firmly embedded in security discourse, neither disappearing nor fading from attention (silencing). Instead, the emergency powers are extended, the exception becomes the norm, not as a process of re-installing the status quo, but rather as introducing the exceptional within the norms as a "new normal". Because it engages with indefinite temporalities, desecuritisation should not be employed as the fundamental counterpart of securitisation; instead, institutional securitisation and normalised securitised are produced.

The state of emergency was at the heart of French political and legal life ever since its declaration on the night of the 14th of November 2015 following the attacks, until the day of its termination in October 2017. Political actors tend to view the state of emergency as the means of the French counterterrorism strategy and a response to a recurrent terrorist threat. Depicted as diffused, multifaceted, endogenous and exogenous, daily, it securitised the everyday life, as a vernacular threat, thereby normalising and institutionalising the exception. The so-called *état d'urgence* is being modified and (re)constructed in its nature and it becomes a permanent answer (Guérin-Bargues and Auriel 2018). Particularly significant in the French case is the institutionalisation of exceptional powers, as a long tradition of normalising the exceptional post-conflict, which consequently does not signify restoring the status quo ex ante, but rather constructs a new norm, as a new benchmark of normality with an old disposition. The threat is framed as permanent, shifting from an exceptional danger addressed by extraordinary powers, to one managed through ordinary powers under the SILT bill. Several measures once classified as exceptional were incorporated into ordinary law through the SILT bill's 21 articles:

- Article 1 which relates to the protective zone, Article 2 which gives the right to close places of worship, Article 3 which focus on the control and surveillance of individuals, Article 4 which grants permission for house searches and administrative confiscation, Article 5 and Article 7 which focus on the PNR (Passenger Number Record)

Table 2. The normalisation towards a non-desecuritized threat of terrorism.

2 axes of normalisation		
Neal (2012)	"normalisation where the once exceptional becomes the new normal with the passing of time"	"are acts of legal normalisation that aim to consolidate and make permanent all the temporary and exceptional laws passed in response to previous emergencies"
Flyghed (2002) French case study	"normalisation of the threat" Two years of emergency powers living with a permanent terrorist threat. It is also a colonial legacy and a constructed continuum resting upon a long tradition to recourse to emergency and exceptional powers as a 'go-to' measure	"normalisation of the response" First step being the SILT bill 2017 enshrined within the law. While being normalised it is still depicted as an imminent threat, consequently, cannot be argued to be desecuritized.

- Article 11 which gives powers to monitor and control internet movement as a cyber surveillance
- Article 13 granting rights to access and control the PNR file and movement (air and land)
- Article 14 granting rights to access and control the PNR file and movement (maritime)

Articles 9, 10, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21 are modifying disposition and detailing other aspects of the law but are not a direct transfer from the exceptional bills to the SILT bill.

The concept of normalisation implies that emergency or exceptional powers do not disappear but rather are introduced and included in ordinary law, in the realm of so-called "normal politics". The interplay of temporality and discourse is significant; by exploring political discourse, it can be argued that constructed "temporality" influences the movements of (non)desecuritisiation and normalisation. The French case study is an illustration of this concept of normalisation of a securitized threat and the impossibility of desecuritisiating the threat of terrorism. The emergency paradigm is challenged by both decision-makers and terrorism itself, resulting in significant shifts (Payé 2004). The line between emergency and normalcy becomes blurred, as prolonged application normalises counter-terrorism measures (Neal 2012, 261), in turn reflecting a colonial legacy. The modification, interpretation and evaluation of what constitutes the exceptional are used by decision-makers as a political tool to advance and justify counter-terrorism measures (Greene 2018), deeply rooted in colonial history.

The study illustrates a mix of both axes of normalisation (see Table 2). The political narrative constructed a securitized everyday life through the normalisation of the exceptional and the unprecedented. Terrorism is both exceptional and long-lasting, illustrated by the various extensions of emergency powers. The threat framing evolves, the threat and enemy are (re)constructed and (re)produced through political narratives but are also deeply embedded in colonial legacies of powers and structures which need to be reflected by scholars in terrorism studies and IR more broadly. The exception illustrates something different; it allows the understanding of what covers the institutionalisation of the exception per se (Goupy 2017) and it enables the excavation of the coloniality of such measures embedded by the state of emergency in the French context.

The application of emergency powers and the use of anti-terror measures from the SILT bill did not stop at the premises of terrorism but were also used and implemented beyond the scope of countering terrorism by the French police which illustrates further the legacies and coloniality of such powers. Anti-terrorist measures have seamlessly integrated into everyday existence. A recent illustration of this phenomenon was witnessed during the 2023 French uprisings⁹ when anti-terrorist forces and techniques were deployed beyond the scope of terrorism, underscoring the impact of such policies on the everyday and illustrating the vernacular application of emergency powers towards the “postcolonial enemy within”, similar to how the resistance in Kanaki has been repressed since January 2024. Accordingly, the study demonstrates that the threat of terrorism is instead embedded in an evolutive framework: a colonial continuum. Some cycles of violence, by their level and length participate in the routinisation of the state of exception; despite its “end”, it still survives and reflects durability in the long run (Codaccioni 2015, 14), due to state practice, and police and military police practices. The state of emergency reflects this argument; the “durability” is expressed from the Algerian War, during the Kanaki fight for independence, and then during the riots in the quartiers populaires. Rather than constructing, thinking and explaining the exceptional and emergency powers as a space-time exception (Lambert 2021, 73), it should rather be demonstrated and deconstructed as a continuum, reproducing legacies, the violence, structures and powers in a contemporary response to terrorism: the colonialities of the emergency powers with the Law of 1955.

Conclusion

After an in-depth analysis of the framing of the terrorist threat in French political discourse, which resulted in the activation of emergency powers and a war on terror post-attacks of November 13th, the study suggests that the emergency paradigm and the dichotomy of emergency versus normalcy create a certain temporal paradox which rests upon colonial legacies. The study analysed the political discursive construction of temporalities, exceptionality and urgency. Through a critical discourse analysis method, it explored the threat framed around the question of time for various reasons. First, time is central to the activation of emergency powers. Second, a time-limited constraint is central to the securitisation framework in the legitimisation of policies. Third, temporality is core to the article’s argument that the threat framing rests upon an evolutive and continuous securitisation process towards a normalisation of the exceptional. It was argued that there is a political interest in constructing and manipulating temporalities through discourse, to justify the activation of the *état d’urgence* as an exception (in singular) to its six extensions, that is exceptions (in plural). Last, temporality is central to the argument of colonialities, giving a sense of continuity, reification and persisting colonial structures in the present-day French counterterrorism strategy.

The impossibility of desecuritising was demonstrated, as well as the narrowness of this concept in relation to terrorism as a global phenomenon. This article showcased that the political manoeuvre in constructing temporalities led to the impossibility of desecuritising the threat of terrorism but rather created a paradox of a threat considered unprecedented and long-lasting being dealt with by

exceptional and ordinary emergency powers. In doing so, the emergency powers uncovered an ongoing application, routinisation and normalisation. Thus, it strengthens the argument of the colonial legacies and continuities – colonialities – in the French political application and enactment of emergency powers facilitating a normalisation. Overall, the article contributes to the emerging decolonial approach in terrorism studies by exploring the entrenchment of French counterterrorism powers in colonial legacies through a specific lens and context. Specifically, it examined the colonial continuity of the French contemporary response to terrorism through the enactment of the state of emergency from 2015 to 2017 by securitising not only the threat but the bodies and the spaces in an indefinite timeframe.

Notes

1. The term “war in Algeria” appeared since 1955 in the French media, reappeared in 1960 but the French authority never mentioned or used the war in Algeria. Debates highlight either the use of “in” or “of” (see. Bancel et al. 2022).
2. This study is part of my doctoral research project and therefore the limit of data collection was fixed to January 2020.
3. All quotes are translated by the author from French to English.
4. Law no.55–385, 3rd of April 1955 relating to the emergency powers/*état d’urgence*.
5. Article 7 of the Constitution of 1946, where the police powers are transferred to the military/army.
6. Rigouste (2023b) extensively explains in his research and activism how we can describe this zone of/from the people and in a neighbourhood where he posited “It is used to describe the precarious living conditions of exploited social classes”, within which “the social fracture is nourished by a colonial fracture” (Lapeyronnie, 2006: 214). This article does not aim to define the complexity of *quartiers populaires* and suggests referring to *The Funambulist*, Issue 50 (2023) which explained the terms to avoid invisibilised social and historical hierarchies within such “quartiers populaires”. We can understand it as a regime of endo-coloniality across time and space, as a product of several historically interwoven genealogies, part of a long history of capitalism, dynamics of dispossession and exploitation.
7. See Guéguin (forthcoming) for the securitisation of bodies by French political discourse post-2015 attacks, where it investigates the essence of this “postcolonial enemy within” in more detail.
8. Quotes correspond to notes taken during the Paris attacks trial in November 2021 and Hollande’s hearing.
9. In May–June 2023, in the aftermath of the death of Nahel in France after police control, France saw an outbreak of “uprising” in its cities. To contain, control and militarise the French public space(s), in particular to limit and control the protests (a French constitutional right), the police deployed its antiterror units and measures by securitising the domestic space (Guéguin forthcoming).

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