

CREPUSCULE

By JUAN BRANCO

Foreword, by DENIS ROBERT¹

It was early November 2018 when the French President completed his remembrance tour with a visit to Pont-à-Mousson, on the Moselle river. He was to close a conference, using English loanwords to “make up” the future world as he saw it: Choose France Grand Est. I have a friend there who is a doctor. I suspect he might have voted for Emmanuel Macron in both rounds of the presidential election. Let’s be perfectly honest, I did the same in the second round, without any qualms whatsoever. This friend of mine, who I suspect always votes for the right wing, sent me a long e-mail message a few days later with ten or so instructive photographs attached. It was as though a lethal gas had wiped out an entire town. Not a single inhabitant of Pont-à-Mousson was in the streets. Place Duroc was completely shut off to the population. The same was true for Prémontrés abbey where the five hundred conference attendees, elected officials and leaders, hand-picked, searched and wearing ties, were penned in. That afternoon, it was as if the town was anaesthetized. The people had been sidelined. There was not a soul around, no free citizen in a radius of approximately 500 meters around Emmanuel Macron. Nothing but metal barriers, rural police forces and anti-riot police waiting in dozens of coaches parked along the river banks.

Television that evening, and newspapers the day after, noted the success of the presidential visit, but failed to report the sidelining of the unwelcome common people. “I’ve never seen that before, this is totally crazy”, my friend remarked about the conspicuous fear of having the President confronted by opponents. It was November 5th and the yellow vests were still folded in the boots of vans. Juan Branco was adding a final touch to his *Crépuscule* (Dusk) manuscript which he had just posted on his blog. It was still confidential. One week later, the yellow vest protesters would start to grouse on social media, then on roundabouts. The carbon emissions tax on diesel cars was making the have-nots yell. And the rich hide. The nation split and the rulers stalled for time. In unison, high-profile commentators played down the movement taking form and root. The gap between rich and poor was widening and would soon become an abyss. Right in the middle, a chasm opened up that the so-called intermediate bodies and those given to political gossip attempted to bridge. But no one managed to do it. Intermediate bodies had been atomized by Emmanuel Macron and his *La République En Marche* (LREM) movement. The gist of media remained indulgent to the rulers and developed fancy theories to hide the fact that they did not understand the revolt going on. I have in mind the photographs from my doctor friend. A president who’s hiding so much from his population is a cheating and frightened president. How else could this be accounted for? Juan, then just a Facebook friend of mine, posted a message inviting me to read his text. I did not do so immediately due to reluctance for its apocalyptic message:

“The nation enters miscellaneous convulsions where hatred and violence have taken hold. This enquiry into the inner gears of the Macronist power, written in October 2018, proves

¹ Denis Robert is one of the most famous French investigative journalists, known for his work uncovering the *Clearstream* case.

the point of those hatreds and violent acts one was so keen on discrediting”. There is so much of this sentiment on the Internet. Yet, in spite of its abstruse style, its lengthy sentences and the hardship of on-screen reading, something hooked me in its tone: that Juan Branco seemed to know his subject and set the appropriate distance. I saved the document. I was surrounded with friends, journalists, neighbours, kins, most of which playing down the Yellow Vest movement. On Facebook, the fire was spreading, but on the mass media, things went their slow way, calling the demonstrators² at best “oddballs” or “hillbillies” (Jacques Julliard), at worst “hooded thugs” (Pascal Bruckner), “far right or far left bastards coming down to streets to smack the police” (Luc Ferry³) or “hordes of petty people, of looters eaten up as much with resentment as with lice” (F.-O. Giesbert). Every Saturday, while the President remained stashed, the yellow vest protesters were yet occupying more and more space. My contacts often kept trotting out the acme of media comments, being scared of violence in the streets, criticizing the lack of organizing and clear claims, mixing up the yellow vest protesters with far right.

Those reasonings sounded narrow-minded, duplicate and eventually groundless to me. They expressed a fear of the unknown and of the insurrection smoldering. I had just published an enquiry depicting how billionaires plunder States⁴, with a little help from merchant bankers and law firms. I had been thinking a lot, writing some books, directing documentaries that focused on growing inequalities, on the clout of finance on economies and the impoverishment of middle classes: how come such a wealthy nation as ours could yield so much poverty? On social media as well as in public debates, I took sides with the yellow vest protesters. They are expressing a revolt which is salutary and essential. They restore our honor and our pride despite excesses and blunders. I was repeatedly asked: “Did you read *Crépuscule*? Did you see the performance of Juan Branco shot at Mermet’s radio broadcast?”⁵ One evening in late December 2018, I decided to do both. First, I discovered a calm and ardent young man with a structured thought who was developing a well-argued and original criticism of Macronism. Then I plunged into his book *Crépuscule*. I got out of that reading exhausted, but thrilled. I could not drop his manuscript. Despite the digressions and the sometimes-emphatic stance of his, it was the first time I was reading such a well-documented and compelling narrative of what Macronism might be, that was presented as a fabulous democratic scam.

² On that subject, see the article by Serge Halimi and Pierre Rimbert: “France’s class wars”, in the February 2019 issue of *Le Monde diplomatique*, that lists, from Bruno Jeudy to Hervé Gattegno and from Sébastien Le Fol to BHL, the inglorious litany of mean words written by those French opinion leaders in their op-eds.

³ Former French Minister of National Education, writer and radio host. Notorious for openly asking the police to use weapons on Gilets Jaunes protestors during a public radio broadcast show : “Qu’ils se servent de leurs armes une bonne fois, écoutez, ça suffit”.

⁴ *Les Prédateurs*, written with Catherine Le Gall, published by Le Cherche-midi, 2018

⁵ On the 21st of December, Juan Branco was the guest of Daniel Mermet’s radio broadcast, *Là-bas si j’y suis*. His 30 minutes or so performance would rapidly gain him over a million views.

Macronism is neither a humanism nor an ideology. On reading *Crépuscule*, it conspicuously shows as a complete makeup by oligarchs. It is a system for preserving and optimizing the gains of an (affluent) bourgeoisie who did not know which way to turn after the failing of the two last presidential incumbents. Emmanuel Macron made his own contribution. He conquered crowds. He trod waters. He consolidated and perpetuated the relation of domination of the elite over common people. He did not seek to get himself or his family wealthier, like the traditional and greedy tyrants used to. But he was able to stand the pain, he toiled for his own caste, his friends, those who helped him make it to the throne. He sought to preserve and make their interests thrive. Macronism is an elaborate, modern and hi-tech form of despotism. Albeit an enlightened despotism, but still a despotism. And that's it? Yes, that's it. The first version of his manuscript -Juan would regularly update his blog to refine his text- was divided in two parts. The first part -a hundred pages or so- is a monologue on Emmanuel Macron takeover. The second one, which is shorter -forty pages or so- is a portrait of the new undersecretary of Youth and Sports, Gabriel Attal. Both parts share a promise of "doom" for the young president and his henchmen (which includes the little-known Gabriel Attal). The hearsay around the text and the downloads went cheerfully on. Juan shortly became a star of social media, multiplying videos and interventions on Facebook and Twitter.

By the end of December, his book had registered over a hundred thousand download and some of his videos totalled two million views. We maintained a brief correspondence. I called on Juan to work his text over, to make it denser, more flowing, focusing on his readers. I induced him to indulge in a journalistic and didactic work and offered him to go in quest of a publisher. I did so without any calculation, out of infatuation for that story and that manuscript in progress. I had never read yet, nor understood that well the deep rationale behind Macronism. What I did comprehend was that the media advertised Emmanuel Macron. I had read someplace that he was cozying up with Xavier Niel. Seeing the queen of paparazzis, Mimi Marchand, take the exclusivity to look after the president's image had left me surprised. I had noticed that Brigitte Macron would only wear apparel coming out of companies owned by Bernard Arnault. But I did not make any linkage between those facts and other Juan narrated. I was bathing in tepid water, hardly pissed off when reading and hearing, op-eds and TV appearances after op-eds and TV appearances, laudatory comments on how young and clever Emmanuel Macron was. How lucky we were! I had shut my ears, got drowsing. I was like those frogs that never realize they will end up scalded. Poor animals.... Yellow vest protesters got us awake. Juan, through his background and position within the State machinery, through his age and his relationships with the leaders of that *République En Marche*, is part of bringing us to our senses, somewhat aching. He allows us to better grasp the Macronian geist, and capture the nascent horror. - Horror, you mean "aurora"?

- No, I mean "horror". - No kidding! - No, in earnest, nothing that we're faced with is tenable. What is horrible is equally the economic and tax platform and wrapping of it and the class warfare before us... Juan Branco is both a hacker and an insider. He tells us, from

the inside, the advent of Emmanuel Macron and the thirty-something around him, backing him and pushing him forward. They all have the same profile: having their sights set high, a devouring ambition, sterilized thoughts, showing no affect for anything that relates to “decent people”. The very idea of the people. That word does not belong to their vocabulary. “They are not corrupt. They are corruption”, Juan writes with affectedness and a touch of realism. Watching them work, one can say he is right. Juan is twenty-nine years old. He used to work as the principal adviser of Aurélie Filippetti before she became Secretary in the government and fired him. As such, he rubbed shoulders with TV and newspaper bosses. He got wooed by La République En Marche partisans and by Xavier Niel. He is an alumnus of the intellectual elite graduate school of ENS (Normale Sup), went to the same elite high school of École Alsacienne⁶ in Paris as Gabriel Attal, whom he knew as a partisan of Sarkozy, then a partisan of the Parti Socialiste and now epitomizing the perfect partisan of Macron. That same Attal is a kind of epitome of the President’s “philosophy” (my quotes). The depiction he makes of that man is chilling and serves as a trigger for the book. That young man, well clad, appointed Secretary in the government at twenty-nine, is a sheer symbol of the triumph of political void and progressive liberalism. That constantly emphasized modernity puts aside the mere idea of general interest and deifies the lack of scruples. The only feats that matter are marching ahead to nowhere, being personally victorious, owning a Rollex at thirty and a brand new smartphone.

This book is a saga of a government in a race to prevent its fall, concealing the deals that were signed. Reading Branco lets you to decode and realize the treason. It is before our eyes. This is what it’s all about. A treachery, a deception on the quality of political supply. The president wishing to pass laws on fake news is by himself the product of a huge fake news. That of a young and superiorly clever provincial reportedly working for the good of all who got up one day guided by a dream of his presidential destiny. Reading Branco, the whole story turns greyer, more interesting, secret, chaotic, compromising. And it gets dusky. Emmanuel Macron shows through this narrative as the product of a public manipulation. Through the rationale set and the facts stated and sourced, Emmanuel Macron, whatever brilliant he might be, is revealed as the candidate of an oligarchical system on its last legs, which has an interest in finding a display dummy and some storytelling on pain of demise. As a compelling illustration of that storytelling of political life, let’s pick December 10th, 2018. On that evening, in the midst of the yellow vest crisis, Emmanuel Macron in a tightly scripted TV address, announced that all employers who could afford should pay a year-end bonus to their employees. A bonus that would not be subject to tax. The president, cornered by the wrath of yellow vest protesters, was reaching out to businessmen. Help me. In the morning of the 11th, with an improbable

⁶ private school founded in 1874, among the most reputable schools in Paris. Its students are known to come from the most privileged parts of french society, thanks to selection and admission policies, and its geographic location.

mimicry, the CEOs of Altice, Free, LVMH⁷, Orange and a few others announced they would let go around a thousand euros for each of their employees, by virtue of a “necessary endeavour of solidarity to the nation”.

Patrick Drahi, Xavier Niel, Bernard Arnault, Stéphane Richard, just to cite four of Emmanuel Macron’s main endorsers, would respond present. Everything evidently looked premeditated. They had to respond quickly and let go a bit of money. The friends and endorsers of Emmanuel Macron’s campaign responded present. How else could it be? By the end of 2018, the stockholders of CAC 40 (the French index of big caps stock) companies were distributed 47 billion in dividends, the fortune of Bernard Arnault was doubling and Emmanuel Macron pressed against maintaining the French wealth tax (I.S.F.). He had made that pledge to his campaign funders, to all the families who, drawing 7,500-euro cheques, had demanded more tax justice, for themselves. At the end of the year, as a strange paradox, the number of persons living under the poverty line exceeded nine million in France. And the president’s cronies, under the pressure of yellow vest protesters, would pay a pittance. Similarly, the government, worried to see every Saturday roundabout folks get nearer to downtown, settled the police bonuses in kind with brand new high-performance beanbag guns. At a later stage, they would pass an anti-rioter law and take full responsibility for their security-driven excesses. I took advantage of the end of that year to visit many of the publisher friends of mine enticing them to read Juan’s text. I am naturally confident. Juan was multiplying followers and the booksellers were getting really excited with the digital and so literary version of *Crépuscule*. I pointed to my publisher friends that the text would be complemented and enhanced. I explained that it was part of the so French tradition of pamphlets. That it was a salutary work.

Since the book by the former secretary of Budget Christian Eckert⁸ where he narrated how Emmanuel Macron, then a secretary of Economy, had misused his mandate in the French ministry of Economy and Finance (Bercy⁹), to build up his campaign for the presidential election⁴, no one had undertaken to tell, with so much detail, where the president was coming from, nor how he had built his success. I was to meet with five refusals. Most of the time, the first reading -done by the publisher- would be positive. But, at later stages - when climbing the pyramid of the publishing house-, things would go awry. Although the text was downloaded in tens of thousands, despite the yellow vest crisis and the conspicuous linkage it had with Juan’s book, no significant publisher would take that risk. The issue was evidently more judicial than political. Even though, with a surprising coincidence, on January 9, 2019, Aurore Bergé, spokeswoman for LREM, announced she had filed a complaint against Juan (as well as columnist Thomas Guénolé) for incitement to

7 The biggest luxury selling company in the world, notably owning brands such as Dior, Moët et Chandon, Louis Vuitton etc. His founder and biggest stockholder is the 70 years old Bernard Arnault, one of the 5 biggest fortunes in the world.

8 Former Budget French minister. Notorious for publishing a book entitled “a minister shouldn't tell this” in which he depicts a dark picture of his former colleague Emmanuel Macron, accusing him of preparing his campaign instead of doing his ministry job.

9 French ministry of Economy and Budget, equivalent of the US Department of the Treasury. Acting as head of this ministry helped Macron financially and politically to create his movement “En Marche” and enter the presidential race.

hatred and violence. “Worse than the one who threatens, the one who beats up, the one who intimidates, are those who arm citizens minds to legitimate violent acts in our country”, were the words of the MP for the Yvelines (reported by Paris Match). The rejection of the manuscript and the attacks against Juan dispirited me so much as I considered participating with a friend to its publication in person. Such was my state of mind when two publishers, more independent and enthusiastic than the rest, contacted me. What you hold in your hands, that chronicle of a possible crumbling, is the fruit of a swift ripening.¹⁰

Reading that book gives us a better understanding on why that president is so afraid of common people and depends so much on police forces to save his own and his friends’ reputation. In this late February, the Macronian solemn rituals in the guise of town hall meetings are occupying TV screens almost full time. They defer a term which, according to Juan Branco’s book, is unavoidable. I could have put “hoped for”, but I’m not sure of it. Unlike the author of *Crépuscule*, I am not convinced by the fact that the crumbling, then the ousting of Emmanuel Macron is the only outcome of the conflict shaking the country. Nor the best outcome that be. Never have tax and economic policies been so plainly devised, sold to the public and crafted to benefit to the highest classes, already so affluent and dominant. The lack of checks and balances by the media and of credible political offering instead is a source of despair. We have let ourselves lull and deceive. But we were consenting voters. And what awaits us is not the end of a world, it is just its decay, its dusk. The uproar, the disorder, the confusion of a world. Why should we expect the worst? Let’s hope for dawn, calm, silence and justice. Let’s hope for men standing, determined and lucid. Unlike the gloomy vision Juan suggests, offering no alternative and leading to a revolution that will necessarily be bloody, we still have a bit of time and hopes left. And there still are journalists from the mass media or the alternative and independent press to pursue the investigative work on Macronism. And to reverse the heavy trend aiming at burying the yellow vest protesters under the rubble of resentment towards the managers in power.

This book differs from what is customarily published and read about Emmanuel Macron, those who took him to the Elysée and those who are handsomely paid by the Republic marching (*La République En Marche*) towards a place named nowhere. This may be a form of treason, but its author bravely takes full responsibility for it. Juan resides in the Saint-Germain-des-Prés neighborhood. He is a young bourgeois who has come to sever his ties with his own class, his masters, some of his friends, his co-alumni of Normale Supérieure and IEP Paris (Sciences Po). He’s been living for almost a year on benefits. Let’s wager he will be blamed for that. He also broke with his former life and his banker wages to undertake that labor for himself, on himself and for us. He did not make any plans for that. He just got up one day and set to writing. To take that risk because the rest, all the rest,

¹⁰ Christian Eckert, *Un ministre ne devrait pas dire ça*, Robert Laffont, 2018.

seemed unbearable to him. Crépuscule enlightens us - such a paradox - on the dark face of this decaying power. First of all, this is a work from someone lucid.

Denis Robert

Chapter 1

France is entering a period of upheaval in which hatred and violence have taken hold. This investigation into the personal dealings of the macronist regime, initiated in October 2018, attempts to explain the reasons behind the hatred and violence that commentators have done so well to expose.

It pays tribute to a woebegone people; the depth of whose anguish has been dismissed as sordid by an elite that it is now time to crush. To be clear, I will reveal the ties of corruption, nepotism, and intermarriage that are smothering this country and by which the dominant class has become a slave to its own interests.

All the facts I will present have been investigated and verified in detail. They reveal a major democratic scandal: a small minority has seized power, reaping the benefits and dividing them up freely among themselves, unrestricted, and with no moral constraints whatsoever. It is this imbalance which not only explains but justifies the explosion of violence we have been witnessing. For it is through unrelenting moral concessions that the experts, whose job it was to break down the facts for us, have instead prostituted themselves in a market for news where the protection of secrecy is as important, if not more so, than telling the truth.

This scandal has yet to be described or revealed, even though the people responsible for telling it knew exactly what was going on. More interested in preserving relationships than doing their jobs, they were essentially bought and paid for by the very ones they were supposed to keep in check. In a country where 90% of the press is in the hands of a few billionaires, exposing the truth has become a complex matter. Broken and besmirched, the truth has become undiscernible and unmentionable, politically unappealing. Because of this corruption, the ability to grasp and speak about the facts has deteriorated, both for the authorities and for ordinary people alike.

And so, the people have finally risen up.

Chapter 2

We are teetering on the brink of an abyss. Only eighteen months after his election, half of the French people wanted their president to resign¹. At this point we must assess the impact of what might seem to be the result of yet another meaningless poll. Beyond the mood swings and the data fluctuations that might occur in any population subjected to endless propaganda campaigns, such as the Great Debate*, let's consider what we were not told: that half of the French population was merely unhappy with the President of the Republic. But, rather, that one in two French people, the overwhelming majority of whom had, up until now, supported the existing political order, wanted the man they had collectively anointed just a few months earlier to be gone. President Macron was so battered by this revelation that even his trembling hands required a coat of make-up²!

How can this aberration be explained when Emmanuel Macron complied with all the outward appearances of a democratic election and, as its victor, should have been in a powerful position to lead and reform the country?

This is the question our scribes couldn't answer. Entrenched in a system that has enslaved the mainstream media through successive attacks on their freedom, journalists and columnists have become incapable of discussing or explaining the world around them. Reduced to mere commentators on news coming from the street or the halls of power, they have been confounded to the point of no longer being able to apprehend or produce any independent content.

None of them was aware of the obvious, that Emmanuel Macron had only *formally* respected our democratic system, and that they had been his first accomplices in this deceit. Therefore, the sense of illegitimacy felt by a majority of our fellow citizens, was clearly based on reality.

These are harsh words. Nonetheless, I will set out to prove that they are in fact justified. The person we are about to take down symbolically came to power, literally, at the expense of our sovereignty, a sovereignty that has been violated.

The call for Emmanuel Macron's departure is not a seditious act. His rise to power was an assault on the body politic which has precluded the possibility of political disagreement and has altered the very nature of personal and political interaction. This violation of our democratic and republican ideals has clearly revealed that the notion of belonging to a single society with shared ground rules was pure fiction.

¹ Yougov survey dated December 4, 2018. The survey was conducted on December 4 and 5, 2018. 1,005 people representative of the French population aged 18 and over participated. 48% wanted Emmanuel Macron to resign, 57%

wanted the dissolution of the National Assembly. One month later, half of the group called for a new Constitution. Thomas Romanacce: “Half of the French people want Emmanuel Macron to resign”, *Capital*, December 5, 2018 [online, in French].

2 On Macron and make-up, see Raphaëlle Bacqué, Ariane Chemin and Virginie Malingre’s article, “Depuis la crise des gilets jaunes, la vie à huis clos d’Emmanuel Macron”, *Le Monde*, 22 December 2018 [online, in French].

*The Great Debate (French: le Grand Débat) was a national, public discussion which was kicked off on the 15th of January 2019 by the French president, Emmanuel Macron, amid the Yellow Vest movement.

Chapter 3

No institutional narrative, be it in the media, politics or elsewhere, was giving voice to the desire for radical change which was spreading throughout French society. No one other than the Yellow Vests were ready to talk about this far-reaching issue. Over the course of several months, the mainstream media would invite yellow-vest representatives into their broadcast studios only to portray them as naive and unsophisticated, even though it is the role of both media and politicians in a democratic and liberal society to represent the will of the people without a hint of contempt, alienation or prejudice. This role of careful mediation should lead to a methodical elaboration of the subject matter in an effort to avoid any potential breakdown of society.

If there are no institutional mechanisms that allow for the expression of widely shared opinions, then the very principle of our form of government is an illusion, and violence ensues. This explains what took hold of this country, starting on the 17th of November 2018. How can one support a system allegedly representative and democratic, when the views of a majority of the people are systematically ignored and deprecated, on a daily basis? While in the meantime, between a fuel tax intended to finance the CICE¹, the imposition of the Flat Tax, the repeal of the ISF² and thousands of other measures invisible to the public, a massive transfer of resources was being engineered? When the country's wealth was being redirected from the vast majority of the population to the handful of individuals who had enabled Mr. Macron's election? While no one among the Paris "in-crowd" who was educated, paid and enthroned within that group was ready to stand up for the interests of those with no access to power? This paradox, that they tried to conceal and that no one was willing to address, is a sign of profound weakness. It is, in fact, an outright proof of failure³.

Everyone involved – political parties, intellectuals, experts, the media – remained silent, because all of them found themselves trapped in what I will call here, and prove later to be, an oligarchic system. This system refers to a public space dominated by individuals whose tremendous wealth depends directly or indirectly on the government and who invest a portion of their assets to take control of media outlets in order to drain and restrain their power and to use the voice of this diminished press to guarantee the preservation of their interests, to the detriment of the common good.

These are individuals with whom I would mingle and socialize with on a regular basis. There is no democracy without enlightened citizens. No sovereignty without free access to information. No freedom without representatives to regulate it. The hijacking of information by a few individuals obsessed with their own egos distorted the life of the people, quashing any possibility of meaningful opposition. This has been accompanied by the gutting of our educational system, reduced to an arena dedicated to the continuation of privilege and the introduction of future monarchs and aristocrats to one another. These people will inherit the advantages of their parents under the guise of meritocracy, a

despicable and unfounded concept within a democracy, which attempts to justify why, today, only one percent of the children of blue-collar workers attend the Grandes Écoles⁴, institutions which were nonetheless intended to champion them and educate them.

The body politic has been taken over by purely profit-oriented interests to the point of being subjugated by technological strategies and concocted algorithms promoting the illusion of liberation through uniformity.

Then, in the grasp of an advertising platform such as Facebook, we regained our sovereignty and found one other. What is more, we seized upon this platform, and seized mightily, as rightful beneficiaries enabling us to emerge onto the public stage with the same intensity with which we were once stifled.

Through the sacrifice of some ten human lives, thousands of wounded and detained, the system was able to reaffirm itself, to the relieved cheers of its representatives, both journalists and parliamentarians alike. These “mediators” should have been defending the interests of society right along, yet they remained callous to the violence that millions continue to suffer every day. Obsessed with the idea of getting back to playing their little games, they were now panicking that their turn would come to be overtaken by this surge.

This primer will reveal what was obvious to insiders: Emmanuel Macron was “placed” rather than elected. And the press acted with a complicity only to be expected from people who had themselves been “placed”. They put up no resistance, and after successive, imposed budget cuts, they continued to bray their independence, out of fear of losing their jobs more than out of indignation, like goldfish trapped in ever shrinking ponds.

All of this explains the wrath and the will to remove Macron from power that motivated a majority of our fellow citizens.

The testimony I am about to give is a treacherous act. By disclosing this imbroglio of compromises, lies and manipulations I am ready to take on the very people who sought to induct me into their circles. I will be doing this in the name of an idea they have abandoned: the idea of the *commonwealth*, the *res publica*, that has invigorated me and that I refuse to renounce.

For six months in 2012 I was the main advisor to Aurélie Filippetti⁵ while her rise to power was in the offing. During these six months, I was responsible for undoing the Hadopi Law, which had established a regulatory authority over the Internet. Then, in the middle of the campaign, even though commitments had been made, a cabal of lobbyists devised a scheme to force the candidate to renege on promises we had worked so hard to obtain. Hereupon I handed in my resignation, which was refused. This was in 2012. The

experience of this campaign, although undertaken reluctantly, was pivotal for me. It afforded me the opportunity to hear a president-to-be tell his advisors that he was very well aware that they were only in it for the cushy jobs, and that he would take care of them. It would allow me to witness first-hand as an insider the mechanics that gave birth to the powers that be, and the tainted fruits of their treachery.

Hired as a core member of this caste, I witnessed the dealings behind the format of *The Evening News at 8* on TF1⁶, the presidential interviews on France Television⁷, the appointment and recruitment of journalists according to their political and oligarchic leanings, the methodology behind the publication and retraction of articles. I witnessed a series of programming and recasting compromises being made at all levels to ensure that nothing gets leaked about the inner workings of the Paris in-crowd. I saw the facades they all hide behind to advance their own interests.

I queried and auditioned all the TV network bosses. I negotiated Act II of the Cultural Trade Exclusion [“l’exception culturelle” is a French principle of international trade designed to protect local arts and media interests in the areas of domestic quotas of foreign production and authors’ rights in the digital age, among other concerns. Act II refers to a ministerial report on the matter commissioned by Ms. Filippetti and produced by Pierre Lescure, 2012-2013, Ed.] and dangled the proverbial carrot in front of Nonce Paolini, Bertrand Méheut and Rémy Pflimlin, the heads of the three main French TV networks. All this while a stunned, soon-to-be Minister of Culture could only watch, anxious and silent, as a 22-year-old child put himself out there in the C-suites of TF1, Canal Plus and France Television.

I was in an absurd position for someone my age but being on the inside gave me a unique perspective on the workings of this political machine. I saw powerful men and women of this world grow and strengthen their power. I saw the attorney general of the International Criminal Court submitting to African potentates and French government officials. I saw them conceal their sordid business dealings in order to save face on the world stage. At first, I was taken in by these chosen few but soon came to renounce them so as not to become sullied as they were and to be used as a pawn in an enterprise dedicated to the manufacturing of consent in the service of their own interests.

It is from this vantage point that I will now tell you how Emmanuel Macron engineered a “democratic takeover” which could only result in mounting authoritarianism on the part of the regime, leading either to excess or collapse.

1 The tax credit for competitiveness and employment, implemented on January 1, 2013, is a tax reduction for big companies in France allegedly designed to facilitate and encourage hiring of personnel

2 A supplemental tax on higher incomes, “*Impôt Sur la Fortune*” in French, which exists in several EU countries, in different forms. Its objective is to ensure that the richest people of a society contribute more through a specific tax, supporting symbolically the importance of tax consent.

3 This problem concerns the media as much as the political parties, unable to grasp the importance of this event. *La France Insoumise* [French Rebels, a leftist political party in France, translator's note], in its search for renewal, merely asked for the

dissolution of the parliament, and we are left to wonder where this might have led us. The *Rassemblement National*, [National Rally, a far-right political party in France, translator's note], panicking, called for “the respect of the institutions of the Fifth Republic”. The others are of no importance.

4 Top schools which you can only enter through a competitive entrance exam. Most officials working in the public service were educated there. The “Ivy League” of French universities.

5 Aurélie Filippetti, born June 17, 1973, is a French politician and novelist of Italian descent. Member of the Greens, then the Socialists, then *Généralistes* she was elected deputy of Moselle in 2007, re-elected in 2012. She became Minister of Culture and Communication on May 16, 2012, serving first in the government of Jean-Marc Ayrault and then in the government of Manuel Valls. She resigned her ministry position on August 25, 2014, remaining the deputy for Moselle, and in the vote on the 2015 budget was one of 39 Socialist deputies who abstained.

6 *Le Journal de 20 heures*, main evening news broadcast on Channel 1 of French national TV

7 State-owned TV

8 Major French TV channel owners and representatives.

Chapter 4

October 2, 2017. Place Vendôme is sealed off. Across from the Ministry of Justice building, an important event for the nation is taking place: a close friend of the President is launching a clothing store.

He just happens to be the wealthiest man in France and fourth wealthiest in the world¹, owner of the planet's most important luxury brand, third-largest shareholder in Carrefour and a plethora of other media and economic holdings. None other than Bernard Arnault is celebrating the completion of a project that has taken seven years and cost him almost half a billion euros.

A few kilometers away from the Louis Vuitton Foundation, Arnault's favorite brand and the foundation's namesake, which accounts for half of the gross sales of the LVMH group, is inaugurating its flagship boutique in the heart of the French capital. Built with over 500 million euros in tax relief², the building's four floors are cornered between two mansions and attract its wealthiest clients with an opulent aesthetic, refreshed with a touch of modern style.

Despite violating the building code governing historic landmarks, the boutique was able to set up an enormous, gilded sun across its façade, contrasting the decrepit Ministry of Justice building just across the square. A real sweetheart of a deal.

Although Brigitte Macron typically appears in public wearing creations branded by her friend Bernard Arnault³, she declined to attend the opening. On June 29, 2017, she did, however, accompany her husband to the inauguration in Paris of Station F, the tech temple of an aspiring start-up nation, standing next to Arnault's daughter, Delphine, and son-in-law Xavier Niel⁴. In addition to the presidential couple are the same guests who were present at the dinner in honor of France organized for the President of the Republic by Donald Trump. Uniformed butlers wait on the guests in the winter lounge of the most beautiful hotel in Paris. In the heart of the Ritz, hidden from sight and under heavy escort, the host Bernard Arnault is with his daughter and son-in-law, welcoming his guests. These three families have combined their capital, with the obliging help of the government, to create the most powerful family on the continent, and at their side, a hundred carefully selected guests.

Due to a casting error I am among them, accompanying a friend.

This was not my first encounter with Xavier Niel. Three years earlier, the CEO of Free invited me for lunch, place de la Madeleine, as he did regularly with young people in whom he perceived a higher calling. I was 24 years old at the time and a Reader at Yale University⁵. I was back in Paris for a few days after a research trip to Central Africa and was about to meet a certain Julian Assange for the first time. My agenda was full. From ambassadors to power brokers, the inner circle was brimming with activity. I had an

appointment with Natalie Nougayrède that evening, director of the daily paper *Le Monde*. She did not know that she was about to be ousted by the same man who had invited us both for lunch.

The meeting was not very interesting. Niel, about whom I was very curious, tried to convince me that he got on very badly with his father-in-law. Niel's relationship with Delphine Arnault was damaging the image of the 'outsider loyal to his values' he was still trying to portray, and he seemed obsessed with the idea of rehabilitating this perception. We talked about various things, and I warned him of the danger of investing in the press, that mixing different types of business could cause problems for him. He waved my concerns away, stiffened up, and gradually revealed the cynicism of a man motivated only by his own interests.

The journalist who introduced us tried to join in the discussion, but his attempt fell flat. His incessant monologue left me dumbstruck. I could not abide by his obsession with money which undermines any possible relationship with other people. I tried, unsuccessfully, to pay the bill.

We walked down the small private stairs leading to the sidewalk. I knew that Xavier Niel had long been hiding his limousines, trying to convince anyone who would listen that he still drove a second-hand car. (As recently as January 2019, one of his closest associates told me how every expenditure, right down to office supplies, became a source of conflict. With a salary of 2,000 euros per month, his assistants would explain how some of their colleagues were reduced to renting a small, windowless office of seven square meters just to look after the affairs of the tenth wealthiest man in the country. Many of them told me about the workings of an empire reaching from Corsica to Miami, tarnishing the legend my interlocutor was trying to restore.) As he was leaving, he showed me his phone: a man named Emmanuel Macron had just messaged him. "The future President of the Republic!", he told me. Remember, this was back in January 2014. I scowled, and his smile disappeared.

That evening, during my meeting with Natalie Nougayrède, we talked about Assange and Syria. I didn't dare mention my encounter with Niel and his confidences about Emmanuel Macron⁶. Her predecessor, Érik Israelewicz, had died from a heart attack after months of harassment (relayed in detail by one of his friends) against which shareholders had failed to protect him. She herself was in a considerable amount of trouble. The meager investments that she so tirelessly solicited from her land-baron friends, out of the billions at their disposal, never materialized despite the fact they had been promised for some time. Xavier Niel was playing a double game with her, as I would later discover. He had lent money to Mathieu Pigasse, a bigwig over at Lazard Bank, that would allow him to invest in *Le Monde* and would soon extricate him from the triumvirate he formed together with Pierre Bergé⁷ who was on his death bed. Xavier Niel needed both to legitimize his appetite for power and replace the lawsuits he was continually bringing against journalists with a takeover pure

and simple so that, as he would say outrightly, “they stop screwing with me”. These people were nothing more than pawns in a long and carefully planned strategy.

In the large office on the boulevard Auguste Blanqui, the honest journalist I had met at the Quai d’Orsay while trying to warn her of the abuses of our Syria policy, knew nothing of the front that was forming against her. She suggested that I go to the press, but I was concerned about a potential obfuscation of interests. As one who was considering a political career at the time, I replied that the contract journalists have with their readers could become muddled and this would best be avoided. She told me of her difficulties: the promised investments that remained out of reach, the journalists who circumvent her by going directly to the shareholders, the reforms imposed to weaken her.

I wrote to Xavier Niel again, but we didn't find any common ground. Always up for a fight, he accepted the challenge, and we wound up spending months trying to come to terms but in the end, nothing materialized. After some reflection and presenting him with an unambiguous analysis of the oligarchic abuses in our society, I ended up suggesting seriously to become his children’s private tutor. Elisa Arnault, daughter of Xavier Niel and Delphine Arnault, was born more powerful than many heads of state. Clouds are gathering over Europe and democracy is on the verge of collapse. I explained that his position was untenable, that it was putting everyone in danger and that, to prevent upheaval, it was imperative to enlighten these powers of devastation.

What I did not mention, however is the deep concern I felt about the complete lack of consideration for the common good on the part of these individuals. The numerous job offers I was receiving (one in particular, from Lazard Bank where I received a grand welcome) confirmed that this question was not being addressed at all in these settings. As if the mere fact of being one of the chosen was qualification enough and so, of course, why rock the boat?

It was not yet the time for direct intervention in the democratic arena by the monied powers. As in the case of Quick⁸, they were happy to appropriate some of the funds provided by public officials. Funds that would later be replenished by taxes levied on much of the population. Since these officials are products of political parties that have maintained a tenuous relationship with the public, fallout was limited. Le Monde, it seemed to me, had remained relatively independent, as if the influence Mr. Niel was trying to buy had not yet produced the desired results which left him with no choice but to behave like a responsible manager. I would later come to learn that, quite the contrary, his plan was to take a reasoned approach in carrying out the initiative by not flooding the enterprise with money, but rather by producing a pressure-cooker effect on one department after another and thereby destabilizing the entire media landscape and subjugating it to his own interests.

There is a disquieting stench that permeates these worlds. I left for London the following day and encountered a man confined to a space of twenty square meters, Julian Assange by name. Although beleaguered, he was still fighting to expose the networks of corruption

that subjugate, starve and kill whole populations. For that, he was targeted by every power that the world has to offer, from the CIA to the FSB. Here I breathed a sigh of relief, comforted to have found a place where one could engage honestly.

1 73.2 billion Euros in 2018, according to Challenges magazine, compared with 30.3 billion euros in 2016, i.e. doubling within two years.

2 “LVMH saved 518 million euros in taxes thanks to the Louis Vuitton foundation”, *Le Revenu*, November 28, 2018.

3 The magazine, *Closer*, calculated that two-thirds of her public appearances were made wearing Louis Vuitton, making her a real force in promoting the brand. Her “friendship” with Balmain’s designer, Olivier Rousteing, brings a calculated balance to her preference for apparel from LVMH.

4 Whose wealth is 6.8 billion euros in 2018, right after the “Free” stock crash, that Niel tried to compensate by launching a new offer based on the Devialet company, where he invested along with Bernard Arnault.

5 Yale has programs with the Ecole Normale Supérieure (one of the Grandes Ecoles, the “Ivy League” of France) so that every year, four graduates are selected to teach there. These programs, begun a few decades ago, give all the “fortunate first few” from different countries competitive bragging rights, while strengthening links between their elites.

6 Worried, I did not mention this encounter to Niel either. I understood later that such precautions are rare in these settings, when Raphaëlle Bacqué, pillar of *Le Monde*’s editorial office, would suggest I meet Niel when I asked her a few years later if she thought I could get hired.

7 Bergé had little interest in freedom of speech, I had been obliged to fight the censorship he had imposed on the Bonello movie about Saint-Laurent. He eventually gave up and produced another movie on the same topic in order to minimize the impact of the original work which he considered a threat to his reputation and which he knew would be welcomed by critics. Of these successive obstacles, *Le Monde* did not write a word.

8 On this subject, see: Denis Robert and Catherine Le Gall, *Les Prédateurs*, Le Cherche midi, 2018

Chapter 5

Three years later, Natalie Nougayrède has been fired from *Le Monde*¹, Julian Assange is still locked up in the Ecuadorian embassy and Xavier Niel's protégé, Emmanuel Macron, has been enthroned at the Élysée. In a changed country where democracy has collapsed, I found myself at the Ritz, a few steps from the man who had invited me to dinner not so long ago. A movie star who had seen me grow up on my father's film sets had asked me to accompany her.

After a moment of hesitation, between Julianne Moore's dress and a Jeff Koons doppelganger, I was seated at an isolated table. I took time to observe the company. None of them was in red-carpet attire. I was suddenly caught by surprise. Upon meeting one after the other, I discovered that these people were some of the most powerful members of the Parisian editorial boards.

It was an enormous shock. In the vanity of decorum and submission, they had chosen to come here, pleased to be invited to such an event. I immediately recognized Marie-Pierre Lannelongue, the editor-in-chief of *Le Monde* magazine, who started looking down at her phone the moment she saw me and did so for the rest of the night. A few months earlier her magazine had censored my year-long investigation into Areva in the Central Republic of Africa, which was at the root of the embezzlement of almost two billion euros of public funds, an investigation which *Le Monde* had initially accepted for publication. Here she was, invited into the monied halls of power. She, who followed the instructions from management (as would confirm her colleague Camille Seeuws), after Serge Michel, another eminent member of the editing staff, had encountered similar difficulties three weeks earlier.

I also recognized Joseph Ghosn, from *Grazia*, who laughed at my presence here and was not so embarrassed. A few years earlier he had requested the only piece I ever wrote for the *Nouvel Observateur*, after having heard about my encounter with Assange. Used to the usual hypocrisy of the elite, he had decided to accept an important position where the impact of the compromises required of him would be insignificant. At my side, the general manager of *Elle* magazine, who had been trying to make me laugh, was being friendly. I suggested she hire me.

As a private show by Will Smith was announced to our small group, and the wine continued to flow, I asked without thinking: "By the way, why are you here?" The so-far relaxed atmosphere suddenly got tense. Uncomfortable looks were exchanged. Everyone seemed to want to disappear. It took a while before one of them timidly answered: "It's not what you think."

At the exit, a slender man surrounded by six bodyguards nervously walked past me. It was Bernard Arnault, followed by Xavier Niel and his wife Delphine. By the time he recognized

me, the couple was already several feet away. I saw the man I once engaged with turn around and stare me down. I remained silent. A few months earlier I had related for the first time how Xavier Niel had assembled his troops to support Emmanuel Macron, how he bragged to his friends that he spoke over the phone daily with the president since the election. In a small confidential journal, accessible only to subscribers, I had warned of the dangers of the regime whose birth I was witnessing, whose foundations could only lead to authoritarian temptations². The concert was atrocious and humiliating for the performer. Walking home in the cold early autumn, I asked again, this time publicly, the question that no one could answer a few hours earlier: “What on earth would ten Parisian journalism bigshots, fed by Ritz butlers, be doing at a dinner hosted by Bernard Arnault and Xavier Niel, whom they are supposed to keep in check and investigate. Was this business as usual?” In fact, what those editors were doing there, was only meant to be discovered upon opening one’s favorite magazine supplements, where one would have found articles dedicated to the glory of the new, recently inaugurated store.

I never saw Xavier Niel or Bernard Arnault again. I had sent a last message to the former that night, as if to warn him about what was coming: “Yes, it was really me. Burning houses wherever they are.”

For all I cared, their world could swallow them whole. I would never have anything to do with them again.

1 Following a witch hunt secretly led by stockholders, she would be replaced by one of the worst directors the newspaper had ever known, Jerome Fenoglio, who took the top job after trying to take power, having been proposed by *Le Monde* stockholders to the editing staff, which would refuse him until Xavier Niel imposed him, “maintaining his candidate”, so ensuring the loss of independence and control of *Le Monde* by its editorial board.

2 Aude Lancelin, interview with Juan Branco, “Macron or the Authoritarian Temptation”, in *Là-bas si j'y suis*, July 18, 2017 [on line].

Chapter 6

Let us now tell the story of how this regime came into being. The way in which, for instance, Edouard Philippe became prime minister out of nowhere, after jumping from lobbying missions for a large nuclear power company to various works for *Les Républicains* party. How and why Ludovic Chaker and Alexandre Benalla were hired by the Elysée in order to assemble a Praetorian Guard, a sort of ‘private police’ for Emmanuel Macron. How that model was inspired by Bernard Arnault, whose Chief of Security, a certain Bernard Squarcini, was no less than the former director of the French domestic secret services, the DGSI. This very man who would later be indicted following suspicions of having put the resources of our government at the service of his new employer, LVMH¹.

Instead of analyzing how an individual like Edouard Philippe could reach such a position in our country at the side of Emmanuel Macron, why were the hundreds of journalists who were part of the so-called free press content to simply scribe the stories dictated by their overlords, without ever trying to investigate?

I will show you that, in this affair as in dozens of others related to Macron’s ascension to power, that no real or true narrative has been written or shared and that consequently, the votes of our fellow citizens were therefore uninformed. Let it be said that on an event as significant as the nomination of the head of a government, a whole country was kept in the dark as to how Philippe was propelled into this position. A small self-satisfied clique had blindfolded the people of France, denied them the truth, and imposed its leaders on them. The democratic problem this raises is an ontological one: it exposes the nature of our political regime and strips those in power of any possibility of legitimacy.

I will show how Jean-Pierre Jouyet, a man known and protected by political journalists², and a servant of Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande, allied himself with Henry Hermand – a millionaire in charge of financing Macron’s private life³ – and with Xavier Niel, who would provide the means for his ascension. Together these men would take the first steps in an odyssey which would lead to the appropriation of power. They would create a system for redistributing the capital that Mr. Macron, in his younger years, had pillaged in order to achieve his ascent.

I shall give you a reason to wonder about Macron, whose colleague in government at Bercy [location of the Ministry of the Economy and Finance, ed. note], Christian Eckert⁴, revealed that⁵, between the multiplication of campaign expenses and the obsessive will to privatize public companies, he acted at every moment to feed his own ambitions and that of those who would help him. From the IGF⁶ to the Ministry of the Economy, and through to the Elysée. In order to accomplish this, he used privileged access and plundered resources acquired after laboriously passing prestigious national exams,

offering said resources to anyone willing to accept them in exchange for help in his ascension.

This man expropriated several million euros. He used the capital offered to him by the government, starting with the networks obtained at the IGF and the commissions in which he participated, and put it at the service of a private institution, the Rothschild Bank. At no point did he worry that these millions of euros would in the end be paid by workers and consumers, as their resources would be reduced by the same amount. This money became fuel for operations of mergers and acquisitions organized for the sole profit of investment banks and shareholders.

What is demonstrated here is that a system put in place by a few people was able to freely pillage and short-circuit all the safeguards of our democracy, allowing the establishment of a regime whose legitimacy is now rightly contested. Where relations and conflict of interest would become the norm, where powerful men would be enthroned to maintain order and profit, a new element -until now under control- would resurface.

This element would be the people demanding its sovereignty.

The *Gilets Jaunes* - Yellow Jackets - mocked by the pawns of the establishment, men and women described as violent and uneducated by those leeching off them, were the first to see the deception that had been covered up by the educated and cultured people who draw their legitimacy and their income from their alleged capacity to interpret and decode reality. Because they kept away from the intrigues of power marring the microcosm of the *Petit Paris*, because they do not benefit from the payouts offered by the French State, they immediately understood the betrayal intended against them. They understood without having to hear what the *MacronLeaks*⁷ were about to reveal: that the fuel tax was not a policy made to serve the ecological transition, a spin created from the start by Alexis Kohler (now Secretary-General of the Elysée) and Laurent Martel (tax advisor to Macron), but rather a massive transfer of resources from the masses to the wealthiest, making everyone pay so that a few could cash in.

They understood what the failure to publish this information meant and the mere outrage it should have provoked in the media. They understood the content of emails accessible to all in which Laurent Martel asserted that they would make something up to impose this fiscal policy which was actually a way of financing tax cuts for major companies. This was an idea Macron had come up with in 2012, claiming it would improve competitiveness, but it has already cost French citizens over eighty billion euros without creating a single job as was promised.

They understood, without help since no one took the trouble to explain it, the real reason behind the repeal of the ISF, the introduction of the Flat Tax and the thousand

other mechanisms that had been engineered within a few months without having gone through the necessary economic analysis.

They understood that this was simply a distribution of payouts, feeding into a system where the main criterion for accession to power was now to please the wealthiest, rather than representing the French people. They understood it on their own, without any help from intermediaries, although the media and political parties are supposed to help them understand and are handsomely paid to do so.

The succession of events, statements and treasons that marked the beginning of Macron's mandate gave birth, by reaction, to an intuitive reasoning which led to a violent demand for real democracy. None of the members of our "elite" welcomed this, happy instead to turn it, against all evidence, into a search for authoritarianism which they themselves were feeding. While for years the TV studios broadcasted humiliating debates targeting minorities, turning them into scapegoats, in an infinite ballet of degrading subjects to distract the people⁸, the Yellow Vests conducted themselves with dignity. Left-wing intellectuals and politicians, thus far seemingly indifferent to the Social Question, showed themselves timorous at best, more often worried, at the specter of a right-wing threat which was actually being fed by their cowardice. Right-wingers and Macron cronies took refuge in a push for law and order, in vain attempts ranging from the political movement *Place Publique* to the standing of Yellow Vest candidates in elections, via moribund Great Debates, pure propaganda operations aimed at short-circuiting democratic discussion in order to crush the protest and integrate the movement into the already existing ethos.

The only ones who understood, and fought for their peers, were the very 'illiterates' of the Republic denigrated by a recently nominated Minister of the Economy in his first televised speech. It is this woebegone people, held in such contempt in higher circles, who, for themselves and others and under staggering pressure, sincerely took up the fight. These are the same people whom the *intelligentsia*, too worried about losing their privileges, would abandon tomorrow in favor of the extreme right should Macron's regime show itself unable to defend their interests. This extreme right, which for thirty years spoke for the little people violently excluded from the mechanisms of social ascension by channeling and redirecting their rage against the weakest among us. Against the homosexuals, outcasts, Jews, who tomorrow, under this new authority which our elites are about to consecrate while claiming to oppose it, will find themselves on the frontline.

What this text attempts to show is that it is those who demand the departure of the president and the reestablishment of our democracy, who do it peacefully, by massively and symbolically attacking the places of power and their most vile representatives, are today the last defenders of an agonizing Republic and a rotting democracy.

Their deep-rooted, thoughtful and controlled passion pales in comparison to the violence which has been imposed on us for decades.

Their intelligence and ideas are far superior to those supposedly trained for leadership. In the face of predatory politics, which are devastating social structures and the capacity to exist collectively, in the face of the specter of political violence and emptiness, these are the only people who have stood up and can carry us into the future.

1 Bernard Squarcini was indicted on September 28, 2016, at the Paris finance law courts for “violation of the secrecy of the investigation”, “influence peddling” and “embezzlement of public funds”, in an investigation still ongoing into his activities since his reconversion.

2 With regard to this man in the shadows who has made and unmade many of the country's politicians, only Raphaëlle Bacqué and Ariane Chemin, leading journalists at *Le Monde*, would investigate him one day, under François Hollande, before going very quiet about him, particularly since the election of Mr. Macron, leaving their colleagues at *Le Monde*, notably Gérard Davet and Fabrice Lhomme, to keep the silence about it all and shower him with praise.

3 See *Libération*, which first mentioned, on November 7, 2016, the loan of 550 000 euros offered by Henry Hermand for Emmanuel Macron to acquire his apartment in Paris. He also invited him for a holiday in Morocco and became a witness at his wedding, before being gradually sidelined by Emmanuel Macron, and “to complain about it to the young people of En Marche, which he finances”. Nathalie Raulin, “Death of Henry Hermand, Macron's benefactor”, *Libération*, November 7, 2016 [Online, in French].

4 Secretary of State for the Budget at the Ministry of Finance and Public Accounts under Valls and Cazeneuve.

5 Christian Eckert, *A Minister Shouldn't Say That*, Robert Laffont, 2018.

6 General Inspectorate of Finance, the most prestigious sector of the State, accessible mainly by being selected after graduating from the ENA.

7 Data leak on May 5, 2017 from the emails of five Emmanuel Macron advisors, filed, verified and published by Wikileaks on July 31, 2017.

8 The epitome of which, before Mr. Macron put the issue of migration back into the “great debate”, when no one had asked him to do so, was the proposal to establish a forfeiture of French nationality by François Hollande, which I described on Canal Plus, during my first television intervention, as pure and simple prostitution.

Chapter 7

The growing uprising did not back down in the face of organized State violence, but rather imposed itself as of November 17, 2018, in a contained and thoughtful manner, focusing on its resources and objectives, moving towards clarity.

This helped an emancipating movement to hold out against a will to crush which did not stop at physically attacking people in order to gain control. In the face of the deliberate destruction of social ties, and the contempt and disdain of the self-obsessed elites, it was a source of joy and of massive regeneration, an outlet for hundreds of thousands of desperate people who had felt alone and individually responsible for their misfortune since the crisis of 2008.

In a society where it is always the same people who suffer from uncertainty, who fear job loss and precarity, the movement provoked an inversion of roles. Now the bourgeois and the comfortable, the pillagers and the profiteers began to tremble. On the Boulevard Saint-Germain, I saw clients of the Café de Flore, which I still visited, shrink back on the pavement tables, worried about the masses that had suddenly invited themselves into their daily lives. I saw those who were used to dominating begin to tremble. People who had blithely compromised themselves, who had forgotten the source of their comfort and privilege, who had established themselves without ever fearing a backlash, supported by a controlled media environment, a justice system shown by sociological studies to support the status quo, an economic environment where social mobility does not exist, were suddenly feeling threatened.

And I said to myself that finally, through this exposure to those they had exploited, they understood that they were part of a collectivity.

This sudden fear – the fear of paying for what they had done – explains why a producer and all-purpose commentator like Brice Couturier during that period asked for Macron to be given full powers, and other nonsense, while Luc Ferry called for the demonstrators to be shot. This fear explains why *Le Monde*, whose editorial board had accepted, indifferently, the imposition of a management that had been refused twice, was so indecent in its treatment of the movement of the Yellow Jackets, claiming to explain it while actually aiming to crush it. This fear explains why we suddenly saw all these usually self-assured people swaying from one position to another, unable to understand what was going on.

This text is not fettered by uncertainty. Its aim is to explain and legitimize the rage that unfolded and understand what was at stake. It gives grounds and reason to those who mobilized. It *demonstrates* – the term is strong but justified – that they were right. Through facts, far from any ideology, it shows the need for this movement which, too briefly, made the owners fear that they could lose what they had gained.

All violence is the expression of a political failure, i.e. a failure of conflict management. Yet, what must now be exposed is that this failure is the result of the servitude of our elites to their own interests. It is the result of thousands of compromises, manipulations and operations which seemed insignificant at the time, but led to a major democratic crisis which is only just beginning.

This violence, which so many people now ask to be condemned, *comes from them* and this responsibility must be returned to them.

I say this with the confidence of someone who was a part of it.

Chapter 8

So now I must return to the event that triggered this investigation. On October 16, 2018, Gabriel Attal, aged 29, is appointed by the French president, without formal nomination, as Secretary of State for Education in charge of the youth.

The public discovers on BFMTV¹¹ the face of the man who has become the youngest minister of the Fifth Republic. In *Le Monde*¹², and even more so in *Paris Match*, there is much excitement about the dazzling CV of this young deputy from the Hauts-de Seine, who looks like the ideal son-in-law. Even though his name has been heard for weeks in the salons of *Petit Paris*, he remains largely unknown to the rest of the country. I for my part know that he is yet another pure product of the system that has just honored him with a high ranking position, much to the surprise of those who could have opposed his nomination.

This discretely executed affair is interesting because it allows us to go to the roots of the career nepotism our elites want to cover up. Gabriel had the right friends. I saw him being pushed to the front, along with a few others, like Manon Aubry who became leader of France Insoumise at the European elections. As early as the summer of 2018, Bruno Jeudy, favored chronicler of high society, revealed the literary and musical tastes of this brilliant young man in no less than three successive articles in *Paris Match*, placing him within the small male political elite that the magazine and its owner, Arnaud Lagardère, fawn over and make famous¹³.

Such a privilege, unwarranted for a man of his age and track record, is cringeworthy, particularly within *La République en Marche*, where his colleagues regard him with wariness, giving him the nickname ‘the dandy’. Posing in a white shirt and capri pants, a glass of white wine by his naked feet, looking self-confidently at the camera on the banks of the Seine, Gabriel Attal seems in one photo shoot to be aware of his power, so confident of his aura, which so far nobody has spotted, irritating even his closest supporters. In the face of general indifference, he waxes lyrical with elaborate speeches about his taste for the rapper Orelsan, Fort Boyard, or his mansion in the very chic Île-aux-Moines. This summer initiation into the *beau monde*, promising many bright tomorrows, shows his integration into a system that must now be thoroughly dissected.

One does not become the youngest minister in the French republic by chance. A few months earlier, this young deputy appeared for the first time on a radio France Inter morning broadcast. This rare opportunity to address the country as a whole is normally

11 French major TV Channel that can be compared to Fox News. Notorious for copying the latter on many aspects, notably copying almost word to word a promo in 2003.

¹² A sycophantic and empty portrait by Alexandre Lemarié that says a lot about the collapse of political journalism in France.

¹³ Bruno Jeudy, “Gabriel Attal: “I put together the Orelsan Fan Club at the assembly”, *Paris Match*, August 4, 2018 [Online], “Gabriel Attal: “The day I meet Ingrid Betancourt”, *Paris Match*, August 20, 2018 [Online].”The young macronist guard take some fresh air in Brittany and come across... Jospin”, *Paris Match*, August 15, 2018 [Online]

only offered to the most seasoned politicians. Many are paralyzed by the stakes. However, supposedly personifying the left wing of La République en Marche because he comes from the Socialist Party, Attal disdainfully and arrogantly bombards the leftist “bobos”¹⁴ of his generation, who were at the time occupying the universities to protest against the newly created “Parcoursup”¹⁵. Not stopping there he went on to violently attack the rail workers’ strike against the privatization of the public rail service, denouncing their mobilization and more generally the inability of the country to reform itself.

Flabbergasting his interlocutors, the new spokesperson of La République en Marche is thus presented to the elite and the public at the age of twenty-eight. The style of his presentation is a pure imitation of time-honored codes. A few years earlier, a certain Emmanuel Macron, for his first speech as minister, talked to Jean-Pierre Elkabach with the same arrogance, calling striking workers in an abattoir in Brittany “illiterate”, and showing complete indifference to the fate of the individuals concerned. Something in the attitude and assurance of both these men distinguished them from their political predecessors.

The machine was up and running. *Le Monde* tried a critique, thanks to Laurent Telo’s pen, another former student of the Ecole alsacienne only too aware of what was happening. His lack of hard work and the need to conform to the demands of glossy paper journalism prevented him from achieving his aim. There was uproar at Attal's all-consuming arrogance from those who claimed he had never had a real job in his life, but it didn't matter. A few weeks later the charmer laid it on thick again. Invited onto a TV show on the State-owned channel called “*On n’est pas couchés*”¹⁶, he confidently defended the “Parcoursup” reform, taking credit for it under the benevolent eye of the presenter and the strangled gasps of his guests.

His first intervention at the National Assembly, both hesitant and tinted with a light smile he constantly tried to get under control, seems to have been forgotten already. Despite the virulent reactions, the new frontman of the presidential party seems intoxicated by his power. In the following months he outdoes himself, setting himself up as the spokesman of the people during the Benalla affair, criticizing the media and the opposition for their alleged ‘excesses’, going on to attack the Yellow Jackets, in front of Léa Salamé¹⁷ and several million people, proud to have been the only member of the government to dare appear on the most-watched public TV show in the country.

Insignificance produces deleterious effects when it colonizes the State and its institutions. The tale of Gabriel Attal’s trajectory will be our entry point to exposing the way in which the inner circle manufactures its soldiers.

¹⁴ Nickname given to the left bourgeoisie, derived from Bourgeois-Bohemians

¹⁵ A higher education reform which created socially selective barriers to enter university.

¹⁶ A lightweight debate program.

¹⁷ French State-owned main radio and television animator.

Chapter 9

For every crime there is a crime scene. Our subject was born in an interesting one. Located in the sixth arrondissement of Paris, the École Alsacienne is directed by a kind-mannered right-winger, Pierre de Panafieu. Left-bank equivalent of the Lycée Franklin, where Brigitte Macron was a teacher, of Saint-Dominique and of the École Bilingue [ed: Set of private high schools associated with the State], the École Alsacienne is where the offspring of the Parisian cultural intelligentsia can breed and thrive. Each year, additions are made to this small circle: French political and economic leaders send their children to join the ranks of the aforementioned elite.

Although it is under contract with the State, the Ecole Alsacienne has absolute control over the selection of its students and teachers. There is no quota, be it economic or geographic. Thereby, the elites can socialize and reproduce amongst themselves without any fear of being contaminated by unwanted company. Unlike many other schools, the advertised goal there is not excellence, but the “emancipation” of the children.

Though it is not too fierce, there is a lot of competition between these Parisian institutions, whose duty is to take in and launch the heirs of the country's most prestigious families, and each school has to find its niche. While provincial cities most often have one or two private schools that set the standards and ensure a social selection to provide the elites of tomorrow - La Providence in Amiens, Fermat in Toulouse, etc. - the struggle is more intense in the capital, there are many more birthrights to be protected. So, a few steps away from where Mr. Attal went to school, the Stanislas School endorses a strict discipline inherited from an antiquated Catholic culture, while Notre-Dame-de-Sion admits the worst of the heirs, and brings them to the “right path” as best they can. In other words: gives them a basic diploma to avoid them being too embarrassed around their peers.

A little further away, on the western side of Paris, Saint-Dominique fights fiercely with Saint-Louis de Gonzague for the elite of the Right Bank, while the Ecole Bilingue welcomes all the heirs of the great international bourgeoisie and diplomats who did not choose Charles-de-Gaulle High School in London. These extravagantly priced schools split between them the great bloodlines of the financial bourgeoisie and the historical aristocracy, under the watchful eye of Janson-de-Sailly [ed: public high school predominantly attended by children from the upper class because of its location in the prestigious 16th arrondissement of Paris], which surprisingly, along with a few other public schools - including Saint-Louis, thanks to its scientific excellence - to stand on a level with these places of social reproduction by attracting the most brilliant young people from the upper-class districts. Finally, a few other schools, such as the Lycée de la Légion d'honneur, complete the picture.

The Alsacienne, in this ecosystem, had to fight to attain the stature it has today. For it is not only a question of surviving the competition from private schools, all of which maintain

their reputation with care, wrapping up their students with a sense of narrative and outdated traditions in order to charm parents in search of distinction. The brightly shining Henri-IV and Louis-le-Grand, located a few blocks from the rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, also cast a shadow on the Alsacienne. Scornfully eyeing all the other schools in the country, and relying on unjust but reassuring derogatory regulations, they attract both the nation's best pupils and teachers.

They constitute yet another social selection filter, ensuring the reproduction of the well-off classes under the guise of equality. There we find the cream of the intellectual elite of the Left Bank - who happily traffic in false domiciliations to ensure their offspring access to the junior school, hoping that they will be selected for the high school in this way - as well as the best provincial students who find themselves accepted through a process that leaves out the poorest of them with a surprising consistency. To this already long list, which gives an idea of the reality of our “meritocracy”, we must add less impressive high schools, from Montaigne to Duruy, and from Lavoisier to Fénelon, which offer an education of incomparable quality compared to the rest of the country, thanks to the funneling system of the Education Nationale, attracting the most experienced teachers and admitting students who already possess the essential social codes to succeed in our school system, starting with a natural affinity for programs designed for people like them, by people like them.

Surviving and standing out in such an environment is a challenge, and all the other Parisian high schools that find themselves deprived of a large proportion of their most privileged students know this. L'Alsacienne succeeded first of all because of its extraordinary location, at the confluence of the fifth, sixth and fourteenth Parisian arrondissements. Located on the heights of Port-Royal, a few minutes from the École Normale Supérieure and the Sorbonne, the school offers a safe and easy to reach environment, surrounded by shops, libraries and various institutions, facing the Luxembourg gardens, a lovely place to go to relax. Offering the possibility of doing all of one's schooling there, from the third year of kindergarten to the final year of high school, the school guarantees a closed environment, promising the heirs of the local bourgeoisie a one hundred percent success rate in the general *baccalauréat* [ed: French national academic qualification at the completion of secondary education], almost always with honors.

However, lacking a few essential elements, such as preparatory classes, the school knows that it is unable to compete with the establishments of the Montagne Sainte-Geneviève [ed: part of the Left Bank], and so it chooses to revel in a humanist and liberal reputation, which it perpetuates by cultivating a suffocatingly closed circle whose only objective is to transmit to its students the codes allowing them to rise in society. This creates a particular climate that reached its peak at the beginning of the 2010s, with the suicide of two of its students, one of whom threw himself from the sixth floor of one of its buildings. Like all schools “under contract”, L'Alsacienne finances its teaching salaries through taxes and only collects from the parents of pupils a tithe of 2700 euros per year for other general living expenses. The selection process to enter the school is very severe, and genealogies and patronage are

just as important as academic results. In the sixth grade there is an exam and a study of the student's file, in order to keep the numbers down to around two hundred students.

It is openly accepted that priority will be given to anyone with a family member who has already been to the school. Here, the academic record only partially counts. Children's habits, their ability to fit into the mold, their parents' "value" are just as important. There is no chance of finding a working-class child, the child of say a nanny or a housekeeper in the neighborhood. These people are kept at the gates of the school, where the population is much more colorful than that of the pupils, due to the presence of nannies and other people hired to replace overworked parents, most often paid under the table and heavily exploited.

From the sixth grade onwards, an annual trip is organized, to bring together all the classes and create a sense of community that will soon become smothering. It begins with Alsace, of course, in a tribute to the Protestant founders and their culture. But the myth takes on its full dimension in the seventh grade, with the trip to *Rome*, with its small red hats, and then by the sports competitions of the "*défi*" in the eighth grade, Florence in the tenth grade, and finally a trip co-organized by the students in the eleventh grade. Since the academic standards are not that high – not many people are excluded or allowed to repeat a year, and they are quickly replaced – the students can focus on socializing among well-born people. Everything is done to promote as quickly as possible a sense of belonging that will allow the weaving of unbreakable ties, of solidarity throughout life which will, in time, be useful.

In these places, it is hard to have a bad encounter, in the most bourgeois sense of the word. Everyone learns from an early age how to act gracefully and respectfully towards the people they have to put up with, and how to accept the gifts and counter-gifts that change hands. The social question becomes a non-issue. Questioning the order of things would be absurd. The children from great families will hardly get acquainted with the few *bourgeois bohemians* from the surrounding arrondissements who manage to break in and who will soon find themselves left out.

This school and a few others play a fundamental part in the endogamy of our elites and the assurance that their privileges will never be questioned. Differences in wealth and status do not, of course, prevent the growth of different castes within this microcosm. Again, this is to get the students used to social discrimination by rank, making it seem natural, thus encouraging the learning of long-term obedience and domination.

There are approximately six classes in each grade, and the students who have been at this school since the third grade of kindergarten are privileged and benefit from an undeniable advantage over later arrivals. They form a truly integrated group with an *esprit de corps* that goes way beyond what one could normally expect from children and teenagers. Access to the various groups that have been formed over the years is socially regulated by a myriad of criteria combining financial resources and the ability to reproduce social codes and

aesthetic dogmas. The cafeteria, a typical place of social mixing, is quickly passed over for the restaurants in the surrounding streets of the very expensive Quartier Latin where, little by little, the distinctions are established. At the heart of the reproduction of the elites, the processes of integration are a serious business. Indeed, later on they will allow students who fail to enter the *grandes écoles* a doorway into the *petit Paris*, thanks to a friendship with a student from the Ecole Alsacienne. This is how some of the executives of Macronism have been able to climb the ladder.

Blending in, in an elite factory, is a difficult thing to do. Those who would try to unlock its secrets are met with mutism and silence. Very intimate and closed, full of social codes and habits which journalists rarely bother to explain, the Parisian endogamy is reinforced by a significant dose of unawareness in regards to its own privileges of birth. This democratic decline disrupts our democracy and prevents the necessary renewal of the “elites”. Blinded by a school system continuously described as meritocratic despite the accumulation of studies that say otherwise, these elites have gradually isolated themselves.

It so happens that I didn't encounter these problems, because, very quickly, they adopted me. After a State school education, my mother's anxiety led to a change and propelled me into this institution, something I would regret for a long time. From the sixth grade on, I was meeting the future minister [ed: Gabriel Attal], as well as many other future emerging figures, whom I would never stop avoiding.

The break with State school is radical. Those who have completed their schooling in this small haven of peace where social diversity is non-existent have, from an early age, an immense advantage over the rest of the population: the mastery of the codes, networks and social habits that govern Parisian society and will consecrate those destined to govern us in the future. There are princes in this school, where the hierarchy is based on seniority and gives them priority over the cohorts arriving in the sixth grade and all those who, isolated, will have to chart their own path step by step. The students who started in kindergarten occupy, from their earliest childhood, one of those privileged positions which, through old ties and the accumulation of information on their peers, will guarantee their integration into the inner circle. It is easy to guess to which of these two categories Gabriel Attal belonged.

Very quickly, the future minister stood out thanks to his opulence, and the sharing and distribution of the social, economic and symbolic capital that everyone was expected to contribute. The art of eloquence, the finest knowledge, large properties, diverse networks - the school playground is a vast commercial space where unaware consumers are like so many corpses and where winners and losers learn their place. This is the miracle of the mechanisms of reproduction: making everyone believe, from an early age, that they are not in any way favored or disadvantaged, and that the affinities between people are only the result of their individual choices.

This picture takes on staggering proportions in these places, and it is easy to understand why. In the class of 2007 - Gabriel Attal's class – you could find among others the granddaughter of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and daughter of the Club Med CEO, the daughter of the Archos CEO, who is also the sister of the future boss of Uber France, one of the Seydoux heirs, the siblings of the film producers Godot, the distant heirs of the general de Hauteclocque, the great lineages of the de Gallard, de Lantivy and de Lastours families, the daughter of the press baron Bernard Zekri and that of the founder of A.P.C. Jean Touitou, the grandson of the banker Michel Pébereau, the daughter of the President of the American University of Paris, Gerardo Della Paolera, and so on.

High-up executives of CAC 40 companies, lawyers and other high-ranking officials at UNESCO and the son of the headmaster of the Lycée Henri-IV completed the picture, accompanied by a small number of descendants of artists, professors and so-called working intellectual classes who were naturally enriched by the surrounding school years: Olivennes, Bussereau, Breton, Peillon and other names of ministers and men or women of power seemed pretty common, in this inner circle, and no one paid attention to them anymore, compared to their classmates called Huppert or Scott-Thomas, who still maintained some remnants of an aura.

It is important to grasp how the illusion of meritocracy masks this extraordinary concentration of wealth and privileges. It leaves the other schools depopulated, and causes the students to adapt, disguising as a social fatality a force that, they say, will have no effect on anyone's destiny. Three kilometers away from the Alsacienne, at a school where I taught, theoretically endowed with the same resources, the success rate at the *baccalauréat* is barely fifty percent, and I would have to prod the anesthetized 12th-grade students to ask them if they really believed that some natural difference explained why a distance of a few kilometers made their chances of success several dozen times lower than those of their neighboring counterparts. It was pointless, the blindness caused by an oligarchic system obsessed with reproducing itself leads to similar effects in both the dominant and the dominated.

Gabriel, who has attended the Ecole Alsacienne since kindergarten, was one of the wealthiest. The accumulation of social, economic and symbolic capital acquired through these years of training would later be the fuel for a fast track ascent and favor him in the co-optation processes set up by political elites in search of soldiers, without him ever having to produce or demonstrate anything, except his natural ability to fit in thanks to his mastery of social codes, his respectable façade and bourgeois behavior that in society, because of cultural and ideological hegemony, still garner the highest respect. With all the resources that the elite can offer its own, Attal would be able to measure up to people sometimes decades older and whose qualifications he could never match.

It is essential to understand the level of assurance, the certainty of being unique and special that success offers in a clan-based, blind system draped in feigned objectivity and universality. Mr. Macron has expressed some concerns about the abolition of royalty in

France. He does not seem to understand - he who has devoted five years of his life to trying to pass one of the Republic's exams - how much the Republic has mimicked the habits and customs of royalty, particularly through its *concours* [ed : Civil service examinations]. Having replaced divine right with the absurd and misguided notion of merit, our leaders continue today, through these mechanisms, to consider themselves the chosen ones. Thus, over the years, our elites have built up a multitude of initiation paths, access to which, despite appearances, has gradually been reserved for them. While all sociological studies show that it has become impossible for the children of workers to pass the Republic's most prestigious *concours*, our leaders still consider that egalitarian competition exists, where in fact there is only competition between well-born people¹⁸.

¹⁸ The rare outsiders, who come from more modest backgrounds and are used to show “that it is possible to pull it off”, will never be enough of a disguise. It is obvious, in the prestigious schools of the Republic today, only two percent of working-class children are admitted, despite them being ten times more numerous in society as a whole. One can imagine the perverse effects of such a system, where ignorance doubles the motivation: the rare members of the hapless classes who manage to slip through often mutate into ardent defenders of a system which crushes their like, but which offers them the possibility of distinguishing themselves and getting away from their poor surroundings.

Chapter 10

The Ecole Alsacienne is a place full of the contradictions of a bourgeois left that claims to be attached to the republican idea but refuses to mix its children with those of the plebs. It is perhaps the most emblematic example of the abuses of our system, naturally producing right-wing thought without recognizing the fact, convinced of its moral high ground but actually blind, due to its isolation from the rest of society. This combination allows it to believe it is progressive and yet defend ideas that in no way threaten the establishment.

The eldest child of lawyer and producer Yves Attal, Gabriel was very quick to behave in a way more suited to the elite high schools of the Parisian Right Bank, where contempt and class confidence are the norm, than to the Ecole Alsacienne, where, as we have seen, politeness prevented any overstepping of the mark.

There was nothing to imply that he would become a progressive. At the Ecole Alsacienne, the economic precariousness of the rising bourgeois classes seeking to establish themselves encourages modesty and prudence, a kind of urbanity clothed in the values of “living together” that Attal would go on to vehemently reject. He was from one of the best-established families in the institution, with a cultural and social capital that was coupled with the troubles that class defectors sometimes leave to their children. His father, who died in 2015, built his success by ramping up the power of business lawyers in the 1980s. The firm he founded dealt with the inheritance and estates of wealthy artists.

Carried along by the evolution of a milieu that was devoted to money and which, by the end of the decade, had given birth to the first cultural dynasties of Paris (thanks to helpful policies inaugurated under the direction of Jack Lang), Yves Attal saw early on how diversifying the sources of finance for the French cinema industry could be of benefit to him. With a structured and well-connected career, after having built up an important network through his firm, he made his way into the film industry by raising funding for arthouse movies. He went on to be recruited, for a millionaire salary, by Francis Bouygues. He took part in the crazy adventure of *Ciby 2000*¹⁹, of which he became vice-president and an ephemeral bureaucratic pillar at the beginning of the 1990s. Accompanied by legendary producers such as Daniel Toscan du Plantier, who brought to the table a substantial address book, Yves Attal participated in one of the most legendary failures in the history of French cinema: the creation of a production with the most demanding directors and writers costing 800 million francs (120 million euros). While Martin Bouygues took over the family empire, Francis Bouygues decided to devote himself body and soul to this company, committed to reinventing the production system so it could compete with Hollywood. Parvenus from all over Europe flocked to make a few million out of the affair. Vanity reigned supreme in this ill-conceived, out of proportion venture which led to the marriage of the cultural elites of the Left Bank with one of the capital's greatest lineages in the West

¹⁹ Pierre de Gasquet, “Bouygues launches into the business of films”, *Les Échos*, February 17, 1992 [Online, in French].

and its immense financial heritage, all under the benevolent gaze of a dying socialism. It would be a quick death. At the moment of Attal's appointment, the right was returning to power and Francis Bouygues, who was ill, gave Jean Claude Fleury the keys to the new production company. The latter took power and forced Yves Attal to resign. This first failure was to be followed by a second, even more painful one within UGC Images. It was to be the last.

Chapter 11

We are in 2005 when a young Gabriel declares his allegiance to right-wing ideas. Raising high the flag of a dazzling liberalism in the face of general dislike, a kind of Nicolas Sarkozy who possesses none of the correct social codes, the young adolescent is full of assertive self-confidence, marked by an ever-present vindictive seriousness. This natural arrogance is only held in check when he finds himself in the presence of the heir of a prominent family, when it transforms into ambition. In a school where domination is constructed in silence, Gabriel stands out and attracts attention.

Like any elite school, the Ecole Alsacienne is a cruel place for those who don't have a set of keys. Generally there because of a very good academic record, or in a music class designed to bring in talent, outsiders are often victims of ostracizing campaigns orchestrated by the most integrated members of the student body. Obvious exclusion mechanisms are applied to anyone whose clothing, name, accent, or even small mannerisms, reveal a different social, cultural or economic background.

Often it is the collateral damages that reveal just how much power is concentrated in the hands of the few, even going so far as to impact the teachers. In tenth grade I witnessed a school year turn into a disaster, in an atmosphere of general satisfaction and excitement. Students were getting teachers fired, in a seemingly endless game of beheadings. The students benefited from an accumulation of privilege, the ease offered by cultural background, absolute endogamy and indifference to the idea of risking their education, giving rise to an atmosphere of class war that the school was unable to control. The students were too aware of their systemic superiority over their supervisors and teachers. From modest backgrounds or with no established social origins, not mastering the codes of an aggressive bourgeoisie, the most fragile teachers fell under the influence of the students they had initially despised. They found an unexpected release in the rebellion against the supporters of the order that were crushing them. The alliance was strange, but it worked perfectly. Behind accumulated privilege often lie extreme cases of disinheritance, where insane ambition leads to rapid disintegration and dehumanization.

If the students of Sciences Po, HEC and sometimes Assas or the Polytechnique discuss anything - such schools being mainly the guarantors of successful social reproduction - the favored subjects consist of comparing their second homes, trendy Diesel jeans or the fabulous parties where the cream of society meet and mingle. It's all about social recognition.

In this respect, these schools are a magnificent laboratory that reveals the future of our society - a place where successful individuals are selected by their ability to maintain the appearance of domination, the habits and customs of the caste, and never their ability to produce anything of real interest. Demonstrating courage, sacrificing oneself in the name of an idea, committing oneself, these are all just so many fantastical notions.

Rock bands are financed by parents and given coverage by their friends in the media. The band “Second Sex” was at the time the most successful example. Through their abysmal and symptomatic mediocrity, a spectacular counter-hierarchy was created that made the school look good and allowed its members to lose the impression of belonging to a second-rate section of the Parisian oligarchy. It should come as no surprise that one of Gabriel Attal’s classmates rose quickly to fame, the pop singer Joyce Jonathan was briefly propelled into the charts thanks to a clever mix of rehashing existing material and being completely middle of the road, which generated a whole series of less impressive, but just as established careers for many others like her.

In a society where anything intellectual is devalued, few great researchers, scientists or intellectuals, industrialists or journalists can issue from an institution whose aim is not to get the best out of students, but rather to find them a comfortable job. His economic comfort being guaranteed, Attal chooses politics early on and does everything necessary to succeed. In his high school yearbook in 2007 he uses the opportunity to publish a picture of his face pasted onto a portrait of the former French President Georges Pompidou, while everyone else makes do with photo-collages with their friends.

The Macron regime, in need of young executives with an ambition to conform, is the ideal setting for this young man. Gabriel Attal wants to act as quickly as possible, so it is important for him to make use of all of his skills. At the Ecole Alsacienne the fierce fight for integration, where anything goes, is a microcosm of the same fight that dominates the adult world of the Parisian elite. The school playground is a training facility, mimicking the places of power and influence where appearance is the barometer for judging others and distinguishing oneself. It is the perfect place to prepare for a media-centric society where the empty politics of deliriously conformist power has easily imposed itself in the face of zero opposition. This would be Attal's training ground until his appointment to the Ministry of Education, in charge of regulating the public universities and schools he had never attended.

While students of Henri-IV and certain other schools have to exhaust themselves showcasing their talents in order to get into the most prestigious universities, it is enough for the students of the Ecole Alsacienne to be courteous.

Gabriel, enrolled at the Ecole Alsacienne at the peak of his father's career, nevertheless found himself confronted with increasing inner turmoil. Treating his peers and everyone else with a rabid insolence, threatening violence to protect himself from any perceived threat, his class contempt would never vanish. During his school years his mother, descendant of one of the most prestigious branches of the Angevin aristocracy, had faced the shock of having to take care of the whole family and keep alive a marriage that should have been one of those great alliances between fortune and nobility, facing the destruction of her life and her children's future.

This is the pivotal moment which perhaps makes it possible to understand, as with Emmanuel Macron's broken relationship with his father, what constitutes both Gabriel's singularity and vulnerability. He had been projected into the world so high up that he now had a long way to fall.

The Ecole Alsacienne is a perfect place to secure your future, as long as you have sufficient financial resources and the noble blood that opens the doors to the most prestigious opportunities, and provided you are willing to negotiate a little to secure your share of the capital. This is what the young Gabriel quickly sets out to do, with the help of his cousin and the aristocratic branch of his family - also educated in the right places. Claiming his royal origins and links with the Russian aristocracy, surrounding himself early on with a small court, he approaches the heiress of the Giscard family, gets himself invited to the estate of his idol of the moment, Valery, and begins to make his way in a world that he believes could expel him any time, and where economic precariousness was becoming a possibility.

Chapter 12

The time has come for Gabriel to forge his destiny, to impose himself and realize his ambitions. A tough task, even if Attal is in his element wherever satisfaction and privilege dominate, he is nonetheless expected to distinguish himself.

Fortune smiles upon those who dare, and an opportunity presents itself when he meets Alexandra, granddaughter of Alain Touraine and daughter of Marisol, a member of the socialist elite. Attal is not operating out of conviction, aiming rather to legitimize his ambitions by associating himself with any potentially successful politician, be they right or left wing.

A Trotskyist who despises her schoolmates and peers as social traitors, Alexandra, who would go on to study at HEC, is relatively isolated in a world whose limits she could perceive, but not circumvent. She is fascinated by the sudden attention of one of her most dazzling acolytes. Caught up in the problems that beset elite families, Alexandra is torn between her mother's aristocratic legacy and a father who is one of the most powerful diplomats in the country, prey to the turmoils that characterize families where powerful women and men form allegiances. The family, which regularly makes the front pages of the gossip magazines, finds a necessary breath of fresh air in this boy who is about to graduate high school and has the mannerisms of a leading man. Seduced by his excess and taste for transgression as much as by the ease he shows in places where she feels clumsy, Alexandra introduces Gabriel into her family circle, thus offering him the keys to his future ascent.

It is during this time of fortuitous meetings, social gatherings and weekends in country estates that a micro-event occurs which may surprise anyone not familiar with these circles. In their quest to climb the social ladder, Gabriel and Alexandra have the bizarre idea of claiming back the aristocratic parts of their names abandoned by their parents. It is a gesture that has become so common that it does not surprise the school's administration, the pair of them are demanding that their aristocratic heritage be recognized. Thus, to the surprise of his classmates, during the school role-call Gabriel Attal becomes "Attal de Couriss" and his classmate becomes "Reveyrand de Menthon".

An adept of strongarm tactics and provocation, Attal seduces Marisol Touraine and is immediately authorized to take part in Ségolène Royal's campaign for the 2007 presidential elections. He abruptly abandons his ultra-liberal rhetoric. The person who had promoted hardline ideas, a mixture of ultra-liberal opinions and the worst social conservatism, surprises everyone by becoming a well-meaning socialist.

Not yet eighteen, Mr. Attal de Couriss, who has not lost any of the devastating assurance that would seduce his interlocutors after leaving high school, easily passes his high school diploma, leaves the school that had taken care of him since childhood and entered Sciences

Po a few steps away, where he would deploy the same brilliant tactics that had worked so well in high school.

Recognized by the “republican meritocracy”, endowed with an intelligence that the system had just sanctified, never having known failure, he reveals his ever-growing conformity with his class, inviting his most privileged peers to castles and summer resorts, building a network, trading the badge of his origins²⁰ for a sudden adherence to progressivism, showing himself ready to serve a political project that he had recently spent his time denigrating.

In his year at Sciences Po no fewer than twelve students are from Henri-IV, while the students of the Ecole Alsacienne benefit from a perfect knowledge of the *quartier* and a cultural conditioning that has directly prepared them for being there. In a privileged position compared to the vast majority of their classmates, *alsaciennes* benefit from the social bonus which comes from their links with their former high school classmates who, having failed or given up their studies, are a worry for their parents and must find ways to ensure they keep their place among the Parisian elites.

Gabriel Attal, who continues to attract attention, is able to run for the head of the Sciences Po section of a Parti Socialiste he admitted to hating fiercely only a few months earlier. He meets Manon Aubry, the future head of La France Insoumise’s list at the European elections, and uses a family friend to help install himself as an important member of the support committee of Ingrid Betancourt, finding there an additional resource to build the vertical networks which tied in perfectly with the social base provided by his integration at Sciences Po.

However, the veneer of commitment cannot completely conceal his desire to dominate. Living in Vanves, in an apartment his parents are paying for, he tries to establish himself in the local section of the Socialist Party, organizing a visit from Marisol Touraine, which secures him an introduction to the Socialist secretary and opposition town councilor, who will go on to endorse him and allow him to inherit the job after losing the 2014 elections. Installed as her successor to the city council, Attal will be “a bit embarrassed”²¹ by this betrayal.

Undeterred, he tries to get closer to the Socialist intelligentsia. His relations with the Betancourt family allow him to broaden his political networks, his attempt to join the team of the national coordinator Hervé Marro, who quickly becomes a councilor at the Paris city council, does not bear fruit but does allow him to be present on the tarmac at Villacoublay when Ingrid Betancourt is freed, a tearful event much covered in *Paris Match* in an article in summer 2018. At this point he decides to lose the aristocratic version of his name that

²⁰ His name particle, still present at the time of his admission to Sciences Po, will quickly disappear. Profile of Gabriel Attal de Couriss, *L'Association des SciencesPo*, available at <<https://www.sciencespo.asso.fr/profil/gabriel.attaldecouriss13>> [Online].

²¹ “Conseiller by Marisol Touraine... And in opposition locale”, *Le Parisien*, April 8, 2014 [Online, in French].

he had been using in his first year at Sciences Po, but he will not hesitate to reinstate it when the need arises²².

However, his taking over the PS section of Sciences Po²³ is proving difficult and is coupled with academic difficulties. For his third year of university, he must find an internship. He chooses the Villa Médicis, where he spends almost a year.

This is a tough period that gives Attal an idea of the difficulties awaiting him when he leaves the cocoon in which he has functioned until now. At Sciences Po he is obliged to compete with other heirs who show an equal rampant ambition. He must redouble his efforts and so he enrolls in a law degree at Assas. Supporting François Hollande during the 2011 Socialist primaries, he tries again, via Marisol Touraine, to approach the campaign team by writing notes to Pierre Moscovici. But again, it doesn't work. Neither does the student list of candidates of which he is part in order to organize Sciences Po social events, a vital vehicle for integration into the institution. Not only does the list fail to win the vote, it even provokes ridicule²⁴. His tribute to the late director of Sciences Po, Richard Descoings, on the collaborative platform *Le Plus*, which tries to imply an inexistent proximity, does not open any of the expected doors. He is starting to get worried.

And then a miracle occurs. Alexandra has managed to catch up in her studies after her failure at Henri IV. She joins Sciences Po a year later, allowing Gabriel to strengthen a thread that was wearing thin. Attal had to have some professional experience before graduating, so she secures him an internship with Marisol Touraine. It is January 2012, in the middle of the presidential campaign, and he is now under the wing of the person in charge of the social affairs department, which should have reverted to Martine Aubry once the government was formed. What was really only a backup solution is transformed, by a twist of fate, into a launchpad. Thanks to a series of accidents similar to those that would propel Mr. Macron to Bercy five years later, and following Martine Aubry's refusal to take on the department, the position is offered to Marisol Touraine, whose distinguished relatives - Alain Touraine occupies an overwhelming position in the *deuxième gauche* (the "second left" tn) - had opened many doors. In such a misogynist environment, although she had been working in this field for years, she had long stopped hoping for this and needed to hastily set up her team.

In a government without ambitions or ideas, carried by a campaign that served only to promote the most insignificant, here is someone who should have at best become a secretary of State being made the new Minister of Social Affairs and Health, an important position with extraordinary resources to implement long-awaited left-wing policies. To do

²² Gabriel Attal, "Gabriel's Profession of Faith, Candidate for the Election of Section Secretary", Sciences Po Socialists Blog, September 14, 2010 [Online, in French].

²³ Gabriel Attal, "Primary on the left: six competitors, Nicolas Sarkozy as the only opponent", *L'Obs*, 23 September 2011 [Online, in French].

²⁴ Sim Bozko, "Election BDE 4/4 - *Tabula Rasa*: dissatisfied people for a better renewal?", *lapeniche*, May 9, 2010 [Online, in French].

this she must build up an environment that, in the absence of competent or committed people, will be able to protect her. Gabriel, who obviously knows nothing about the issues, has not yet held any professional position, has no university specialization, and has just learned that he will have to repeat his last year at Sciences Po, is offered a job as a full advisor in the Cabinet of the largest government department.

His internship at Villa Médicis is his only “professional experience”. This is still the case when he is appointed to the most prestigious functions of the State.

Gabriel Attal, barely twenty-three years old, through always knowing the right people, is awarded a salary that places him de facto among the highest-paid people in the country. He has two secretaries, access to gourmet restaurants and the firm's company cars. He even obtains his master's degree the following year without having to repeat it, thanks to an arrangement with the management of Sciences Po and a validation of prior learning granted by a future advisor to Édouard Philippe, François-Antoine Mariani. Thus the institution excels at covering for those who are destined to take up the baton of its domination.

It is 2012, and Attal is ready to embrace his destiny.

Chapter 13

Those who cannot see the strange parallels with a destiny that would lead a thirty-nine-year-old to become the youngest French president, please read carefully. Let us repeat, it may seem absurd: at twenty-three years of age, without prior professional experience any diplomas, without any competence or specialization, a young man who has lost his aristocratic name particle, gains access to one of the most important posts in the Republic, earning a salary that will quickly reach six thousand euros per month, including bonuses, as well as the benefits that any regime usually grants to its most illustrious servants.

In charge of communications with the Parliament, his job is to organize the Praetorian guard of the new minister. In an excess of vanity, he immediately has one of his classmates, Quentin Lafay, recruited as a project manager. Empowered with authority over one of the most important administrations in France, assistant directors, trainees and mission leaders, socializing with the finest of the Republic, Attal finds himself under the authority of a certain Benjamin Griveaux, elected to the General Council of Saône-et-Loire and future former Mayor of Chalon.

An old comrade of Ismaël Emelien²⁵, a visiting Socialist, Griveaux was recruited into Marisol Touraine's cabinet as a political advisor. Without any previous noteworthy professional experience, he is already earning more than ten thousand euros per month, paid by the State, to which is added more than three thousand euros in allowances for local elected officials. However, he will not hesitate to start working at Unibail Rodamco in 2014 to increase his earnings to almost seventeen thousand euros per month. There is nothing illegal in this salary, offered by a company dependent on public procurement which generously finances former State servants in order to exploit their networks and turn them into fervent defenders of its interests, to the detriment of the common good. Recruited according to *L'Express* to ensure that a tax niche would not be changed, having followed a very typical path that took him from his large residence with swimming pool and sports cars to Chalon-sur-Saône, to HEC, then after a period working at a private boarding school and Sciences Po, returning to “business” as government spokesman, appointed by Emmanuel Macron with whom he had a mutual “friend”: a certain Bernard Mourad (who would not hesitate to send us in writing the latest rumors in an attempt to destroy his best friend). A ministerial taxation missive in which Griveau was to claim he was defending the general interest he had just trampled on, before being terrified by a pallet truck driven by Yellow Jackets advancing towards him as a result of his provocations.

This revolving door is productive for everyone involved. Thus, Benjamin Griveaux, who is already an employee of Emmanuel Macron's campaign - and paid six thousand euros a

25 one of the closest collaborators of Emmanuel Macron from his entering in the world of politics until 2019 and the Yellow Jackets protests.

month - is asked to request that his former employer Unibail reduce the cost of renting the exhibition hall at the Porte de Versailles for the candidate's big meeting²⁶.

At the ministry on avenue de Ségur, Gabriel Attal settles in quickly. Surrounded by people without ideas, without ambitions other than for themselves, he was introduced to a young heir of the Versailles bourgeoisie: Stéphane Séjourné. Emmanuel Macron's future political advisor attended the very chic French high schools in Mexico City and Madrid. Thirty years old, member of the Cabinet of the Socialist regional president Jean-Paul Huchon, after some minor lobbying work, he is about to mobilize the “La Relève” movement of the MJS and the networks of Mr. Moscovici to become the advisor to the future President of the Republic²⁷.

The wheels are moving. As Socialist power collapsed, young conspirators who had never shown any capacity for thought or commitment, who had never been in contact with reality or experienced any difficulty, who had not demonstrated any particular competence other than that of being authoritarian or scathing, were preparing the succession. After having supported Pierre Moscovici and having been orphaned after his exfiltration at the European Commission, they, who hoped to be consecrated in 2017 by the Socialist Party, were confronted with failure. Without much conviction, they then invited one of the rising stars of the Parisian elites, a certain Emmanuel Macron, to dinner. Séjourné made his mark there while Benjamin Griveaux opposed Arnaud Montebourg, probably thinking he could one day compete with him. His failure pushed him to introduce himself, in his turn, via his friend Emelien, to the aforementioned Emmanuel Macron, to be joined later by Gabriel Attal.

However, the matter remained difficult to resolve, and Emmanuel Macron, exhausted by internal struggles that had led him to confront Philippe Légise-Costa at the Elysée, on leaving the palace had to think about his reconversion. This is where the “Macron miracle” comes in. While Arnaud Montebourg broke with the government following a budgetary discussion on the allocation of fifteen billion euros, Jean-Pierre Jouyet and the Inspectorate of Finance fast-tracked Emmanuel Macron, just when he was thinking that his political career was going downhill. Niel and Arnault are the sponsoring duopoly, disregarding all democratic rules. The media are getting in line. Hollow being, without any other aim than to serve his own ambition, ready to put the public wealth at the service of those who could serve him, coming from the Jesuit high school La Providence which plays a role similar to that of the L'Alsacienne in Amiens, flamboyant heir to the provincial bourgeoisie, mastering all the machinery of the “republican meritocracy” after spending five years of his life attempting to gain entry into further education, having seduced businessman Henry

²⁶ To discover this information, it was necessary to examine the several tens of thousands of emails contained in the Macronleaks, including the one of December 1, 2017, from Cédric O to Jean-Marie Girier.

²⁷ “The mere mention of the name Séjourné is enough to make any elected member of the majority turn pale or shiver”. Clément Pétreault, Stéphane Séjourné, “l'œil de Macron”, *Le Point*, October 12, 2017 [Online].

Hernand as well as Jouyet, Emmanuel Macron finds himself, despite his successive failures, at the beginning of his twentieth year propelled into the gotha, in the same way as Attal.

It was a golden opportunity for our young plotters. A simple political clerk who became a parliamentary advisor to the new Minister of the Economy, Séjourné immediately tried to recruit his friend and future deputy Pierre Person, while Lafay was hired in Bercy. Faced with the failure of the maneuver, Person asked his acolyte to use his contacts to get him into the Uber lobbying center that Bercy was supposed to regulate. Stéphane Séjourné, who was hardly troubled by this kind of shuffle, became Gabriel Attal's alter ego, activated his networks and mobilized his former comrades in Macron's service. Educated at the University of Poitiers where he met the future vanguard of a minister who still claims to be Socialist, given by the State the role to structure the "Youth with Macron" movement alongside his comrade and other future executives of the regime who had previously unsuccessfully tried to take over the leadership of MJS, he will use this position to their advantage, and they both will become République En Marche deputies. While Emelien was structuring the movement from above, Séjourné and his acolytes were laying out its construction from below.

While all the candidates in the system, from Fillon to Juppé, Hollande, Valls and Sarkozy, were failing dismally, Macron knew how to be convincing and found a young guard, albeit rather unappealing, to structure a movement. Appointed minister by a desperate president, even though he has just left the Elysée to create a lobbying group, Emmanuel Macron was to build in a few months a communications operation to hide the spinelessness of his undertaking. Lacking networks to fill his Cabinet, he trusts young people of whom he knows nothing, but who have the advantage of being as ambitious as they are hollow. This is the paradox: his rise has been so rapid that, not having held any management position, he cannot rely on any close or trusted person to organize his work. He is dependent on his wife and on three thirty-year-olds, Séjourné on one side, Griveaux and Emelien on the other, to move forward.

Chapter 14

The unjustified ambition of the new minister, Emmanuel Macron, whose only loyalty is to the system that created him, is perfectly echoed in that of Emelien, of Griveaux, of Séjourné, of the group from Poitiers, of Attal, and others like them. When Macron was looking for an advisor, the young Séjourné seemed particularly ideal because, in addition to having no ideas of his own, just like his mentor, he was integrated into one of the biggest movements within the Socialist Party and claimed he would be able to siphon off Moscovici's supporters. He was still in possession of the membership list of the movement called Need for the Left (*Besoin de Gauche*) and was able to complete it with that of the Young Socialist Movement (MJS). Charged with ensuring the success of Macron's law, Séjourné failed. This moment, which should have sealed his fate, on the contrary was to create a bond of solidarity between the adviser and his minister. When the streets were about to fill with demonstrators, exasperated by the *Loi Travail* (Labor Law) and the Socialist Party's worsening betrayals, Valls, with the help of Cazeneuve, pushed Macron to force the law through Parliament. The ensuing democratic crisis, aggravated by Myriam El Khomri, who continued with what was meant to be Macron's law number two, was to lead to particularly harsh policing that caused many injuries and radicalized a part of the French youth.

So here they are these young people, who formed the core of an emerging power, had just failed in the intermediate elections, had no legitimacy, and were witnessing the decline of their patrons. The latter were busy, not dealing with the reasons behind the crisis in our country, but with seducing economic and political elites by offering them new deals which were to completely ignore the demands of the protestors. It was not yet a question of breaking away from Socialist power, but rather of finalizing its transformation. In the absence of popular support - betrayals must be paid for and they make activists run a mile - the only thing to do was to ensure the support of the oligarchy. Then, using significant and readily available financial, media and State resources, to impose themselves over their rivals.

Playing a double game, handsomely paid to succeed, participating in the paralysis of the government, in a general media silence, the young incumbents formed a strategy that mobilized the State's resources in the service of the future President of the Republic. In the meantime, Emmanuel Macron continued his conquest of the upper echelons. Attal was to let himself be gradually absorbed into the heart of the system, playing a double game for a very long time. He bode his time, had faith in his luck and, with his acolytes, mobilized astonishing resources that were discreetly used to ensure, after Macron's failure to be appointed to Matignon²⁸, his future election to the presidency.

28 French Prime Minister headquarters. Macron was hoping to be named prime minister.

Taking advantage of the strange circumspection of the oligarchy when it comes to revealing its networks of influence, Gabriel Attal and Stéphane Séjourné will form one of those “power couples” who strategically place other men and women. With the power of the Socialist Party in decline, it was now a question of supporting, promoting and getting each other established.

Once the election was won, together they supported the appointment of Griveaux to the government while Séjourné accompanied Emelien and Lafay to the Elysée²⁹. Séjourné would ensure that his associate Gabriel Attal, but also Person, Taché and a few others, founders of “Les Jeunes avec Macron” (Young People for Macron), would win their electoral districts in due time, discreetly financed by Messrs. Hermand and Bergé, who happily wrote cheques for several tens of thousands of euros to any young person recommended to them. Séjourné would represent the president on the nomination committee of a party that was supposed to reject all the practices of what he himself called “the old world”. He will soon offer Gabriel an electoral district that he cannot lose. And despite some clashes with Ismaël Emelien, none of these proven cases of nepotism will be revealed³⁰. Because everyone had already participated in the scheme, where many people were recruited, where Bercy hugely increased representation budgets and cabinet staff, diverting councilors from their functions, organizing events with the sole aim of serving tainted political ambitions.

In charge of relations with the Socialist deputies, Gabriel Attal siphoned off their networks right under the nose of Marisol Touraine, who remained loyal to François Hollande. Having understood that the Socialist Party was a graveyard, he prepared his transition by playing the parliamentary networks of a bloodless left. Receiving countless people into his office and recommending a number of them to Macron, he tried to seize the Socialist nomination in Vanves for the 2017 legislative elections, after having campaigned for Bartolone in the county elections. All the while he was serving as a discreet pilot fish for the En Marche movement, which was staying on the edge of the party for a reason: En Marche was still considering a possible integration as a movement within the Socialist Party.

Séjourné, with his colleague Ismaël Emelien, organized multiple events in Bercy in favor of their candidate, using the resources of the ministry to invite, in less than two years, more than a thousand entrepreneurs and as many senior executives, to whom fundraising campaigns were immediately suggested in favor of their champion³¹. At the same time, Attal discreetly joined the gang of Young People for Macron, which formed the skeleton

²⁹ Lafay, in turn, will have his classmate Hugo Vergès appointed as “advisor on America” at the age of twenty-seven, in charge of relations with the Trump administration, with two internships as his only professional experience, along with his proximity to Macron's future advisor, Aurélien Lechevallier. Mr. Vergès would thus be part, alongside Bernard Arnault, Christine Lagarde and Thomas Pesquet, of the fifty or so guests representing France at the State dinner held in Washington in honor of Emmanuel Macron in 2018.

³⁰ Other Macronist executives will follow his example, Cédric O, advisor to Hollande who became one of Macron's closest advisors, making his sister Delphine O the assistant of Mounir Mahjoubi, and therefore a deputy as soon as the latter entered government, as planned.

³¹ “Macron Campaign Emails”, WikiLeaks [Online]

of what would become the En Marche movement. He placed his pawns there. Without ever exposing himself, taking care not to lose either his position within En Marche or the possibility of being knighted by the Socialist Party, he obtained the promise of an appointment in New York. A prestigious position, normally reserved for senior French civil servants, is guaranteed for him at the health section of the UN. At twenty-six, Gabriel is safe. Regardless of the outcome of the election, he will obtain either office, or the diplomatic immunity reserved for international civil servants, and a salary that will at least double. He who already ranks among the highest-paid two percent of the country sees his life, due to an act of nepotism, mapped out. Meanwhile, his boss (who has been promised Matignon by François Hollande), still believing in Gabriel's loyalty, discusses important projects with him.

Chapter 15

The double act formed by Séjourné and Gabriel Attal played an essential role in this rapid ascent, by sealing the alliance of two great fortunes. Using the social network acquired during his time at Sciences Po, Gabriel Attal recommends “suitably educated” individuals, whose trustworthiness is guaranteed because they belong to his social networks from his years at the Ecole Alsacienne. He recommends large batches of them. Séjourné, strengthened by this crowd loyal to Macron, is able to repay Attal for the influence the latter had allowed him to acquire. At this point there is no talk of politics, no commitment, no idea of why all this is being set up, just the pleasure of accessing privileged positions and reaping all the benefits that come with them.

This ambition is baseless and brings with it emptiness and not rigor. The enthusiasm is arrogant, tasting only of betrayal. Emmanuel Macron had been launched in a hurry. Political catastrophe is affecting all the established candidates. He had been obliged to build networks of allies very quickly to give the impression of being ready. And it will take him months - until March 2017 - for any vaguely serious proposals to finally emerge. As his advisers were just as incapable of imagination and thought as he was, he was forced to mobilize spouses and families in an attempt to “think”, aided by an indifferent and benevolent press too excited by a power grab to understand, presenting the candidate's lack of a program as an innovation, which was the height of spinelessness and connivance. The publicity machine set in motion turns this obvious difficulty into an asset, transforming weakness into originality. It makes it possible to hide the inanity of a hastily mounted campaign to prevent candidates outside the system and the oligarchy from winning.

Attal, who perfectly understands what he can bring to the young Séjourné (who had not been educated at any of the so-called *Grandes Ecoles* and had not socialized in the Parisian elites), and he also knows what Macron will owe him. The infighting among his former comrades at the Ecole Alsacienne, who are trying to avoid being decommissioned at a time when the economic crisis and predatory politics were starting to decimate the elites, helped him greatly to impose himself in the emerging regime. In a position of power in an expanding space, he caught about ten young people in the nets of the emerging Macronism, whom he solicited, tested and recommended. Their names litter the Macronleaks in email exchanges that are a mix of unadulterated ambition and offers of mutual assistance, devoid of any content. Being at the confluence of the networks that include ex-students of the Alsacienne and new graduates of the *Grandes Écoles*, Attal is able to promote himself and make people forget his failure to obtain the Socialist nomination as a deputy in the Hauts-de-Seine constituency.

And so, without officially committing himself in any way, he obtains one of the most sought after and easy to win electoral districts in the country. In Vanves and Issy-les-Moulineaux, two cities bordering Paris, where André Santini, a local baron who has held the office for

twenty years has decided not to run again, he will declare himself a candidate, in a region where nearly ninety percent of the voters have just voted for Emmanuel Macron. Now the man whose wife is on the investiture committee representing the President of the Republic³² is on the fast track. Once Emmanuel Macron is elected, Attal only has to formalize his “political commitment”, quietly re-write his CV and pretend, as did his elder, that he was about to launch a start-up when suddenly politics caught up with him, and, without effort, enter parliament. On June 18, 2017, having barely campaigned, he became a member of the French National Assembly.

Immediately becoming group coordinator of the Committee on Cultural and Educational Affairs - thanks to the support of Séjourné - appointed to the Élysée where he was in charge of the distribution of positions in the new Assembly, Gabriel Attal gradually gained influence over his new fellow MPs. Feeding off the source of power, in on all the Élysée's secrets, always one step ahead, hiding the reasons for his rise, he easily obtained the job of drafting the *Parcoursup* law, the catastrophic implementation of which would have no effect on what was to come. Using his proximity to the Élysée to gain influence over journalists cut off by the policy of secrecy implemented at the Château, he trafficked in information and carried himself with an air of haughty superiority. Access to power fascinates, and justifies a posteriori a brilliance that would have otherwise gone unnoticed. At the time no one had any interest in exposing the means of his ascension.

After this first phase of co-opting, during which he multiplies his pledges in favor of the establishment, he still had to transform this immense capital into notoriety and thus impose himself on the French public, as Emmanuel Macron had done. Despite the failure of *Parcoursup*, which was bogged down in endless polemics, and the absence of any glorious achievements, endowed with a questionable charisma and an uncertain eloquence, the young MP was unexpectedly parachuted into the post of spokesman for the presidential party in December 2017, with the help of the very man who had made him an MP. The newcomer, now twenty-eight years old, takes two months to inspire the first article about him.

This was when the Élysée got an invitation for him to appear on the early morning radio show on France Inter, in the middle of a mobilization of railway workers and students, replacing Jean-Michel Blanquer who knew very well it was better for him not to expose himself.

The class confidence he has shown from his earliest years finally finds room for expression on a prime time show. While the president of the republic is laughing at “those who are nothing”, who cost “a crazy amount of money” and are “taking the piss” by getting stuck in their poverty, Attal, whose favorite jokes are about the homeless, does not hesitate to break

³² “He knows - 'because he chose them', he brags in front of his relatives - every LREM elected official”. Clément Pétreault, “Stéphane Séjourné, l'œil de Macron”, *Le Point*, October 12, 2017 [Online, in French]

a strike of exhausted postal workers in his district, delivering letters himself dressed as an employee of the former public service, explaining that he wants to “defend the citizens that elected him”. No longer having to disguise his true nature he multiplies the attacks, letting his real personality appear, i.e. a man created by his own social class and designed to serve it. Leaving the mask behind, he votes against the glyphosate ban after publicly stating his intention to do the contrary³³; he promotes the controversial fake news bill; and, perhaps short of ideas for getting noticed by the media, he tries to launch a campaign against the “momo challenge”, and fails miserably. Less than a year after his election, at only twenty-eight years of age, only a few days after his induction by *Paris Match*, he is running for the presidency of the majority parliamentary group of the country. He will withdraw his application once he is assured, a few weeks later, that a ministry will be granted to him.

Only he knows that the Élysée has just offered him his communication networks, as he offered the publicity advisor Mimi Marchand to Benjamin Griveaux, allowing the launching of a propaganda campaign aimed at preparing and legitimizing a posteriori his appointment to the government.

When, on October 16, 2018, he was appointed Secretary of State to the Ministry of National Education and Youth, with the corresponding budgetary and political allocations, in charge of implementing a universal civil national service, he was perhaps the only one not to be surprised. Since his election he had had three full-time employees working solely to fulfill his ambitions, after having swapped the butlers and company cars of the Ministry of Health between the ages of twenty-two and twenty-seven for those of the Assembly, and had been effortlessly carried into the heart of the French State on a wave of pure inertia. A few well-directed steps were enough to make it happen. An apparently insignificant anecdote was to resurface, however: more than a year after his election, the young MP still had not, since the time of his appointment, opened a constituency office in his district.

As if the rising star of Macronism could not stop himself from telling his own constituents how much, in his journey, they did not matter.

³³ Emma Donada, “Which MP voted for or against the glyphosate ban ?”, *Libération*, September 17, 2018 [Online, in French].

Chapter 16

September 2018. The crepuscule of presidential power.

A book, *Mimi*, is about to be published by Grasset³⁴ and people in high places are worried. A few months earlier, something had happened to accelerate the publication which had met with so many setbacks. That something was Alexandre Benalla. Dressed up as a policeman, Benalla was to put an end to the invincible aura of Macronism when he arrested and beat up demonstrators on the Place de la Contrescarpe. A few meters away a dense crowd composed of thousands of demonstrators was defying State authority, the prelude to the violent confrontation which would set the country alight a few months later.

The involvement of a member of Emmanuel Macron's close guard, revealed by Ariane Chemin in July, reactivated the traditional news circuit with its backstabbing between rival clans. Nobody predicted then, not even *Le Monde*, the devastating effect that this apparently unimportant affair would have. The first crack had appeared in the innocent chronicle of Macronism's immaculate conception that was being repeatedly touted all over a press in disarray, and the light was about to come flooding in. After having been mute for months, the enemies of the president started a merciless war which has not stopped since.

This fervor was to lead to the writing of our story.

While a legend was slowly being tarnished, the underbelly of power was starting to show: its sellouts, corruption and fealties, its dark depths which had come between France and its destiny.

Politics is about timing. Emmanuel Macron thought he had stunned his adversaries and was sure that the midterm elections would consolidate his baseless power. Yet, the gamble of moving quickly so that the State propaganda machines could cover their tracks was about to be lost, because of a vulgar low-level mistake. As beads of sweat were slowly forming on the forehead of our hero, he invented the “Great National Debate”, once again using the machinery of the State for his own political ends, as he had during his candidacy.

Nonetheless, the breach had been opened. The ascent of a young, fair, sky blue-eyed man who, it was claimed, had conquered a country armed with only his talent and audacity, was to suffer its first setback, one that carefully organized daily meetings, financed by the State, could not fix.

For what had suddenly been exposed was precisely the influence networks of Paris which, brought fully into the light by this breach, were immediately used to cover things up again.

34 The second most important publishing company in France, owned by Hachette (Lagardère group) and directed by Olivier Nora and Bernard Henri Levy.

To the usual deal brokers and corruptors, ever-present courtiers of the powerful, was added the heavy weight of the extremely wealthy, who until then had preferred to stay away from the light.

The press preferred to look at the small thugs who, from Benalla to Crase, had been getting their share of the cake. Let us go further.

To understand why one needs to comprehend the nature of a deviant power. And an apparently anodyne text with its hidden meanings was to help us in our understanding. Exposing the shady boundaries of a compromised and dominated press, *Mimi* was the first to break the usual limits of the oligarchy. The work of two reporters and a novelist, published in the autumn of 2018, the book shines a surprising light on the “fabrication of consent” that permitted the victory of Emmanuel Macron through a relentless, almost physical media-bashing imposed on the French public by a certain caste.

The investigation reveals the figure of Michèle Marchand, at the center of a communications network created with the help of Xavier Niel, in order to make an absolutely unknown figure famous and respected by the French public, a figure who had just been coopted by the Parisian elite: Emmanuel Macron.

The investigation helps us understand a key element in the second phase of his power grab, which would consolidate his adoption by the elite. Strangely ignored by television and the rest of the media, the work of Jean-Michel Décugis, Pauline Guéna and Marc Leplongeon revealed how a man with a doubtful past³⁵, who had become a billionaire and then an oligarch, had met in the early 2000s a woman with an equally shadowy past, Michèle Marchand, who was to clean up his image and accompany him in his sudden ascent to becoming one of the biggest fortunes in France.

First oddity, the text revealed that “Mimi” and Niel had met thanks to having the same lawyer during their respective passages in prison in the early 2000s. Although she was incarcerated in Fresnes and he was in the VIP cells of the Prison de la Santé in Paris (where he was briefly sent by the judge Renaud Van Ruymbeke, who would later say that he was fascinated by the man), we learn in the book that the same lawyer had represented them both.

Let's remember that Xavier Niel is today the owner of the most important media in our country and that to run them he has recruited a henchman, Louis Dreyfus, whose work is

³⁵ Xavier Niel would escape every charge of pimping. Despite him being, according to the court order at the time, the main shareholder in a peepshow network, a window display for prostitution, the benefits of which he was reaping every week, driving, according to one of his collaborators, to Strasbourg to collect them. The “disappearance” of all the files related to this case a few hours before the search of his premises and the indulgence of Renaud Van Ruymbeke, to whom Xavier Niel would later pay vibrant tribute, allowed the latter to spend only a few weeks in prison, due to being given “the benefit of the doubt”. Niel would admit to having taken a lot of payments in cash during this time in order to avoid paying taxes. A few years earlier, he had already seen several million euros worth of his business assets frozen to avoid bankruptcy. He did receive a two year suspended prison sentence for “fraud”, and five defamation cases he brought against reporters on the matter, one of whom was violently treated while in custody, would be rejected.

not to censure articles but to hire, fire, promote and punish the journalists, managers, directors and bosses in charge of producing the articles. And that, as we will see, is much more useful.

The strange morals of our wealthiest compatriots are no longer scandalous because they have decided to make everyone love them. In an era where 1% of the planet's most wealthy people hold more than 80% of the wealth produced³⁶, the most powerful of them decided to buy up the media, which were struggling more and more to bring in advertising revenue due to competition from new technologies. The result is well known: today, ten of them possess 90% of the French written press. In order to control their image and buy political influence which will then enable them to reinforce their fortune or, as M. Niel put it, to “not put up with any shit”.

The book *Mimi*, which reminds us of the putrid roots of the greatest fortunes of our country, does not stop there and reveals something quite embarrassing for the good reputation of our elites. Appearances are important: our leaders are considered legitimate because they claim to set the tone. Their superiority - moral, intellectual or economic - legitimizes the privileges they have given themselves and appears to be the key to the authority that society attributes them. If this *imperium* would come to an end the whole edifice would come tumbling down.

To control one's image is to preserve one's power, and this explains why so much was invested, that and the ability to fashion the images of other people so to give oneself even more importance. Breaking the *omerta*, even by accident, is very dangerous, an insignificant element being enough to start a general collapse. Every move was monitored. Bernard Arnault tried to have one of my tweets censored. Xavier Niel pointed out to me that he had seen footage of me online in which I talked about him, although the film had not received more than three thousand clicks. Every element was tracked to avoid it becoming a Trojan horse that would bring the house down. And it so happens that *Mimi* revealed one element. Only one element which the discreet *Petit Paris* had never wanted to share with the rest of the country, not even with the biggest newspaper in France, *Le Monde*, an important daily that pretends to be fiercely independent and which until then had shown surprisingly little interest in individuals who were in possession of fortunes twice the size of the budget of our armed forces.

³⁶ Delphine Cunny, “The 1% wealthiest have gained 82% of the wealth created last year”, *La Tribune*, January 22, 2018.

Chapter 17

Xavier Niel and Emmanuel Macron are old friends. The former mobilized his fortune and networks to ensure the election of the latter when he was as yet unknown and pretending to be the child of an immaculate conception.

The fact that Xavier Niel is the owner of the *Le Monde* group, but also of *L'Obs* and minority stakes in almost all of the French media, including Médiapart, could be part of the reason that our journalists never revealed these ties of friendship, and *a fortiori* how the friendship made available the resources of a billionaire to Mr. Macron.

This is not insignificant. The undeclared financing of a candidate by a billionaire violates the Electoral Code and the regulations on campaign expenses - and the authors of *Mimi* point out, with some delectation, that in this case “no contract” ever appears. In addition, let us recall that Xavier Niel's fortune depends directly on the decisions of our government. It would be enough for the State to withdraw the telephone operator licenses, granted to Free as part of a political scheme involving François Fillon and Nicolas Sarkozy, for Xavier Niel's fortune to collapse immediately. His dependence on political power is such that in order to obtain a telephone network license he had once needed the Prime Minister and the Deputy Secretary-General of the Élysée, François Pérol, to reverse an initial negative decision by ARCEP. This reversal was to the detriment of the general interest, caused the market capitalization of Free (of which Mr. Niel still owns more than fifty percent) to skyrocket and was, in addition, against the wishes of the then president³⁷.

Mr. Niel would one day accompany the president on numerous official trips, but in those days he enjoyed telling everyone how much Nicolas Sarkozy hated him. This put him in the comfortable position of appearing to be a guarantor of independence for the editors during the takeover of *Le Monde*, which had been made technically bankrupt following a destabilization campaign led by Bernard Arnault, Vincent Bolloré and Arnaud Lagardère at Nicolas Sarkozy's request. Nicolas Sarkozy's declared *friendship* with Martin Bouygues (who was to see his empire tremble as a result of Mr. Niel's emergence) had served as a screen for his takeover of the country's most important media in exchange for the granting of a license at a discount price, these were the acts of a convicted delinquent who in the previous ten years had spent much time and energy intimidating journalists and taking them to court.

Investing in the press in order to gain influence, while pretending not to use it, is a process that became widespread almost forty years ago in France, with the emergence of private television and the immense capital it attracted in a short space of time. Bouygues father and son were brilliant at the game, turning the evening news on TF1 into a platform for promoting or destroying our country's leaders, demanding their invitation or dis-invitation

³⁷ The story was taken up by several journalists, who relied on sources that were either biased or had been directly involved. See the spectacular version in Guillaume Champeau “To help Free, Fillon made use of Sarkozy's fainting fit!” *Numerama* December 29, 2010 (online).

to television's holy Mecca according to their ability to serve their interests³⁸. The process, which started there, would quickly go on to contaminate all of the media by favoring the emergence of intermediaries who, coming from the senior public service and purchased for a small fee, became excellent conduits for adapting the influence mechanisms that were shaping public opinion. Thus, from Alain Minc to Denis Olivennes, via more murky specimens like Nicolas Bazire or Jean-Marie Messier, countless defrocked public servants, using the capital we had granted them and their ability to mediate between the political machine and the financial world, were able to buy mansions and finance luxurious lives graced by top model wives and children educated at the best schools.

Mr. Niel was able to fit into this mechanism with particular precision. Seeing the importance of diversifying his sources of information and influence, he multiplied minor investments aimed at attracting senior media executives, while increasing his investments in the country's economic sectors. Thus, while the oligarchs of the previous generation had been content to take strategic stakes in influential sectors, while buying the good graces of a number of carefully chosen senior officials and former politicians, in less than two decades Mr. Niel had invested in several thousand economic structures, acquiring stakes in all of the country's new media, from *Bakchich* to *Atlantico*, via *Causeur*, *Next INpact* or *Terraéco*. He complemented these measures with frequent lunches with any young intriguing person who could be made use of, provided they had attended one of the elite factories that guarantee a golden destiny - L'Ecole Polytechnic, the École Normale Supérieure (ENS) or the Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA).³⁹ He thus placed himself in a position to join up all these networks of influence, setting up meetings to advance the careers of certain people, spending a few hundred thousand euros to buy himself sympathy by investing in anyone who approached him. In this way several hundred senior civil servants have already been strangely *influenced* at the time of writing, as well as several thousand members of the *petit Paris*, whose sympathy he has bought.

These ties of friendship, combined with the relationships that, through family, career and position, have long linked him with the intelligence services of our country, have enabled him to weave a dense net that protects him from any political changes.

It was because of this organized omniscience that Mr. Niel was able to identify Mr. Macron well in advance, at a time when his flesh was still tender and his ideas still vague. Their relationship was known to anyone involved in the political-media clique of the *petit Paris*, so we could be forgiven for our surprise that it was not until September 2018⁴⁰ that the links between one of our country's most important oligarchs and its president were

³⁸ This practice is described by Martin Bouygues himself, who boasts about it to several politicians with no consequence and is denounced by Xavier Niel in one of those extravagant battles which affect our Parisian establishment. See Benjamin Meffre "Xavier Niel (Free) accuses Bouygues of lobbying thanks to *20 heures* on TF1", *PureMédias*, December 15, 2013 (online).

³⁹ It was the case for me, in January 2014, the day that he told me that a young secretary-general of the republic was to become president.

⁴⁰ Raphaëlle Bacqué, "Mimi' Marchand, the wolf in Macron's flock", *Le Monde*, October 20, 2018 (online).

revealed. This is not as innocuous as it seems: not only should these links have been made public in order to avoid possible conflicts of interest and interventions in the democratic space of Mr. Niel, but also because they would have allowed us to better understand the seeming miracle of the election of Mr. Macron, a president who made a point of claiming during his campaign - reaffirmed against all evidence in January 2019 during the Great Debate - to have made it alone, to have been elected without anyone's help, to be outside the system.

Would we have voted in the same way had we known that the young candidate touched by grace, who came out of nowhere through the sole force of his talent, this admirable being who had been presented in article after article, without giving us time to find out about him, as a brilliant self-made man, was in fact from the beginning of his political career promoted and supported by one of the richest and most influential men in France, who held the *petit Paris* in the palm of his hand?

Mr. Macron's overblown assertion of his immaculate conception should have led journalists to investigate, contextualize the words of this president and reveal their absurdity. And yet they kept quiet. No one snitched. For several years, while a career was being built at an impressive speed, no one was investigating. It was not until the publication of a book in which the two men were discussed in only two short chapters⁴¹, one and a half years after Macron's election and four years after their first meeting, that the information was revealed and taken up, discreetly and without comment, by Raphaëlle Bacqué, a journalist from *Le Monde* who was actually already well informed on the matter.

It is all the more surprising because Emmanuel Macron was welcomed several times to Xavier Niel's Station F, the start-up campus built by him in Paris with the support of the mayor, Anne Hidalgo⁴². It was there that Mr. Macron spoke of the "nobodies" to be found in train stations - citizens who are reduced, unlike him and his associates, to take the train and the subway. These meetings, actually political rallies in disguise, were intended to influence the electorate and create a buzz of modernity around a young man who rightly feared seeming old fashioned, with his outdated language and declared love for Line Renaud.

⁴¹ Marc Endeweld, *The ambiguous Mr. Macron*, Flammarion, 2015

⁴² This same Xavier Niel introduced his *missi dominici* Jean-Louis Missika, who had accompanied Free since the beginning, into the Paris town hall, where he was in charge of urbanism, while the other heavyweight of the municipal majority, Christophe Girard, is no less than a high-placed director of operations for another oligarch, a certain Bernard Arnault, about whom we will soon hear more.

Chapter 18

The uninformed public could be forgiven for thinking that Mr. Macron's visits to Ecole 42 and later to Station F, both creations of Xavier Niel, were intended only to serve the common good, not the reputations and circles of influence of the two individuals in question. In fact, the linking together of the oligarch's emblematic businesses - still benefiting from a buzz thanks to massive marketing campaigns implemented with the help of his advisor Mimi Marchand - and the candidate's youth was perfectly calculated. Mr. Macron was the last stone in the edifice of Mr. Niel's rebuilt reputation among the Parisian elite, which at the time still hated him for certain matters in his past. Mr. Macron was essential to him. And Mr. Macron needed Mr. Niel to launch his career. This kind of exposure, as with the trip the candidate would make to Las Vegas, again with funding to be clarified, would have a major impact on public opinion and mutually strengthen their position in the capital.

No journalistic investigation even tried to look into these exchanges of favors, let alone denounce them. Yet it is obvious the kind of imbalance they brought to the election campaign. Mr. Niel boasted all over Paris of liking and supporting his friend, and then of seeking to have him elected. The system set up in order for Mr. Macron to be served by the oligarch (who had received significant support from public authorities to create these institutions) astounded journalists before fascinating the public. Meetings that greatly resembled rallies, hyper-controlled shows of force staged with the appearance of nonchalance, gave the impression that Mr. Macron was the embodiment of renewal, inspiring confidence in the face of even the most worrying upheavals that technology continues to throw at us. Mr. Macron was offered an audience that his lack of political commitment, electoral roots and institutional weight normally prohibited. The simple question: "Why did Mr. Macron, and only him, have the support of this individual?" was never asked.

At this stage, the reader could relativize, quibble over details, and conclude that none of this is really significant. However, this is not the only thing we learn, somewhat late in the day, in September 2018.

Because it turns out our journalists are to show a little more courage. With great insouciance, they inform us that well beyond a simple matter of social niceties, these events had been planned by two people who were closely linked in certain legal cases and through their common lawyer - Xavier Niel and Mimi Marchand. The two of them had decided to join forces to ensure the election of an unknown to the presidency of the republic, mobilizing money and networks to make him known and impose him upon the public, so that he could serve their interests.

And we were to discover that there were, beyond the meetings, many other operations that were to allow this to happen.

So by joining up the dots we discover how Xavier Niel intervened at the heart of our democratic space to publicize and promote his protégé in the election. It all begins with an event which has been described in great detail⁴³ - Xavier Niel asked Michèle Marchand, before the election, to take charge of the image of Emmanuel Macron and his wife, during a meeting organized in Mr. Niel's private mansion, which is nothing less than a pink marble replica of the Great Trianon.

Mimi Marchand, the queen of the gossip magazines, whom *La Dépêche* called an “ex-drug dealer who has served time”⁴⁴ and who, according to the authors of the book *Mimi*, was arrested driving a truck loaded with 500 kilograms of hashish. A person who is able to invade people's privacy or undo their reputation in exchange for money was, say the authors, the person in charge of putting Mr. Macron on a pedestal in the eyes of the French people. Mimi Marchand, the talented dealer in secrets who for the past twenty years had been a central figure in the glory days of the gossip magazines, about whom several editors have spoken to me in glowing terms, who can silence a piece of information in no time, who displays naked bodies in order to glorify or to humiliate, as she sees fit.

Mimi Marchand who would be photographed the day after Mr. Macron's election, making the V for victory sign, in the president's office.

Let us repeat: Mimi Marchand, with her time in prison, her invisible networks, her henchmen and informants, her pressures and favors, was presented by a billionaire adventurer to Brigitte and Emmanuel Macron with the aim of helping the latter to make himself known. And this person did her work so well that the presidential couple was trying to recruit her at the Élysée when rumors around the publication of the book began to circulate.

This very same Michèle Marchand was introduced to Brigitte Macron-Trognoux by her “friend” Xavier Niel, in her private mansion, in order to help bury a piece of information.

And all this we learn not in 2014, 2015, 2016 or 2017, when something could still have been done, but in September 2018, when the cards were already dealt.

And we learn it so tardively, when dozens of journalists, including all of Mimi Marchand's contacts in the Parisian editorial offices, already knew all about it.

And kept it quiet.

The operation, according to the authors of the book, was a success, since it was the direct reason for the nearly forty fawning front pages that *Paris Match* et al offered to Emmanuel Macron and his wife in record time. It was not a simple operation: it required taking a rich

⁴³ Marc Endeweld, *The ambiguous Mr. Macron*, Flammarion, 2015

⁴⁴ Anouk Passelac, “Who is the communications advisor of the Macrons, the ex-dealer who has served time?”, *La Dépêche*, November 14, 2018 (online).

banker, of whom the few disinterested people who knew him said that his arrogance was equal only to his vanity, who had used the networks of the State to make his fortune, who was indifferent to others and obsessed with himself, and transforming him into the ideal son-in-law in a few months. They had to arouse sympathy that nothing in his career or his person could have merited.

Their success was relative if you take into account that Mr. Macron's media coverage exceeded that of all the other candidates combined. Setting the tone, relying on pretend paparazzi photos, Mimi Marchand's efforts triggered a bulimia in the *JDD* (a Sunday newspaper owned by Arnaud Lagardère -tn), which would grant the candidate no less than four front pages in the eight weeks surrounding the launch of En Marche. In *L'Obs*, owned by Xavier Niel, in *L'Express*, directed at the time by a friend of Mr. Macron, and then in the rest of the mainstream press, creating an interest in Mr. Macron out all proportion with any he had initially aroused⁴⁵.

⁴⁵ “Emmanuel Macron really is a big media bubble” Mediapart, February 14, 2017 (online).

Chapter 19

But could a single individual such as Mimi Marchand, even with the support of an all-powerful billionaire, really have orchestrated such a turnaround? At this point we might well lose the confidence of the skeptical reader. For the facts laid out in *Mimi*, in whose wake this book has followed, are not entirely true, nor entirely complete. And it is in the gaps rather than in the lies that most manipulation occurs. Let us, therefore, begin to cross-check the information, and look into the things which are never mentioned because the oligarchy shapes how we function and impedes any investigation being carried out on these subjects today.

To be specific, the authors of *Mimi* forget to mention that the owner of *Paris Match*, Arnaud Lagardère, who was behind Emmanuel Macron's media propulsion, was his client during his time at Rothschild Bank, when Mr. Macron tried unsuccessfully to find Mr. Lagardère a buyer for his media outlets. That more importantly, Mr. Macron allowed Mr. Lagardère, when the former was deputy secretary-general of the Élysée and the latter was seeking to divest himself of his shareholdings in EADS (Airbus), to sign an agreement with the State so advantageous that it would secure Mr. Lagardère nearly 100 million euros in personal dividends. And that, as *Vanity Fair* recounted, Mr. Lagardère's henchman in the media, a certain Ramzy Khiroun, was placed into the service of Mr. Macron when he became Minister of the Economy, in order to help him organize his publicity, with the aid and mediation of a certain Ismaël Emelien.

And that, in short, contrary to what has been written, Mimi Marchand was the mere executor of a strategy, financed of course by Xavier Niel, but above all implemented by Arnaud Lagardère's henchmen, Ramzy Khiroun and his factotum Denis Olivennes, and, as we will later demonstrate, by Patrick Drahi, to promote an unknown candidate who knew how to be compliant.

Mr. Lagardère is heir to a huge media and editorial empire which he is destroying due to his lack of vision, talent or interest in the issues of the day. The fortune of his family, in particular that of his father Jean-Luc, which was built up with the support of the State, has been squandered by its inheritors. This form of government, by which the strategic assets of our country are handed over to certain individuals entrusted with making them grow, is one of the most important sources of corruption in France. It makes it possible, with perfectly legal games of to and fro, for these individuals to plunder a State that they do not hesitate to criticize publicly for its size and propose to make smaller. And all this is perfectly legal, since the ones who make the laws and authorize these extraordinary operations are the first to benefit, turning their new oligarchs into faithful supporters of their political ambitions. Mr. Macron is one of those who have worked hard to make use of the privilege granted by society in exchange for passing certain exams - a job for life, immense power and a brand new network - to participate in this corruption. He did so by taking the wealth of the State of which he was in charge as inspector general of finance and dispatching it into

the private sector. In doing so, he made a name for himself with the powerful people who would be the driving force behind his ascent.

It is worth recalling all this, when so many media myths are being built like levees around untouchable shores, where impunity reigns. It is worth recalling that these men's only capital is not their talent (senior public service exams, which Mr. Macron struggled to pass, are first and foremost compliance monitors) but rather the assets that are being collected each year from the French people. For the last thirty years or so, a few despots have chosen to divert these assets away from their true function, justifying their acts with baseless and far-fetched economic theories cooked up in the circles of power that are just behind the scenes. They have each transferred a more or less important part of our common resources to their backers. The stronger their initial legitimacy - and de Gaulle was the typical example - the less they needed to offer these resources that do not belong to them. The least legitimate ones are more dangerous to society, because they are obliged to strengthen their position, in other words, to sell themselves, in order to build up their reputation. This is why Mr. Macron was only able to find a way into these elite circles by using his various positions within the State to systematically push for privatizations and "deals" with the private sector, causing one of his colleagues (albeit a moderate one) Christian Eckert, to threaten resignation to prevent a ransacking that Denis Robert would not hesitate to describe as a predatory attack.

We should remember all of this, because everyone lauded this new talent, this exceptional man who had devoted five years of his life to taking exams of which he passed only one, and who only once attracted attention in the public arena before his appointment as minister, when he drafted the introduction to the report of the Attali Commission. There he announced an uninterrupted cycle of growth and called to push further with the very policies which, a few weeks later, would cause the 2008 crisis and the collapse of the entire system.

A man who, as far as any ministerial achievements are concerned, apart from the Alstom massacre and the sale of SFR, could count only the creation of new bus lines and some secondary liberalization measures that were immediately forgotten.

One should bear in this in mind when such flagrant non-existence is measured against the truckloads of congratulatory flattery that were thrown at him throughout this period.

Assessing the power of everyone involved in the powerful clique I am describing can be tricky. However, I will tell you an anecdote I heard about the editor-in-chief of *Paris Match*, appointed after the dismissal of the previous editor at Nicolas Sarkozy's request, who was to be dismissed in the summer of 2018. Brigitte Macron, who proudly claims never to interfere with politics, having no legitimacy on the subject, nevertheless made an appeal to Ramzy Khiroun at the request of Mimi Marchand. The latter feared the loss of her position at *Paris Match* and had frantically announced that Mr. Macron's exposure would, therefore, be greatly reduced. Her request was obviously in her own best interests, her agreement

with the now president of the republic was very advantageous to her agency, which had become one of the few to be officially approved by the Élysée. The director of *Paris Match* kept his job, and Mimi, until the book to be published by Grasset, was safe.

Notoriety is a drug, and indeed after the election the Macrons continued to make use of the so-called scoops, published without judgment and widely taken up right across the media. Such as the now famous “private visit”, when they were very opportunely photographed by Mimi Marchand's paparazzi in front of the Taj Mahal, in the middle of a State visit to India that was to prove catastrophic. Our readers are probably fairly shocked by now. Only a rebellion by part of the press, perhaps outraged by these methods, or frustrated at not having been outraged, lifted the veil on these practices. The general spinelessness was so extreme that no one had objected to a privately owned mass media being used as a pure propaganda tool, while news channels and broadcasts relayed content produced directly by the Élysée, provoking the indignation of Emmanuel Macron's very respectable friend, Dominique de Villepin⁴⁶. But he can wait because we are just getting started. Because the question that all this raises is the following (and the answer is very worrying): why was the whole story not accurately told in the courageous book entitled *Mimi*? Why didn't the book say that Arnaud Lagardère had been Emmanuel Macron's unsuccessful client concerning his media group, before going on to be served by the latter at the Élysée, and that Mr. Khiroun, in his Berluti shoes, had been the *missi dominici*?

Sloppy journalism, the reader could think. So here is the fatal blow.

All this was not mentioned, even though all this was known, for the same reason that led Mrs. Bacqué and *Le Monde* as a whole to cover up the relationship between Niel and Macron until it was no longer possible to do otherwise: because, in the same way that *Le Monde* is owned by Xavier Niel, *Mimi*'s publisher, Grasset, is owned by Hachette, a group belonging to a holding company called Lagardère Active, whose owner is a certain Arnaud Lagardère, and whose effective director, apologies to Mr. Nourry, is Ramzy Khiroun. And that it was therefore impossible for them to tell the whole truth of their investigation, and therefore impossible to make everything clear to the reading public.

And now we are beginning to understand why in this country no one understands anything, while we suspect everything. Now we are beginning to have an idea to what extent the French public space is rife with fealties which, taken individually, seem harmless - surely competition will compensate for all these links! - but which, from one relationship of interest to another, are enough to prevent anyone from describing the system as a whole. All of them, who believe they are free and independent, are in fact partially subservient, and at one point take care not to expose one of the oligarchic blocs that rule over them. And in doing so, quite simply prevent us from accessing reality.

⁴⁶ Léa Salamé and Nicolas Demorand, interview with Dominique de Villepin, “Dominique de Villepin: 'Trump has played his cards, what are they? The division of Europeans'”, France Inter, November 14, 2018 (online).

Because the entire French media space, with rare exceptions such as *Le Monde Diplomatique*, which has for good reason become one of the main critics of this system⁴⁷, is affected by this opacity, that is why the truth is never complete.

And it is why our oligarchs and their vassals to continue to dominate.

⁴⁷ Marie Bénilde, “Emmanuel Macron, created to serve”, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, May 2017 (online).

Chapter 20

At this stage, let us go on and make a comparison that will only come as a surprise to those who are blind to the nature of the regime we have fallen into. Let us remember the ascent of Vladimir Putin. Facing the collapse of a system, the former KGB officer was suddenly *placed* in his position *via* a democratic election held by a panicked oligarchy that was protecting its interests and eager to sell to the people the first bureaucrat who would pledge allegiance.

He was unknown to the public and became the chosen one, quickly distributing favors to those who had put him in place. He consolidated his power through propaganda, military parades, throwing great parties in castles and generally staging events and communication operations.

Remind you of anything?

Now let's demonstrate how the French press, helped by three national oligarchs, multiple PR directors and an infinity of passive accomplices, in a few months created a politician of international stature who would be *democratically* elected and, once in office, work hard to serve the interests of the oligarchy.

Chapter 21

We should remind ourselves at this point that since his election Mr. Macron has not denied himself the use of the State-owned media, ordaining or canceling television shows with friends, assuring that they will be recruited, or that they will hold on to their jobs.

We are thinking for example of Mr. Delahousse, a TV journalist who grew up in Amiens like Mr. Macron. Delphine Ernotte, appointed CEO of France Télévisions (a State-owned audiovisual conglomerate) wanted to remove him in October 2017. After the Elysée intervened, he was kept on, causing an almighty shake-up that almost led to the removal of public service investigation programs and treated us to an absurd “Christmas interview” with the president - a long conversation at the Elysée, so flagrantly servile that it was compared to a Soviet propagandist film - it is well worth watching.

A few weeks before this interview, at the end of November 2017, a controversy was raging at France Télévisions over the suppression of jobs on the TV shows *Envoyé spécial* and *Complément d'enquête*. Contrary to what was suspected at the time, these layoffs, on programs produced by Elise Lucet, had not been requested by the Elysée. It was more complicated than that, and the affair allows us to understand how the current links between media power and politics degrade the informational space and imprison our journalists in power struggles. The story begins with the desire of the Elysée to impose a fifty billion euro budget cut on Delphine Ernotte. Let's not forget we are in troubled times. There is controversy about Michel Field, political director at France Télévisions. Pujadas (a news broadcaster) was fired the day Macron took office. Fifty billion euros out of a 2.7 trillion euros budget is not much, in fact it is rather petty. So, confronted with this rigor over the budget imposed by her patron, the France Televisions CEO decides she too will have some fun. She insinuates that she is about to stop the Delahousse show. It turns out that Delahousse, who went to the same high school as Emmanuel Macron, has lately become his close friend, and Mme. Ernotte knows it. Delahousse, after having verified the intentions of his employers, predictably takes the matter to the Elysée, which ordains that Ernotte maintain the show and save money elsewhere. This is where the versions of the story differ, giving us an idea of the swamp in which our beloved journalists are operating. The directors of the news service suggest that Ernotte's staff (including the chief-of-staff, Stéphane Sitbon-Gomez), lacking experience, had hurriedly formed a plan for cuts involving the programs of Elise Lucet without realizing the consequences of such a move. Let's give this version the credibility it deserves, while other, more sophisticated versions, willingly affirm that Ernotte's precise plan was to embarrass the Elysée, knowing it would be immediately accused of censoring a journalist so well-liked by the public. So, the board announced cuts in investigation and Delahousse, incapable of understanding what was at stake, thought he had breathing space.

Everyone knows what followed, it was covered by the press and threatened an embarrassing scandal for the Elysée. Board meetings were held, contradictory statements

were released while worried press journalists relayed the mounting indignation, to the delight of the directors at France Televisions. We should point out that Michel Field, the increasingly embarrassing news director, was hated by the powers that be for having made David Pujadas (fired the day of Macron's inauguration after glib coverage of the campaign) into a news martyr. The furious Elysée could pretend it was not responsible, but the damage was done, the match was won. With a vote of no-confidence on the horizon, and the quarrel threatening the position of Ernotte, high-level negotiations restarted, and it was announced that *Envoyé spécial* and *Complément d'enquête* were safe. Delahousse would keep his job and the budget cuts were put off for a year.

This could have been the end of the story. But the president of the republic, who is not a forgiving man, and who is not afraid of appearing foolish when it comes to winning a show of strength, would not stop there. As soon as the conflict was settled, on December 5, he declared “The French audiovisual public service is a disgrace”. Then he organized a final nose-thumbing - a veritable provocation - at Field and Ernotte, which would seal the fate of the former.

It is stunning. It not only shows the level of immaturity, but also the irresponsibility of our leaders. Here we see an all-powerful president of the republic and a broadcaster at the peak of his career, both vexed, deciding to take revenge by making, behind the back of the directors of France Televisions, a long-form 45-minute interview aired just before Christmas where Emmanuel Macron is fawned over by a smiling Delahousse at the Elysée. A humiliated Ernotte was left to watch from afar, and having no say in the matter was obliged to broadcast the interview. Where ten minutes had been allotted to a discussion on the climate, Ernotte discovered a live-streamed eulogy glorifying our banal president, and she understood who was being targeted through the satisfied smiles displayed on the public television channel. The sentiment of complete power is so strong that although the following day sees a vehement reaction from the press, the ridiculousness of the situation has no consequences for those involved. As in the most glorious times of the monarchy, the king was served, and his valets put in their place, while the mesmerized people witnessed, uncomprehendingly, the schoolyard games that no one took the time to explain.

We can think of a few other stories, related to Michel Field, France Inter radio, the nomination of the director of LCP (The Parliamentary Channel), the appalling director of *JDD*, which could, with a little courage, be published and which would be so many examples of a great tradition of interventions in our democracy. Let us remind ourselves of the traumatic firing of Aude Lancelin, deputy editor at *L'Obs*, by Xavier Niel and his friends, because of her political ideas, before her successor was also fired because of a front-page criticizing Macron's migration policy; the forced resignation of both Hervé Kempf, an important voice for ecology in *Le Monde*, and his boss Natalie Nougayrède, led into a trap by stockholders before Macron's election, justified by saying it was a question of “personalities”. Let's look at the bigger story, going back a decade, with the cases of Guillon and Mermet on State-owned media, and Bolloré's removal of the program “Les Guignols” from State-owned TV; the stories of explicit censorship at France 2 revealed by Paul Amar

and some others who had the courage to talk; the repeated compromises of Maurice Szafran or Franz-Olivier Giesbert with each new leader to whom they only wanted to sell themselves; and all the stories we will never hear because everybody is just trying to survive in this world, and so it is better not to talk; the apologies that immediately appeared in *Le Monde* after a front page had displeased the friends of the powerful. Then there are the daily self-censorship cases, such as when Patrick Roger, for decades a highly regarded journalist at *Le Monde*, proposed an article on a book written by Christian Eckert, retired Secretary of State for the budget (of whom I have already spoken), but saw it turned down because it was considered too positive about a book that deconstructed Macronism, showing how Emmanuel Macron had used Bercy and hired a group of thirty-year-olds to impose himself. Let's think of all those lists of journalists that Bruno Roger-Petit proudly gave to Macron so that he could validate the future editorial board of *L'Obs*. Of the passage into positions of power of big editorialists, from Claude Sérillon to Roger-Petit, from Laurence Haïm to Nathalie Ianetta or Catherine Pégard, sometimes because of talent, often for services rendered. Of our own Russia Today, France 24, where a foreign affairs minister's wife was placed before being moved into public service radio. Of Anne Sinclair who affirmed to Henry Hermand her will to serve Macron while she was CEO of *The Huffington Post*⁴⁸ after she had been one of the main vectors for the ascent of her husband Dominique Strauss-Kahn, with no one blinking an eye. Of the articles about the nepotism we have exposed here in detail, concerning a minister and a political adviser, namely Gabriel Attal and Stéphane Séjourné, which were removed, at the request of the Elysée, from the websites of *Gala* and *Voici* only a few hours after being published, and to which all links have disappeared. Of the buyout of *Marianne* and the press branch of the Lagardère group by a Czech billionaire who, like Xavier Niel, and all the oligarchs before him, pretends to be acting in the name of democracy, while building an alliance with the businessman Etienne Bertier before showing an interest in the energy sector. Of the non-stop invasions into the secrecy of sources through phone records, aborted search warrants, threats from embassies towards war correspondents who were doing their jobs. Of the friendship that would cause Daniel Schneidermann to remove an article revealing how *Le Monde* had censored my investigation into Areva in the only media supposed to take a critical look at our journalists, "because all that was too much for them". Before that came the destruction of the country's only two finance and economics newspapers, *Les Echos* and *La Tribune*, by Bernard Arnault, and the various compromises spoken of in a thousand books that were ignored or quashed because it was never a good idea to discuss these things too much.

Let's think finally of all those other stories, the payouts and benefits that Macron would dish out, justified by the fact that this was nothing new, paralleled with a de facto control over parts of the media so as to reward those who had helped him, using policies that favored the rise of inequality as well as being more and more authoritarian and arbitrary,

⁴⁸ An email dated July 12, 2017 from Brigitte Brechon, Henry Hermand's personal assistant, to Pierre Person, Macronleaks.

reducing liberty in direct proportion to the rising corruption⁴⁹. These are the consequences, in sum, for the daily lives of billions of French people, of the compromises made when information becomes merchandise.

We could go there, talk about the hundreds of cases of imposed self-censorship, but we would immediately be reproached for doing so. After all, journalists are not assassinated in France. No, here we are more likely to die from despair or inanity, crushed and suffocated for having confronted authority without backing down. Or it is death through compromise or precarity, for the mechanisms used to silence the brave are more insidious than in an authoritarian regime, with censorship left to such organisms as the CSA (Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel)- financed by those in authority, its members generously rewarded for their servility, it gives an illusion of control over an ever-growing rubbish dump, but is actually unable to impose itself. Death comes from unemployment, too much pressure, humiliation and frustration. The political violence of our regimes knows how to disguise itself with the cloak of modernity.

We could talk here about the effects of an oligarchy where everyone attacks in order to defend their interests, but that would once again be putting the blame for a crushing system on the footsoldiers and not on their overlords.

In France, information gets diluted, suffocates under the effects of stupidity and servitude, both of which are actually the desired outcome. None of the oligarchs would have the idea, after having invested billions, of losing money for the good of those media which they assure us they own for the sake of protecting democracy. Only Bernard Arnault lets the *Parisien* take on more and more debt so that any emancipation is impossible. Yet, every journalist seems to believe and continues to think that as long as (with the exception of Bolloré) nobody has the stupidity to intervene directly, their independence will be assured. Proclaiming their independence, denying all the mechanisms of control and censorship, they believe they are defending their dignity when they are actually complicit in a system that exploits them endlessly. No, in France nobody bothers to kill anyone. Paying them will do.

⁴⁹ From the law on trade secrets, through privatizations, to the Flat Tax, the Exit Tax, the suppression of the ISF; the CICE and many other more discrete mechanisms, we have lost count of the measures implemented with the aim of benefiting their creators. This has created a system of impunity at the same time as a reduction in public liberties, via the integration of the State of Emergency into law and a series of legislative and regulatory provisions that are regularly denounced.

Chapter 22

Why are these links so rarely brought to light, and even more rarely denounced? Because the bulk of news in France is sourced from the traitors belonging to the various camps within the *Petit-Paris - Le Canard enchaîné* and *Mediapart* systematized this modus operandi to such an extent that they were repeatedly criticized. However, exposing the links that dominate them would be tantamount to depriving themselves of their sources of information, and of starting a trench warfare in which everything could collapse.

This is the way it is, in order to uncover and clarify the murky ties between Macron and the oligarchs, you have to get your information from the few journalists who were brutally ejected from the system, like Aude Lancelin, or persevered, whatever the cost, like Marc Endeweld. This is how it is, especially when nothing is ever questioned, even when it is discovered that essential information has been hidden, for months or for years. There was no reassessment of the presentation of Emmanuel Macron in *Le Monde* or elsewhere after the presidential campaign, nor of the revelation of the oligarchic ties that financed it. The unquestioning support of the leading newspaper for the man who was, for months, presented as divinely derived from the thigh of Jupiter, went on and on and continues to this day, multiplying the number of editorials that, unconsciously, follow the government line, and sometimes push it even further.

It is clear that no enigmatic force was systematically enslaving the hundreds of political journalists who, in Paris, have the job of revealing the mechanisms of rise and fall of our leaders. This is what is so frightening. There was no need for censorship or advertisements, as journalists were doing both all by themselves. *Libération*, *L'Express*, *L'Obs* and *Le Monde* were to dedicate more than eight thousand articles to Mr. Macron between January 2015 and January 2017, as many as to all the left-wing candidates put together, when there was nothing worthwhile to remark in his political actions⁵⁰. Financed by society, educated in the best schools in our country, the cream of our political journalists, those who have access to the powerful, whose duty it is to control politicians on behalf of society, have renounced their mission entirely, and seem to have done so willingly. To explain this voluntary servitude and the links of corruption that have brought it about, has become our mission.

Because what we've just revealed is not much. The three authors of the inquiry on Michèle Marchand have not only failed to inform us about one of the main vectors of the propaganda operation which led Mr. Macron, without any real support from people, to preside over the destiny of our country, and which as a result strengthened the Rassemblement National (formerly the National Front) which is delighted by all these compromises. The authors refused to dig into the relationship between Niel and Arnault, and between Arnault and

⁵⁰ Vincent Ortiz, "How the Media Fabricated the Candidate Macron," *Le vent se lève*, February 2, 2017 [Online]

Macron. They deprived the French people of crucial information at the time of their decision. And here we really must start to worry.

Chapter 23

Now that Mr. Lagardère's future is assured we are free to explore in another direction. According to one of the authors of *Mimi*, Michèle Marchand was also in charge of looking after the image of (or rather of burying any compromising information about) another oligarch: Bernard Arnault. Arnault is the richest man in France, fourth-richest man in the world, endowed with a fortune of seventy billion and the owner of the multi-national luxury goods conglomerate LVMH. This may appear as insignificant as the “friendship” between Niel and Macron unless we point out another fact, which good bourgeois manners and class conventions should prevent us from doing: Xavier Niel lives with Delphine Arnault, daughter and heiress of Bernard Arnault.

At this point the innocent reader may ask: why does it matter? After all, are we not taught it is bad form to stick our noses into people's private lives, be it those of the weak or the powerful? Are we not reprimanded and shamed every time we take the liberty of speaking on this subject? Is this not the mantra of political journalists (whose usefulness is questionable) who in public seem so modest and quiet, polite and discreet, and yet never miss a chance to spread rumors and gossip back at the office? When it comes to writing, they refrain from publishing anything potentially sensitive, accepting all the compromises imposed by their sources; once a reserve army of the powerful, they have become their appointed scribes.

It should be remembered that Mr. Arnault is not only a media tycoon, he is also the biggest advertising magnate in France. He has the power of life and death over every media outlet, a fact of which journalists are only too aware. Any number of articles and investigations about him have been censored! This reveals one more of the damaging results of the concentration of wealth - the kind of power that it automatically bestows upon the richest individuals, enabling them to impose themselves in every possible way without any need for outside help. Arnault did not hesitate to demand the removal from the daily newspapers of publications that displeased him, threatening the publishers with bankruptcy to make them understand the price they would pay if they decided to attack him. He was the first to plot against *Le Monde* by removing his newspapers from its printing houses, in order to ruin the paper and bring down its management, because the newspaper had criticized the then president, together with Bolloré and Lagardère. Bernard Arnault, the possessor of a fortune that could support several nations, who wanted to go into tax exile to boost the heritage of his brilliant children, who tried to sue *Libération* for making fun of this decision.

Bernard Arnault, who crowns and dethrones princes, while, strangely, nobody mentions his compromises and corruption, his invisible influential connections - associates and subordinates whom he has used and disposed of for decades.

This same Bernard Arnaud now also hires a certain Mimi Marchand.

In the course of a famous conversation at the Trocadero between the journalists Edwy Plenel and Jean-Jacques Bourdin and the president, under the watchful eye of the entire country, Bourdin permitted himself an indecency: he revealed that in France the main beneficiary of the tax policies of Mr Macron's new government was precisely Bernard Arnault. He also pointed out that Bernard Arnault had a personal connection with the Macron couple. That they were, in short, friends.

Hide that nugget so we can't see it! This close relationship between a billionaire and a president, thus exposed, provoked outrage!

Why report this fact? The president himself has claimed that he has no friends! The ensuing media circus would be amusing for anyone unaware of the many tragedies that are born out of these arrangements. The president made a very strange remark, by the way, so surprised was he by the audacity of the journalist, he could only reply: "I have no friends."

All the more surprising if we know a little of Xavier Niel, who has been repeatedly saying for years: "Like all the rich, I have no friends." We don't know by what metempsychosis the words of Niel became those of Macron - well, we wouldn't have known it, had we not known that they were "friends" - but at the same time, we might have understood better if we had really listened to the president during his election campaign, when he often said that it is important to dream of becoming a billionaire. An insignificant anecdote, just like all those speeches so full of hot air. And yet.

We do not know by what metempsychosis the words of Niel became Macronist.

Because we did not know that Niel and Arnault were friends.

Chapter 24

We will not mention, since it is not the subject here, what it was that Mr. Niel obtained from Mrs. Hidalgo before going on to make use of Mr. Macron, who was so grateful that he took Niel's place in announcing the opening of an Ecole 42 in Algiers⁵¹. We will not mention the unbelievable litany of public policies implemented by Mr. Macron to protect those who had crowned him king.

We will discover, however, that the director of *Mediapart*, who had nodded in agreement with the statement of Mr. Bourdin, knew that Mr. Arnault and Mr. Macron were friends. However, he had never published this fact, neither in *Mediapart* nor anywhere else. *Mediapart*, is a bold media outlet, which I respect very much, but it was only able to exist by accepting all the compromises of the Parisian news world, protecting its powerful sources and denouncing others, playing a system where behind one corrupt person there is always another one. It gained renown in the era of Sarkozy by obtaining revelations pulled from the heart of the State by one of his main enemies. But *Mediapart* never denounced Sarkozy himself, thus misleading their readers, who admired journalistic courage which, although admittedly greater than elsewhere, was nonetheless feeding the machine it should have been attacking.

Jean-Jacques Bourdin had just betrayed a secret that was severely embarrassing to the president and would arouse his outrage⁵². It should have given rise to a torrent of investigations: hold on, is it possible that Mr. Macron had been influenced by this man? How long had they known each other? What role had he played? Mr. Plenel, in response to the answers given by Macron, at whom he had gazed so fondly during the presidential campaign interviews at *Mediapart*, said not a word. Was nothing said because the wife of Laurent Mauduit, the *Mediapart* journalist charged with studying the elite caste, was until 2017 a PR director at *Carrefour*, one of the companies where Mr. Arnault had huge investments? Or because Mr. Arnault's son-in-law, Xavier Niel, had invested in *Mediapart*, a fact which Plenel and Fabrice Arfi would clumsily try to refute, in spite of clear evidence?⁵³ Could it be because *Mediapart*'s lawyer, Jean-Pierre Mignard, was a big supporter of Emmanuel Macron, organizing one of the many fundraising events - of highly dubious legitimacy - which he had made abroad, notably in Algeria? Or maybe because Alain Minc, who had been a big help to Edwy Plenel at *Le Monde*, was, together with Jean-Pierre Jouyet, the main channel of Mr. Macron's ascent to power?

⁵¹ Yoann Ferret, "Emmanuel Macron announces the opening of the School 42 in Algiers, in the presence of Xavier Niel", *Freenews*, December 7, 2017 [Online].

⁵² See, among others: Romain Hereros, "Bernard Arnault, is he really a "friend" of Emmanuel Macron, as has said Jean-Jacques Bourdin?", *Huffington Post*, April 16, 2018 [Online]. Grégory Raymond, "Friendships with Billionaires: Bourdin and Plenel beaten at their own game by Macron", *Capital*, April 16, 2018 [Online].

⁵³ These pathetic explanations, coming from a newspaper admirable in so many ways, would only deserve our deepest contempt: "Is Xavier Niel a shareholder of *Mediapart*?", *Liberation*, October 2, 2017 [Online].

One could hope that this was not the case. I have great respect and admiration for Laurent Mauduit, who, perhaps owing to his closeness to these circles, was the only person to have had the courage to radically criticize the media, going so far as to make the revealing statement: “What editorial board today would risk criticizing Bernard Arnault?⁵⁴” And yet. Edwy Plenel continued to vacillate, giving somewhat belated warnings starting in July 2017 of the dangers of Macron's authoritarian drift, having called previously, between the two rounds of elections, to vote for him for this very reason, indifferent to the myopia of his editorial board on the subject of the emerging power. He seemed reluctant to completely drop the candidate he had allowed to advance. We have another reason to be skeptical when we discover that, while Martine Orange and some other investigative journalists were engaged, often in growing isolation, in the important work of reporting Mr. Macron's successive compromises, there was no genuine editorial implication, right up until the failed police raid of *Mediapart*'s premises. And so, even where there was much to be admired, including the introduction of the podcast *Les boites noires* to accompany each article, which (although they would soon become rare) were an abomination for the conflicts of interests against which *Mediapart* had made a stand, the seeds of doubt were sown: incredible, how in all honesty could we not allow for this possibility?

Because beyond these assumptions, there is an established fact: despite numerous and meticulous investigations, despite the accumulation of facts and compromises that *Mediapart* has so brilliantly brought to light, at no point did the daily newspaper confront the candidate of the oligarchy as it had done many other politicians before him. Whether it was caused by a sociological conformism or by the long-standing personal dislike that Mr. Plenel had towards other candidates that *Mediapart* could have supported, in particular Mr. Mélenchon (a dislike that is also never mentioned), is of no importance. It is obvious that here, too, a malfunction in the relaying of information was operating. And coincidentally, this malfunction didn't affect the root of the problem, although any editorial policy is possible as long as it is assumed, but rather the foundations of a power where oligarchic ramifications were proving to be problematic.

⁵⁴ “Laurent Mauduit: “What media would risk attacking Bernard Arnault?”” *School of Journalism-News*, February 22, 2013 [Online].

Chapter 25

When it is revealed that the main beneficiaries of tax policies which were making billions - yes, billions - disappear from the Treasury every year were close associates of Mr. Macron, and also revealed that journalists had been a party to this information, nothing happens. There is a de facto rule of silence (with the sole exception of *Le Monde Diplomatique*), which does not prevent news getting out, but devalues important stories by not giving them the place they deserve. What is the use of important investigations conducted by the journalists who *are* continuing to do their work in the face of a war machine that smothers editorial commitments, front pages, opinion pieces, including those of *Mediapart*, wearing down their efforts to expose the truth?

It has been established that no economic reasoning could justify Mr. Macron's adoption of tax and economic policies that would freeze old-age pensions and abolish the ISF⁵⁵, nor any of the other criminal measures that would lead to a massive transfer of resources from the majority of the population to an infinitesimal percentage, destabilizing society even further. Thus a question arises: what is the use of our media - disengaged from thought, unable to treat information beyond just letting it flow, in the name of a supposed objectivity that avoids any real discussion and prevents the politicization so vital to understanding what is at stake?

Without even mentioning a single compromise, this tiny breach was enough to cause terrible embarrassment. Since when had the journalists known? Why did we have to wait for the moment of truth when, after having reluctantly let something slip concerning president's ties of friendship, Jean-Jacques Bourdin went on to question him on tax policies, the absurdity of which had been acknowledged by everybody? And why has it not been discussed until we are sick of hearing about it? Why did not a single reporter question the fact the austere Mr. Macron implemented policies extremely advantageous to the most privileged, while increasing taxes on the rest of the society, pretending to do so in the name of the common good? Basically, how and when did he meet Bernard Arnault and Xavier Niel? And what role did they play?

In a healthy media ecosystem these questions would have allowed us, perhaps, to discover that Mr. Arnault and Mr. Niel supported Mr. Macron in his campaign, in order to thank him and to influence his decision-making.

This support came in the form of Mimi Marchand.

⁵⁵ A solidarity tax on very high incomes – tn.

Chapter 26

Let us persevere and delve more deeply. How was it that journalists, with their tax allowances and legal privileges, *our* journalists, kept silent for all those years? That they preferred to avoid mentioning these facts, claiming, as did Fabrice Arfi to Aude Lancelin on *Le Media*⁵⁶, that to do otherwise could open them up to the criticism of having an ideological agenda, when it was simply a matter of asking questions about an undeniable link? Why, when the facts were revealed, did they not rush to their phones and computers to harass their interlocutors to make sure that democracy had not been perverted, that probity and integrity were being respected, that our most fundamental values were being protected? Put simply, to expose the truth?

Could it be that Bernard Arnault and his son-in-law, Xavier Niel, that these two individuals, using their advertising power and their wealth and networks, created structures and codes of behavior around *their* journalists so that the moral sense of the latter became diluted, thus developing a widespread conformism which kept them in their place, ensuring that Arnault and Niel didn't even have to give guidance on the matter? Could it be that our journalists no longer have a sense of duty towards society, but instead feel obliged to their owners? That they serve their advertisers rather than their readers? Is it possible that we are beginning to see how, little by little, the production of news in France has collapsed, that we have accepted the outrageous with increasing equanimity, getting more and more soft, to the point of allowing the destruction of social values? Didn't we all collectively get stuck in the swampy environment of widespread rottenness, informed not by a vigorous press, but on the contrary uninformed because of the latter's inability to denounce, to break free from its ever-deepening and omnipresent incestuous bonds with the powerful?

Is it possible that at underneath this degeneracy, of this total loss of energy and conviction that transforms journalists, who often depend on their jobs, into zombies, the keys of their enslavement lie in the hands of a few billionaires with so much power that they no longer even need to use it?

Why did we have to wait for the people to rise up before beginning, at last, to condemn what had until now been seen as quite normal - the violent, socially unfair tax policies, designed to serve a few - if not because the enslavement had already taken root?

Confronted with an uprising, why did no one look for the root of the problem in the newsrooms, rife as they were with the very fascism with which they were trying to tarnish the protesters? Fascism's real ambassadors could be seen all the time on TV shows, invited and glorified by journalists who put them equal on an equal footing with any other political

⁵⁶ The partiality of which towards La France Insoumise created, under the previous management, at least as many conflicts of interest as those we have just denounced.

force. Why such denigration of the people who had risen up to fight these powerful private interests?

Could it be that all these people had become the defenders of a privileged class, rather than of an idea, the idea of truth? And that those willing to protest found themselves in such a minority that they were squeezed out?

Where were the dozens of front pages, after so many which had glorified the personal merits of Mr. Macron and his wife, querying their relations with Mr. Niel and Mr. Arnault - a subject that, at least in terms of sales if nothing else, would have been certainly as worthwhile as all those bland covers justified by absurd economic reasons? The front pages that should have appeared the day after the publication of *Mimi*, and never ceased? The front pages that should, in a tireless assault, have tracked down the reasons for the abolition of ISF, until there could be no more doubt, confronting power with its dishonorable compromises, requiring it to show the relevance of its dishonest trickle-down theories? Why did not a single article ever call for a debate when the villainous law on commercial secrecy was promulgated? Why such a lack of modesty around discussing the private lives of the powerful when it suits them, and yet such prudishness as soon as it might disturb them? Where are the photographs and articles aimed at examining not the president's blue eyes, but his conflicts of interests? Not just an occasional investigation here and there, but everywhere and all the time, dozens of articles, inquisitive and controversial?

Where are the journalists capable of revealing to us the smoke and mirrors, instead of implying that there is no need to worry, nothing to infer from Bernard Arnault's statement that he is "proud that LVMH dresses the first lady", intended to reinforce what everyone is required to believe: that he is obviously as clean as the driven snow, that there is nothing to suspect?

Where are the journalists who, rather than claiming their independence, fight for their dignity not by asserting that they are free from enslavement, but by demanding the right to liberate themselves from the money tutelage under which they operate? Where are the colleagues of those who, at *L'Express*, tried to confront Drahi; those at *L'Obs* and *Le Monde* who had smashed Niel and Pigasse when they were attacking Lancelin and Kempf⁵⁷, those who rose up to demand the protection, not of their corporation, but of their right to work freely?

⁵⁷ "Hervé Kempf leaves the daily paper *Le Monde* in August 2013, his last ties with the newspaper are officially severed on September 2, 2013. The journalist explains his departure by the constant refusal by the newspaper's management to allow him to produce a report on the Notre-Dame-des-Landes airport project." His Wikipedia note cites all the sources relevant to his departure.

Chapter 27

The connection between Xavier Niel, Bernard Arnault and Arnaud Lagardère goes beyond belonging to the same oligarchy. The circumstances of their alliance are based on geographical proximity. Thus Arnault acquired Lagardère's private mansion, rue Barbet de Jouy, from his widow, and later his son moved close to the villa Montmorency and Xavier Niel. Their dealings with each other are constant, based on ludicrous hatred and reconciled interests. Politicians come and go, and the amount of support they receive, worked out over a dinner here and a lunch there, depends on one thing - their ability to serve the interests of the oligarchy. All of them, sooner or later, are invited into mansions where they discover Bernard Arnault's proverbial coldness. Amid much finery, surrounded by works of art exempt from taxation and liveried butlers, the finest wines are served, socializing is very careful, with the exchanging of gifts and counter-gifts, and anecdotes are swapped that will later leak out to the *Petit-Paris* but will never reach the ears of the French people. The trafficking of information is everywhere but not optimized, because intelligence, contrary to what one might think, hardly reigns in these places, which I know for having frequented them more than once. On the other hand, small-mindedness is omnipresent, made up of reciprocal humiliations, infantile rivalries aiming to destroy a particular person in order to take revenge for a particular affair. Everything conforms to a doxa in which a kind of freedom of trade seems to be the only thing that matters. Beffa was to tell me how, at the head of Saint Gobain, he lost two years of his life fighting back against a terrifying oligarchic offensive that almost ruined his business. Betty Lagardère was brutalized by Bernard Arnault after a charm offensive, the sole objective of which was to buy the premises where his detested rival had humiliated him. Lunch meetings at the Bristol or George V hotels are followed by more refined entertainment in private mansions for the most honored and important guests. There, the impressed politicians are received and gradually made accustomed to the way things are. They are presented to the heirs of fortunes and learn the usefulness of socializing with them when the next day they read a flattering article they had not anticipated. They will go on to be invited to social events, from fashion shows to inaugurations, and are thereby transformed, little by little, in their great naivety, into agents of influence and soldiers of the existing order. Beware of transgression, it could get you expelled from these spheres. Your market value depends on your ability to submit to and nourish these circles, and this was to be the experience of Brigitte Macron.

The Marchand affair, from Niel to Lagardère, put in motion in order to flatter and reassure her, allowed her integration into a world that was out of her league. How could one not stay faithful to those dear friends who made it possible to regain her dignity in the face of unflattering rumors?

Of course, what is to be played out at a later time must be prepared in advance, and so we learn the significance of the gestures made, here and there, to reassure the most easily swayed of the influential members of editorial boards. The Vuitton affair is just one

example among thousands of micro-events whose function was to foster compliance. Is it really possible to claim that such proximity would have no consequences, would not result in any advantage, when this is its one and only reason for existence? What would lead us to think that Bruno Jeudy, lackey of the powerful, willing to take on any communications operation asked of him, would, like Giesbert, show total indifference to the myriad opportunities offered by rubbing shoulders with the powerful? The infernal cycle, which begins with the initial invitations, reaches closure in the form of chosen politicians being propelled into the palaces of the French republic (*). Once installed, they use the riches of the country to repay the favors bestowed upon them. Journalists are sometimes a part of this, as we saw in the Vuitton affair. How can we claim that this proximity is not important, would not result in any profit, when this is the whole point? So several times a day Macron invited the cream of the Parisian elite to the ministry's restaurants and then to his private apartments, at public expense. The exhaustion of his assistants was the cause of a few leaks, particularly about the visits of Mr. Arnault, who was duly rewarded for his faithful friendship.

Our allegations do not stop there because once the connection between the president and the oligarchs was established, should we not have been looking for the compromises and conflicts of interest that such a connection could create? Should we not have searched for the information which would prove the interventions of these oligarchs in the public sphere, in favor of their protégés? Recruitments, banishments, promotions and so on? The lethargy that has spread throughout almost all of the French press seems appalling. The lack of quality is obvious to anyone, coming from Italy or Germany, Spain, Portugal or even England, accustomed to democracies that have not been so completely destroyed.

How can one expect *Liberation*, which struggles every day to fill its thirty pages, its editorial board ruined and dependent on the meager income still coming from advertising, to investigate exactly when it was that Mr. Macron became a friend of the most wealthy couple in France, to explain how he managed to get acquainted with these individuals, what tricks he used to earn their respect, since according to Xavier Niel - and one begins to understand the meaning of his statement - friendship has nothing to do with these relationships? How can one expect a newspaper belonging to an oligarch to explore the intimate, the subjective, to bring out the best that the journalism can produce, rather than making it all the more vulnerable, obliging a perspective that the current legal straightjacket could immediately destroy?

Friendship has nothing to do with these relationships? So be it, we are beginning to understand more clearly, nothing but profit. The boy from Amiens who, fleeing family pressure, arrives in Paris alone to build his destiny thanks to a love which has been much magnified, in fact has powerful friends.

We might hold back, despite the accumulation of evidence, and doubt what we have just discovered. What is, after all, the connection between the fairy story told to the masses and the mask that it immediately places over the relationship we have described? Was there

a correlation, or was there a desire to conceal one thing by staging another? In short, could there have been, from the very beginning, a fabrication?

Legend has it that a provincial gentleman made it to Paris without a penny, devoted himself to the common good, after having brilliantly completed his studies, before being propelled into governmental positions of great responsibility, without ever compromising himself. This is the story that, from *Paris Match* to France Télévisions, hundreds of journalists have been telling, spending fortunes to produce documentaries, narratives, inquiries and portraits, in order to relay a fabricated fable.

To doubt this narrative, as a small minority would attempt to do, to investigate the atrocious idea that the candidate was chosen and carefully propelled by his friends - sorry, his oligarchs - and that he was not an innocent provincial who had devoted himself to the public good and been deified, was it even conceivable?

Utter the words - compromise, oligarchy - and you will immediately hear the outrage of all the footsoldiers of the system, all those journalists who treat as conspiracy theorists anyone who expresses the slightest doubt about their integrity. Without fail, they denigrate any questioning of the establishment, attributing it to some tinpot psychology or foreign influence! Utter the words to those who deny their servitude, despite the fact that they never happen to disagree with the system, and they will arrogantly and contemptuously demolish you as a dissident who dares to question them. Those who, at the same time as proclaiming their independence, covered up the very facts that they were excitedly discussing among themselves over lunches and dinners, and who, with their corrupt coverage of the presidential election campaign, carry a huge responsibility for the collapse of the system happening before our eyes.

We can already hear them crying out with indignation, or, even worse, remaining silent. They have proved that they are not to be trusted. Stupidity or blindness, active or passive compromises, it does not matter: the refusal to admit that any “friendship” between a president and an oligarch with riches superior to those of a State, who owns the mass media within which they function, is by its nature a political fact that deserves attention; as indeed is their own connection to this oligarch, and therefore with this president, which is bound to influence them.

To deny it is to add cowardice to their compromises. Listening to them, you have to say to yourself that even if you believed in their good faith - if you believed that there was nothing to suspect in these ambiguous connections from which no profit was made - all of this should, at the very least, warrant a huge investigation. If only to silence all those conspirators and other enemies of democracy who, not content with finding evil everywhere, dare to suggest that in Paris, center of the Enlightenment and of the world, there is a cesspool where politicians are selling themselves to financiers over lunch and dinner tables, under the blind eye of exploited journalists.

Obviously, there was no investigation because, obviously, such a thing was simply not possible.

Chapter 28

All this being said, we should pay tribute to those who, in isolation, did try to swim against the tide. They were ostracised. One of them, with just one book, hit the target. *The Ambiguous Mr. Macron* by Marc Endeweld, a journalist at *Marianne*, struck first and hardest. The book, despite the fact that no one understood a thing about the Macron phenomenon, was not to be mentioned either in *Le Monde* or *Le Figaro*.

Treating it with disdain, the media were to let it pass under the radar, preferring to interest themselves in the exciting story that Lagardère and Niel, Arnault and Marchand were concocting, giving pride of place to commissioned articles which, from the editorials of *JDD* to those of *Challenges*, were seeking to tell us all about the apparent miracle that was occurring.

Marc Endeweld, once he had finished his book, was to resign from the newspaper *Marianne*, after its buy-out by a Czech oligarch, Daniel Kretinsky⁵⁸, who had also bought shares in Lagardère's media, including *Elle*. There he was to appoint our friend Denis Olivennes, before buying shares in *Le Monde* from Matthieu Pigasse, in order to prepare his takeover of the energy company Engie. Mr. Macron was intending to fully privatize Engie after Sarkozy had opened it out to shareholders when he was seeking support for his 2007 election campaign. This in spite of having promised that the company would “never be privatized”, putting him on a level with Dominique de Villepin, who handed the motorways to another private company, Vinci.

History repeats itself and buries us deeper. Before the Czech oligarch, another oligarch, Patrick Drahi, domiciled in Switzerland, had bought *Libération*. This purchase was made at the express request of François Hollande, a request transmitted by Emmanuel Macron, at the time assistant secretary-general at the Elysée. Macron's only mission there was to earn more credit in the eyes of the *Petit-Paris*, through the Alstom affair, his attempts (already!) to privatize *La Française des Jeux*⁵⁹, as well as the airports of Paris, Toulouse and Lyon, and numerous deals including one which would strangely benefit Mr. Lagardère. A shady story of a game of luck and skill. Since Bouygues, backed by Arnaud Montebourg, had been authorized to buy out SFR, it was Patrick Drahi's turn to demonstrate his generosity. *Liberation* was doing badly. Patrick Drahi understood and asked Bernard Mourad to take care of it. His offer, with the help of Bolloré, was accepted, resulting in the loss of five thousand jobs. This story does not come from us, but directly from one of the henchmen of Mr. Drahi, Bernard Mourad, a crony of Emmanuel Macron. The anecdote is related in the December 2018 issue of *Vanity Fair* in a portrait so complicit that apparently neither the journalist nor the subject is aware of the seriousness of the facts being laid bare.

⁵⁸ Benoît Daragon, “Who really is Kretinsky, the Czech who buys the French press?” *Le Parisien*, October 28, 2018 [Online].

⁵⁹ The French National Lottery – tn.

Mr. Mourad relates, without embarrassment, the methods of building up an oligarchy: a graduate of the Ecole Polytechnique, in debt to the tune of thirty billion euros, gets the support of a president to buy a telecommunications company in exchange for organizing his re-election, before appointing Mr. Joffrin, a classmate of François Hollande and the latter's ghostwriter, as editor-in-chief. Bernard Mourad, for his part, will be put in charge of the company, as well as of *L'Express*, RMC and BFMTV, also now owned by Drahi, where, as he said himself, he suggested devoting front pages to his friend Emmanuel Macron. Not just any old front pages either. *L'Express*, as early as 2014, laid their cards on the table with the headline: "The Macron Bomb". Macron will go on to thank Mourad for his services by appointing him as an advisor during his presidential campaign, before giving Bank of America France permission to privatize Aéroports de Paris. A few months later Bernard Mourad had been put in charge of the operation. Meanwhile, faced with the downfall of Hollande, *Liberation* and *L'Express* had initially been prepared to run the presidential campaign of Manuel Valls, before falling back, like the other media, on the *intimate* Emmanuel Macron, just as the latter was losing ground. As for BFMTV, the channel was to offer the unknown candidate coverage equal to that of all the other candidates put together⁶⁰. Their plan for supporting the re-election of one president glided very naturally into supporting the next, placing him, for this was the ultimate aim, in their debt⁶¹.

⁶⁰ Between November 2016 and February 2017 his meeting speeches were broadcast on BFMTV for a total of 426 minutes, as opposed to 440 minutes for his main opponents.

⁶¹ Bernard Mourad would try to convince us that Patrick Drahi had acted purely out of pity when a journalist from *Liberation* told him: "You are going to invest fourteen billion euros in SFR, you can just as well invest fourteen million in *Liberation*." I found him more convincing when he explained to me that in fact, Patrick Drahi didn't have much interest in the media and that he had only invested in several outlets after Martin Bouygues had threatened to mobilize all his political correspondents to block him. Mr. Mourad would also tell me that François Hollande's only reaction to the *Liberation* deal completed by Mr. Drahi was to congratulate him.

Chapter 29

Ten days after his interview with Plenel and Bourdin, in which he claimed not to be Mr. Arnault's friend, Mr. Macron invited Mr. Arnault to the presidential table at the first State dinner given by Donald Trump in honor of France.

But, come on, after all, this could be just a coincidence, and anyway: why, even if this were true, should it be of any interest to the public? After all, who cares? Isn't it perfectly natural for talented people to appreciate each other and socialize together? Why not believe in good fairies?

Are we not being far too swift to assimilate political choices with social ones? Besides, the financing of public life is controlled by strict legislation, and not a trace of compromise has been found. Why question the deranged insistence with which the president, in addition to the abolition of the ISF, defends the maintaining of the CICE, which he created and which is costing the state at least twenty billion euros a year, in exchange for a very insignificant impact on employment? Why would we imagine that this was the reason for the full-page coverage Bernard Arnault offers in his newspaper *Les Echos* to support his non-friend Emmanuel Macron, and why make assumptions about Arnault for giving his journalists-employees a few pointers on the line to follow with regard to this candidate? Why be scandalized that ties of friendship, sometimes even collaborations, among the powerful have been concealed by those who are supposed to be objectively keeping such things in check, and who assert, just like the oligarchs, their right to privacy?⁶² Why should we be surprised at public boasts about dressing the President's wife, that are coupled with the pretense that no commercial benefit comes from this link?⁶³ Surely it is all, *in fine*, simply a question of friendship?

All these dishonorable disembowelments of good bourgeois behavior are, up until now, fairly minor, despite already making the disembowelment of citizens a daily occurrence. Let us recapitulate. On the subject of a candidate who almost a year into the presidential campaign had no program and had trouble filling rallies which were later proven to be artificially staged, a book revealed to us the sources of an unprecedented media hype, as well as the reasons for the blind conformity which, with very little effort, got him the backing of most of the media. We learn how this candidate was consecrated, co-opted in advance by a small circle to implement public policies that were heavily in their favor.

This media hype has largely yet to be counterbalanced or contradicted by any thorough investigation, apart from a few isolated attempts which have been rapidly crushed.

⁶² Bernard Arnault, "Why I am voting Emmanuel Macron," *Les Echos*, May 5, 2017 [Online].

⁶³ Katia Fache-Cadoret, "The connection between Brigitte Macron and LVMH is older than we thought", *Marie Claire*, June 20, 2017 [Online]. Sophie Levy Ayoun, "Brigitte Macron: first lady and... Louis Vuitton's muse", *Capital*, May 9, 2017 [Online].

We are aware of the gregarious nature of human beings, and of the difficulty in making up one's own mind in the face of such a phenomenon, which is always presented as something natural and inevitable.

The results of this are now clear to see.

Chapter 30

It is time to remember that fortunes are not made by miracles. Their connection with and ability to influence politics are the key, especially when these fortunes are counted not in millions, but in billions.

The making of political careers in France, this democracy so glorious that we endlessly boast about it, owes not so much to the intrinsic virtues or qualities of any of the individuals involved, as to their ability to charm and to serve certain oligarchs, who, as we have seen, are able to invest hundreds of millions in the media to make us believe in their impartiality.

Let us recount Mr. Arnault's method of building his fortune and becoming the richest of us all: it is thanks to a scandalous transaction, the buy-out of the Boussac weaving factory, carried out at the expense of the State, that Mr. Arnault's fortune was made. This buy-out, or rather this pillage, was possible thanks to a political favor granted in the 1980s by a certain Laurent Fabius. The State advanced nearly one hundred million euros on the condition that Mr. Arnault would raise half of the funds, a condition he failed to meet. Instead, he purchased a portfolio of brands which included, among others, the very profitable Dior perfumes and Le Bon Marché. Semi-public sector enterprises and the infamous Crédit Lyonnais were mobilized under the supervision of Antoine Bernheim to enable Mr. Arnault, in just a few years, to build an empire, using the networks provided by the State, to which he obtained access via his education and the social connections made possible by virtue of the family fortune. Via public borrowing, debt relief, government loans and an endless series of interventions at public expense, he was to become a billionaire, get rid of less profitable branches of the company, and lay off workers by the shedload, before starting to acquire the media and applying for Belgian citizenship (for tax purposes). When that maneuver failed, as an alternative he befriended any French president willing to lighten his tax burden. Thus Emmanuel Macron, once elected, will assert shamelessly in front of Bourdin and Plenel that this kind of attempt at tax evasion was merely optimization, he will also rapidly abolish the Exit Tax created for curbing tax avoidance and let slip to the expatriate community of Brussels, with a smile full of innuendo, that there were “good reasons” for moving to Belgium⁶⁴.

⁶⁴ Geoffroy Clavel, “Tax exile: Macron evokes the “good reasons” to go to Belgium”, *Huffington Post*, November 21, 2018.

Chapter 31

It is indeed through his connections with politicians, who have generously mobilized public resources to subsidize his businesses, that Mr. Arnault has made his fortune; through incestuous ties such as these, Mr. Macron is complicit with him. It is indeed through his friendships, and other supposedly harmless collusions, particularly with Mr. Fabius, that our Mr. Arnault has become what he is, to the detriment of an entire country. Thanks to the policies implemented by Mr. Macron and his acolytes, his fortune has doubled in less than two years, shooting up from thirty to seventy billion euros between 2016 and 2018, when the buying power of the general population stagnated, even diminishing in the case of the poorest members of society. It is important to recall that the property which constitutes the basis of Mr. Arnault's fortune was sold to him at a loss by a desperate government. This was done not to avoid bankruptcy and redundancies, as was promised in the official explanation - these redundancies were to take place anyway, although the money invested by the State to help Mr. Arnault would have been more than sufficient to avoid them. The real reason was that the government was looking for support to remain in power and counter the inexorable return of the far right. Its economic policy was already shifting, from 1983 onwards. This so-called socialist government sought to create a network of financiers and media outlets capable of building a machine that would overwhelm the public domain and conceal their ideological betrayal. This shift in policy was to be named *le tournant de la rigueur*⁶⁵, and was to create a rift between those in power and those in the population who had been their supporters. Everything was done in this precise chronological order, with the purpose of remaining in power. And perverting democracy.

Now we are starting to understand that this affects us more than we had imagined, and could determine the fate of an entire country.

The link between small and large-scale corruption, between petty and major politics, was beginning to forge itself. The CICE, created by Mr. Macron while still assistant secretary-general at the Elysée, cost the State a hundred billion of euros securing Macron in return the exuberant support of these big companies⁶⁶. Not to mention the ISF, nor the tax evasion that costs the taxpayers and public service users nearly one hundred billion euros a year, with some people unable to afford to heat their homes despite living in the world's sixth-largest economy.

“Conspiracy theories!” will come the answer. Is it a conspiracy theory when Jérôme Cahuzac tells me in confidence that the economic program of François Hollande, which

⁶⁵ Shift to austerity – tn.

⁶⁶ Its largest beneficiary was the Carrefour Group, of which main private actionnaire was Bernard Arnault.

would lead to the collapse of the Socialist Party, had been designed for that purpose and was entirely written by Jérôme Cahuzac and Mr. Macron?

Conspiracy theories, or intelligence, in the strictest sense of the term, of a system where everyone avoids examining the central role are they playing and the reasons why they have stopped looking, among all the supposedly insignificant friendships, to see if anything there could jeopardize the integrity of our political system.

The complicity demonstrated by journalists and politicians towards the powerful is almost unhealthy. There is a criminal element in it, too. According to the *Inserm* (French National Institute of Health and Medical Research), ten to fifteen thousand people die each year from mass unemployment which our leaders, by supporting a deleterious economic system fed by the powerful and created to promote their careers, have only caused to increase over the last forty years.

No democracy, even without all this, would have survived the last forty years, which have brought such systematic destruction of social ties, plummeting wages, and exploding inequality.

No real democracy would have survived the death of three hundred to four hundred and fifty thousand people, and millions of broken lives.

For the survival of a republic like ours, it is essential to have members of different social classes representing the population and controlling the activity of the State and the actions of our government. Journalists, on the front line, are responsible for informing us and for making sure that our representatives don't use their power to serve either private, or their own, interests. Should this not be the case, the very meaning of our political institutions is lost, and our democracy, which once was real, becomes no more than a formality. What is the point of elections where one votes blindly, not knowing who the interested parties are behind the candidates, unable to check their professional records, to investigate their duplicity, the sources of their ideas, their oily propaganda.

Chapter 32

Sadly, our indictment doesn't end there. One doesn't become a billionaire for no reason, just as no one becomes a president overnight. This much is obvious. The extraordinary nature of the job of governing a country often leads us to think that any individual doing it must be endowed with extraordinary qualities. However, nominations and corruption play a far bigger role than the qualities more generally considered to be intrinsic and essential for a governor of the people. And Xavier Niel, who, like Bernard Arnault⁶⁷, chose to invest his fortune in the media and in expanding his networks, knows this well.

One doesn't get involved with Mimi Marchand for no reason.

Of course, a naïve person might not see this. In this case, we should refer again to *Mimi*, where it is revealed that Xavier Niel, before suggesting to Mr. and Mrs. Macron that they collaborate with Michèle Marchand, offered them the use of his “networks” so they might verify and eventually hush up certain pieces of information.

We are in fact talking about the leading media tycoon of the country, who has got his hands on *Le Monde* and a few other newspapers, and claims that there has never been any evidence of his direct intervention into their content - a curious admission, in fact, of his implicit intentions. Yes, we are talking about the future president and the future first lady, Mr. and Mrs. Macron, who agreed to accept Mr. Niel's help when visiting him in his pink marble palace. In doing so, they agreed to put themselves at the mercy of an individual who could claim repayment of their debt to him at any time. This individual had infinite power over the Macron couple through the possession of sensitive information that could be leaked at any moment, leaving them under the ever-present threat of blackmail.

Fortunately for them, the information in question was never confirmed.

Our reader may at this point feel they are looking into a vortex, but this is just the beginning. We will now shed light on another mechanism, which the above case helps us to understand. Mr. Niel claims never to intervene in the content produced by his newspapers. This is a claim that Mr. Dassault, who became the owner of *Le Figaro* due to the buy-out of Robert Hersant's group by his father, never felt the need to make, despite well-known agreements he made during this period with another politician, Mr. Valls, via his father, Serge Dassault. Prior to that, Mr. Lagardère, Mr. Arnault and Mr. Bouygues, also never bothered to declare that they did not intervene in their media outlets.

Xavier Niel belongs to a new generation in which suspicion was growing in regard to this issue and where there was a desire for powerful editorialists who prized independence as

⁶⁷ Here we must recall that Mr. Arnault is the owner not only of the world's largest luxury conglomerate, whose advertising power is sufficient to kill any media outlet if he so decides, but also of France's largest newspaper, *Le Parisien*, and none other than our country's only business and financial daily publication, *Les Echos*, after eliminating its competitor *La Tribune*.

their highest priority. So he invented a strange formula - he publicly displayed his detachment from the journalists while in private he was wiping them out. Things might have looked better, but in fact, they were worse, because there was an illusion that free will had been preserved, and indeed journalists exhausted themselves trying to defend the truth of this against all the evidence. Everyone found their own way to pretend. *Mediapart*, for example, rather than finding the courage to ask friends in the media to buy back Mr. Niel's shares in the company, played along with the illusion, by publishing (and then more or less dropping) a big fake-real investigation into Mr. Niel, which flopped, because it was about everything except his political connections⁶⁸. *Le Monde* would also try to maintain the illusion, in this case probably in all sincerity, by publishing an extensive investigation into Mr. Daniel Kretinsky over the period that he acquired shares from another small oligarch, Mathieu Pigasse. The investigation unearthed nothing, nor even pointed to anything that could explain Mr. Kretinsky's sudden irresistible desire to acquire a structure that should remain democratic and belong to society.

This illusion was dangerous because it led to an acceptance of a scandalous situation, while at the same time reducing vigilance and creating a lot of tension. The only ones to benefit have been the new generation of oligarchs. Why would they bother intervening directly in the content produced, when they can rely on henchmen and women like Michèle Marchand, who was under the radar until the publication of a book in September 2018, to ensure in advance that a particular revelation will receive no coverage, or put pressure on a particular source likely to say too much, someone whose name has come to their attention through the discreet networks put in place within the State? Why bother imposing censure, when it is possible to intervene in the production of news indirectly, through the intermediary of Louis Dreyfus, managing director of, simultaneously, *Le Monde*, *L'Obs*, *The Huffington Post* and *Les Inrockuptibles*? The person who is, if you please, the decision-maker in matters of recruitment and dismissal, promotion or career obstruction, in charge of the daily management of the structures that supply the most prestigious newsrooms of Paris, where all French journalists dream of working, while perfectly aware that it is in their interest to cover up certain information in order to have a chance of being recruited there.

So, Xavier Niel, we are told, never censors an article. What's the point, when he can simply make sure that it will never be published? All he needs to do is use the skills of Michèle Marchand, his contacts within the State, the power of Louis Dreyfus, his own contacts within the editorial boards, the direct connections he maintains with certain journalists, and, finally, the self-censorship of all those whom he, with his fellow oligarchs, has carefully placed in a precarious situation, pressured, promoted or sidelined? Why take the risk of revealing oneself when one can simply give instructions to recruit or dismiss anyone who would have the luck of pleasing him or misfortune of displeasing him; or ask Mrs. Marchand

⁶⁸ Laurent Mauduit and Dan Israel, "The well-kept secrets of Xavier Niel," *Mediapart*, January 6, 2013 [Online]; Laurent Mauduit, "The Secrets of Xavier Niel. The day when the boss of Free made his fortune", *Mediapart*, January 10, 2013 [Online]; Martine Orange, "The Secrets of Xavier Niel. The pirate who knows how to navigate the Net", *Mediapart*, January 13, 2013 [Online]; Dan Israel, "The Secrets of Xavier Niel; Co-pilot of the new "Monde", *Mediapart*, January 14, 2013 [Online]; Dan Israel, "The Secrets of Xavier Niel The paper-eater 2.0", *Mediapart*, January 16, 2013 [Online].

to place a veil over certain pieces of information; or discredit any given opponent, in such a way that no one could guess who was behind all the intimidation, destruction and defamation? “You will never find any evidence of me intervening in the contents of my newspapers.” Well, that says it all.

The oligarch’s strategy was different from that of his comrades Lagardère, Arnault and Bolloré, who belonged to the more paternalistic old regime. Using clever management practices, through accumulation and concentration of capital, through social plans and interventions in wages, he put pressure on journalists, ensuring that no one would risk going up against him or his friends. Another important move was to take over the stronghold that is *Le Monde*, which was thought to be the most incorruptible of all the French press. After substantially cleaning up his image, all he had to do was to buy the country’s most important newspaper in order to position himself at the top of the food chain and make sure that no ambitious journalist would ever *seriously* attack him. Sometimes certain affairs are exposed, due to score-settlings, and when an unfortunate commentator loses the support of the system, freedom rears its head. Let's just think a minute about a certain Alexandre Benalla. Now we understand why he was put in the spotlight, although the true reasons for his exposure have never been revealed. And let's compare the drama that was created around this person, with what might have been, had the above-named oligarchs been investigated with the same determination.

We really should yield in the face of the evidence. In any healthy society Mr. Niel, like any other oligarch whose fortune exceeds by several dozen generations what any normal person could ever spend, who boasts about his closeness to the president, who makes millions on a daily basis, would have been seen as a war trophy by any journalist seeking to make a name for himself. Mr. Niel, and not a twenty-seven-year-old bodyguard, a petty crook involved in skid row swindles.

And yet.

And yet Niel continues, with his countless lunch meetings, to influence the hierarchs of our regime. He drops the names of politicians or rising executives that might be of interest to them. Via a henchman, this hint will be brought to the attention of an editor or a journalist who has become influential, who in turn will pass it on. All this may seem like nothing much, and everyone, right up to the journalist who eventually writes the article, is voluntarily unaware of the true and apparently innocent beneficiary of it all. The journalist, who may or may not know why there is such an interest in the subject of the article, presumes his colleagues also know nothing of the matter, and generally writes a flattering article. Surely the person who is the subject of the article, thus distinguished, will feel obliged to reward his friend and protector?

Chapter 33

We are told that these facts are just coming to light, but this is only in a manner of speaking. Because even great power is flawed, and when in January 2014 Xavier Niel told me in person that Macron would become president, although he was still only assistant secretary-general at the Élysée at the time and unknown to the public, it is hard to believe that I was the only one to be informed. From that moment on the public should have been told about the link, in order to warn of the possible conflicts of interest and point out the source of all the praise being heaped upon Mr. Macron.

Here we touch on another problem with the behavior we are exposing. When the very foundations of our democratic system were being damaged, the bourgeois press only picked up on the explicitly illegal acts. Very few journalists showed any interest in the lies, manipulation, or even worse, legal corruption, not to mention the perversion of our ever more damaged democratic space. No one seemed to tire of being told that Mr. Niel, the Arnault family, and the Macrons met for the first time in the summer of 2014, six months after Mr. Niel had already told me that his friend Emmanuel Macron would become president, nor of the claim they had met by chance, between New York and Los Angeles, which is the height of absurdity. This information was picked up and circulated by everybody without any real verification, yet it is false. Mr. Niel and Mr. Macron must have met during the negotiations surrounding the buy-out of *Le Monde* and its definitive loss of independence, in which Bernard Arnault played an important role. Macron was at the time busy betraying some of his collaborators in order to support others, when Niel came up with a competitive offer compared with the backroom deal Mr. Macron had made with Alain Minc, his first entry point into the oligarchy. In fact, it was during this period that Mr. Niel consolidated his position in the Parisian elite, for the first time he would pass the summer not in his usual holiday home, but with the person who was to become his partner, Delphine Arnault.

Very little has been written about these relationships, or it has been written badly or half-heartedly, hence consciously or unconsciously serving the public relations strategies of the people in question. Thus, information that everyone knows to be false is circulated, in order to completely conceal the facts.

You've had enough? But we're not done yet! We have barely begun.

You may recall something we have already mentioned. The father-in-law-to-be of Xavier Niel, Bernard Arnault, granted himself the luxury of recruiting the all-powerful former director of the country's secret services, Bernard Squarcini, as the "security man" at LVMH. This very same Mr. Squarcini would call his former subordinates to demand information about certain people. However, the magistrates of the bench, unlike those of the public prosecutor's department, were the last of the "elite" civil servants to be absorbed by the oligarchy, and so Squarcini had to face charges.

Bernard Arnault put his security apparatus at the service of candidate Macron, adding this to the protection of the media already offered by Michèle Marchand, via his son-in-law Xavier Niel. In this way, Michèle Marchand became the custodian of a great deal of information on politicians and wealthy businessmen, which could be monetized when necessary. And we were to discover that LVMH was not content with simply turning our first lady into moving advert for their products.

Had this first move been announced to the public, we would have been able to follow the trail back to Mr. Squarcini's dirty work, and even beyond that. It would have led to questions about, and therefore to the discovery of, the fact that Mr. Arnault was actually acquainted with Brigitte Macron long before Xavier Niel.

It is in *Capital*, the only financial magazine not directly owned by the Parisian elite, that we read that in fact, Mrs. Macron taught the children of the richest man in France, at the highly selective, exclusive and private Franklin High School, a temple of the oligarchy which molds the heirs of the country's economic elite⁶⁹. The insignificant Pascal Houzelot, admittedly a member of the supervisory board of *Le Monde* and organizer of a dinner for Macron and the three future owners of the newspaper, had almost nothing to do with it, despite the long-accredited assertions to the contrary. This information, corroborated by a person close to the Arnault family, allows us to see that the happy beneficiaries of the media circus are not satisfied with merely hiding information, they also spread lies and hearsay to conceal their networks, they are in control of which deals and which conflicts of interest are revealed.

For what purpose, we wonder?

⁶⁹ “Between the Arnaults and the Macrons, it may be a beginning of a long friendship. It started at Franklin Private High School, in the 16th arrondissement of Paris, where Brigitte was the teacher of Frédéric and Jean.” Sylvie Breton, “Brigitte Macron was the French teacher of the children of Bernard Arnault's daughter!” *Tele-Loisirs*, 21 June 2017 [Online].

Chapter 34

It is obviously highly important to conceal that the selfless and generous Brigitte Macron, admired by the French people ever since Mimi Marchand became her best friend and took on the task of turning her into an exemplary first lady, Brigitte Macron, muse for the common good, was a teacher not in a comprehensive school, not in a difficult school, but in one of the most secluded and posh high schools in Paris, the kind of school which plays an integral role in the devastation affecting our society. This post was applied for and chosen deliberately, and the school benefited greatly from it, obtaining via Mr. Macron's interventions at his wife's request a class visit to the Pompidou center normally reserved for high schools in difficulty, or a conference at the school with some member of the Parisian elite. This reveals that Brigitte Macron used her job to connect her ambitious husband with the main fortune of France, and yet he would claim that on his arrival in Paris he was alone and poor as a church mouse.

Now we're starting to get dizzy. The young man with the piercing look who appeared from nowhere, pure as the driven snow, ready to sacrifice himself for France, presented to the people who would immediately exalt him even before he became minister or deputy secretary-general of the Élysée, had in fact as an ally and friend not only the oligarch Xavier Niel, but also France's first financial power, allied by now with the second.

In addition to Rothschild Bank and its networks, which he would access using those of the General Inspectorate of Finance (by dint of betrayals now a channel for diverting State resources rather than controlling them) in addition to the networks of the bourgeoisie of Amiens, in addition to the support of Jean-Pierre Jouyet (we will get to him later), with help of his wife, Mr. Macron had started an operation of accumulation of political capital, well worth the price, which would never stop getting more expensive.

It is not yet 2012. Remember that the press owned by these individuals will present him, years later, just by chance and with complete journalistic independence, as coming from nowhere, purely thanks to his genius and virtue, with no contacts or support from anyone, a gifted person endowed with exceptional qualities and a mystical aura, capable of enchanting the plebs solely with his intelligence and talent. And that in 2019, Mr. Macron is still using the same story, daring to repeat it in an attempt to convince anyone who crosses his path.

In 2019, after having failed to deceive us, not a single one of these media outlets has corrected, nor even acknowledged the mistake.

Chapter 35

This man, this Emmanuel Macron, a millionaire before the age of forty thanks to the networks provided by the republic; believed to be a paragon of democracy; Macron, seen as a champion of the most progressive democratic aspect of our system, republican meritocracy, was he nothing more than a corrupt social climber? It would appear we are beginning to think so. This young modern hero of a hollowed-out system can find no arguments in reality to justify all the glory that has been heaped upon him. Here we must mention the attempts during the presidential election campaign to present him as a philosopher⁷⁰, a Mozart of finance and a renowned pianist, efforts to justify the suggestion that we be fascinated by him, when really there is nothing to inspire such fascination.

It is difficult not to ask the following question, as the facts become overwhelming: this man, driven throughout his whole career by pure self-interest, was he no more than a puppet in the hands of those whose program he has applied to the letter, a program that serves their interests?

Is this why Mr. Macron appeared particularly feeble on all the questions concerning social issues, unable to propose a single idea? And his inability to admit his helplessness, is it not, *in fine*, a sign of naïvety and confusion, the ridiculous sincerity of somebody deceived by the reflection in the mirror that was being held before him, who would end up believing in all the praise that had been heaped upon him and his wife in order to better control and make use of him?

⁷⁰ “Perfect” philosopher, since he has never published anything, and therefore cannot be judged in this capacity.

Chapter 36

I want to emphasize one thing. Regarding the scandal caused by the discovery, still incomplete, of all these facts more than a year after the presidential election, we find that we are obliged to reconstruct the story ourselves, shining a light on dishonesty and sophistry, investigating the cliques and journalists who have continued to lie, using our personal experience to give a contrasting narrative. And why are we the ones to have to do it? Because the most explosive investigation into Macronism, *Mimi*, which contains, by the way, only a few pages on Macron, was published by one of Lagardère's companies. One of the journalists who carried out the investigation also happened to be an employee of Bernard Arnault, and so it would hardly be surprising if he was unable to reveal certain, nonetheless well-known, pieces of information.

We know that in this kind of system it is impossible to put independence at the top of one's list of career priorities: both book publishing and the press are collective adventures where a nonconformist will be immediately crushed, this is the argument we were given at *Le Monde* in response to our outrage about their acceptance of management's censorship. The few surviving independent structures are obliged to live in severe precarity, which they do with unbelievable courage, but they are not enough to make up for all the shortcomings of the system as a whole. We know the cost of it, in terms of delegitimization, pillorying, accusations of mythomania and other attempts to discredit anyone who breaks with the established system. The establishment seeks to reproduce and impose itself using all means necessary, to disqualify by all means necessary, in order to protect itself from being exposed. The most dangerous people are not those at the top: they are spread horizontally on the same level as those who step out of line to tell the truth, and so threaten to expose them.

Perhaps now is the time to make everyone tremble, before what's coming finishes us off completely.

Chapter 37

Because here comes the how. How to let the French people know that corruption costing them billions every year is hushed up for hidden motives?

How to shine a light on this accumulation of facts and events, already known to many people, but which has been diluted, taken out of context, made politically innocuous? How to present, without appearing to be partisan or a conspiracy theorist, the facts revealing that a president has allowed his “friends” to use and abuse the republic, purely for his own promotion? How to put all this information into perspective, as it becomes politically innocuous if it is incomplete and the whole story not exposed?

How to let people know?

Which media outlet would follow through on our intentions? And put the counter-arguments? *Liberation*, *L'Express* or BFMTV? That is to say, the media owned by Patrick Drahi, whose empire was strengthened with the help of Emmanuel Macron; Drahi, who repaid his debt by offering, during the presidential campaign, the services of his right-hand man and de facto media director, Bernard Mourad?⁷¹ This same Bernard Mourad was to “suggest” front pages about Mr. Macron at editorial board meetings, on the orders of Mr. Drahi, who, contrary to all ethical principles, participated in these meetings.

Could it be *L'Obs*, *Le Monde*, *Télérama*, *Mediapart* or the dozen other media in which Xavier Niel has invested, and which occasionally pluck up the courage and attempt to step out of line, all the while being very careful to avoid being examined themselves?

Could it be *Le Figaro*, owned by Olivier Dassault, where we would have to hope that one of his journalists would find the courage to attack the collusion between the media and billionaires, bearing in mind that this very collusion laid the foundations of the empire of Dassault's father, which he has inherited?

Let's consider *L'Humanité*, which has just suspended payments to its staff due to lack of funds, and is asking itself rhetorical questions about “the possibility today of having a press that is independent of the major financial groups or their affiliates”⁷², and then move on to consider State television or radio, bearing in mind that their directors are appointed by political power. Indirectly, of course, as in these circumstances, it is better to remain discreet, Mr. Macron was able to fast-track his classmate, Sibyle Veil, to Radio France, without any difficulty. Admittedly, in these organizations, the machine of domination can

⁷¹ As we have already mentioned, he would go on to be appointed director of the Bank of America France, which would be miraculously chosen by the authorities to manage the privatization of Aeroports de Paris. He had been appointed, before serving Emmanuel Macron, director of the press hub of Patrick Drahi's group, and therefore de facto manager of *L'Express* and *Liberation*, bought by Patrick Drahi at the suggestion of François Hollande, presented to the latter by Emmanuel Macron via Bernard Mourad, in order to obtain the “benevolent neutrality” of the State in his takeover of SFR.

⁷² “*L'Humanité* in default and 'under the protection of the Commercial Court'”, *Le Monde*, January 26, 2019 [Online].

be slow and the structures so large that it is still possible to find a place there, and then work on being accepted. But we have just mentioned how a pillar of the public television news directorate undermined the integrity of the whole group, in order to serve his friend the president, and in these news platforms even the most brilliant journalists, such as Élise Lucet, have never denounced such issues.

Where then?

Le Parisien, *Atlantico*, *Les Échos*, owned by Bernard Arnault? Or *Vanity Fair*, which publishes commissioned articles and which would go out of business immediately if Arnault stopped financing it through advertising?

Canal+ or C8, property of Vincent Bolloré to whom Macron entrusted a significant share of his public relations broadcasts while he was minister of the economy? Firstly through Havas, then Hanuna, the capitalistic pillar of the group, who was to become the best intermediary by regularly inviting him to speak over the telephone on his show. The same Vincent Bolloré who is known for his abusive treatment of journalists, the removal of his flagship program *Les Guignols de l'Info*, and the regular censorship of documentaries, including the one showing his son Yannick, the heavyweight of the family group, attending Emmanuel Macron's rallies?

Where then?

TF1 or TMC, belonging to Martin Bouygues, again compromised to the core and dependent on the orders of the State? It was one of his main collaborators, Didier Casas, who was sent to run Macron's campaign and ensure that the connections be maintained.

At *JDD*? Where Hervé Gattegno, the footsoldier of the powerful, passing from *L'Obs* to *Le Point*, from *Le Monde* to *Vanity Fair*, from RMC to BFMTV, has largely shown himself to be a zealous servant eager to please his owner. And here *he* is ... Arnaud Lagardère!

Where to go?

It is worrying, all of a sudden we are starting to feel blocked because we serve no interest or network that could someday come in useful for one of them. It is worrying because we know that on top of all this we can add corporate interests, as well as the fear of journalists of appearing conspiratorial and of not showing solidarity, the fear of being expelled.

What had seemed to be a pluralistic landscape, full of courageous and independent journalists who, through competing with one another, would fill in all the gaps in the narrative, turns out to be a putrid space full of fear and uncertainty when, out of the blue, someone tries to advance systematic and substantiated criticism, criticism of the system on which they depend.

Chapter 38

This is all the more worrying because, evidently, parts of the truth could be leaked by any number of people. In fact, this is one of the conditions for the survival of the system. As in all the best authoritarian countries, power struggles must be allowed to take place.

Thus the rival of Mr. Arnault, Mr. Pinault, published extracts from *Mimi* in *Le Point*. Sometime earlier Raphaëlle Bacqué published a flattering - one could almost call it loving - description of the book, and Mr. Pinault distanced himself a tiny bit from Mr. Macron. It is certainly slightly disappointing to read the news of the massive fiscal correction which had just been administered to his group Kering, revealing a fraud which according to *La Tribune* was to the tune of fifty-five billion euros in fifteen years⁷³, obliging the billionaire to clean up his image and show his teeth - an operation which *Le Monde Magazine* was happy to carry out.

In these circles it is impossible to expose the compromises, in which everyone is involved to some extent, without risking being exploited in turn.

Even at *Le Monde*, where Ariane Chemin had the luxury of being able to reveal the Benalla affair, it was a journalist with no experience who was designated to cover the subject. Virginie Malingre was sent to the Elysée, a suggestion made to the economics section by Dreyfus in order to neutralize the story.

Since there are hardly any daily newspapers left, apart from the excellent and not too ferocious *La Croix*, let's look at the magazines, for example *Le Point*, the weekly that is losing the least readers. But *Le Point*, owned by Artemis, a consortium belonging to François-Henri Pinault, and in a strict tradition inherited from Franz-Olivier Giesbert, only exists because of its capacity to compromise itself and sell itself to any defender of the status quo who makes the best offer. Sometimes, as in the case of the Clearstream affair, it would get involved in the petty power struggles between different members of the same system. So what? we may ask. Are they not the enemies of Bernard Arnault? Is there not some advantage to be had from playing this kind of game?

The feeling of solitude is growing.

Apart from France Inter, which has lost its edge after playing along with the élite for too long, censoring François Ruffin during the Yellow Jacket revolt⁷⁴, France Culture which has become almost fascinatingly conservative, and the near-dead investigation department of Radio France struggling under permanent budget constraints, there are many other radio

⁷³ Daniel Vigneron, "Tax evasion, the Kering group and the evolution of legislation" *La Tribune*, December 13, 2018 [Online].

⁷⁴ François Ruffin, "# BDR44: a bomb of anger and hope, 'I am not a hero' and my big debate", *Canal Fi*, February 13, 2019 [Online].

stations that would give the necessary space to these questions, enough space not just for a scoop, but rather to reduce and neutralize the influence of corruption through a long process of raising awareness. We know the problems faced by the public service - that it is not well thought of to criticize the administration too much, that the only program which analyzes the media, *Instant M*, refuses any systematic questioning of the milieu to which it belongs, so maybe Europe 1?

Lagardère again!

RMC? Alain Weill, in other words, for the last few years, Patrick Drahi. Added to which Alain Weill has, through his sister Catherine Grenier-Weill, become a member of Macron's inner circle. Xavier Niel was to make him a member of the board of directors of his company, generously support the partnership RMC-BFM, and consider him one of his “friends” that like to be made use of.

Have we ever heard, be it on television, on the radio, in magazines or newspapers, a methodical criticism of the individuals presented here?

Should we try RTL, which of course belongs to the same group as Capital (owner of M6), the director of which, Nicolas de Tavernost, specifically said that he had censured an investigation into Free when Delphine Arnault was a member of his supervisory board?⁷⁵

The new media? Those embodiments of independence and modernity like *Brut* or *The Huffington Post* who know how to speak to the youth and would have every interest in explaining the kinds of power games their elders have put into place? Guess who is the principal financier. Well done. Xavier Niel, who for the moment has not found sufficient reason to meddle too much, but who has placed his ally into *The Huffington Post* in order to control it.

Right then.

We should try anyway because as we have already explained, these things are not systematic, there always weaknesses and breaches emerging, brave and courageous people coming out of the woodwork before being destroyed, maybe there is room for maneuver. But at what price? At the risk of making how many enemies?

And with what effect, when any risky story disappears immediately, swallowed up in the mass of information produced daily that blinds everyone to their real destinies?

Yes, let's try, as we did, and then admit that it couldn't be done. Even *Marianne*, newly integrated into the system, went back on its promise to publish.

⁷⁵ Pauline Moullet, “An investigation by Capital into Free was censored by M6”, *Slate*, September 24, 2012 [Online].

A book then! We who are so well connected, let's do it that way. Fayard, the brilliant editor of one of my books? But Fayard has been bought out by Hachette, meaning Arnaud Lagardère, and is *effectively* run by the very same Ramzy Khiroun who intervened to protect Mimi Marchand at *Paris Match* and whose second in command is the wife of a “great friend” of the president, Bernard Mourad!

Grasset? It seems on the surface to be different, but it's the same owner, the same hierarchy, and we understand now why the book attributed activities to Mimi Marchand that were actually being carried out by Mr. Khiroun...

We say this in passing, but we should take the measure of what this lack of integrity means.

Stock, and so many others, same owner; and one can imagine the huge upheavals that would be necessary for them to take Macronism head-on, along with its backers.

Gallimard? They have just censored Annie Le Brun, one of their long-standing authors, because she had criticized LVMH in her last book about fashion. Bernard Arnaud's recent acquisition of shares in the publishing house, and the use of its famous “White collection” to promote Vuitton bags doubtless had nothing to do with this.

Annie Lebrun was able to move to Stock with a thirty-year career behind her, but the next time Lagardère was not her subject.

Let's take a minute, to avoid laughing cathartically or going limp, we try telling ourselves there is always...but no. Surely it can't be *that* bad? As with most of our media, for a long time, Gallimard was independent, this kind of concentration is completely new.

So let's go on. Flammarion? Bought out by Gallimard! Actes Sud, meaning Françoise Nyssen?

So we could laugh, but it would be a forced laugh, in fact it's getting less and less funny. Wait, you must be exaggerating, there are so many others! You're right. Robert Laffont? La Découverte?

The nearly fifty other publishers owned by the Edisis press group? You mean to say the group that just got bought by...Vincent Bolloré?

But there are lots of other independent publishers. Wait, wait, Le Seuil, whose new CEO comes from La Découverte? But Le Seuil now belongs to Media Participations, the group of the president of the Syndicat National de l'Edition, where groups are important. Le Seuil was forced by its new owner to reduce its workforce, and it would be amusing to see the reaction of Hugues Jallon if his editors were to show any enthusiasm for our project. So, yes, somewhere else then, but we are starting to feel suffocated. Because any independent publisher willing to take us on would have to stand up to legal, economic and media

pressure before they even began to diffuse, distribute and publicize! And who owns the means of diffusion? Who owns the media where the publicity is supposed to happen?

Chapter 39

Let's stop thinking about all that for now, and continue with our story.

We were about to discover that things did not end there. Raphaëlle Bacqué revealed that Alexandre Benalla was the unofficial path into the Elysée for Michèle Marchand. In addition, she was in charge of Benalla's public image after he was shown hitting and arresting citizens in the street, dressed as a policeman. But the way in which this information was revealed made it difficult to understand what it really meant.

Those who do understand, please be patient. Benalla? The same Alexandre Benalla who, in addition to hitting members of the public during his spare time, had attempted to mount a Pretorian guard at the Elysée, recruiting people to carry out any necessary dirty work, without answering to any higher command, be it in the military or the police?⁷⁶ Yes, the very same.

Stop! You say. You are jumping from one subject to another. Wait a moment, all will become clear.

Let me explain. Using the reserve police force, Alexandre Benalla was told to bring civilians into the security service of the Elysée. He was in charge of the police who worked there, the place where the careers of all the civil servants in the country are made or broken. It is a frightening thought: if things had gone according to plan, a guard with only a few weeks' training and no particular qualifications would have been recruited into the heart of the State, on a purely political decision, not subject to any hierarchy, at the service of one man, and given de facto authority over all of the security forces of the republic.

Let's say this again. Mr. Benalla was, with a certain Ludovic Chaker, the channel between Mme. Marchand and the Elysée. And we see why he would have been ordered to hand over to Mr. Emelien, special advisor and all-powerful member of Emmanuel Macron's inner circle, videos of the demonstration on May 1, 2018, that were stolen from the Paris prefecture in order to be circulated on social networks. Mr. Benalla was to be seen hitting and arresting citizens, deliberately feeding a climate of fear and violence in the country. This is not quite how the events were described, as to do so could have created anxiety. That is the real scandal in the Benalla affair, and not what has actually been reported, i.e. the petty scams and passport stories that are overwhelming insignificant.

And if this interests us, it is because it is indeed linked to our story. If Mr. Macron was hoping to be able to bring handpicked individuals into his personal police force in order to

⁷⁶ This conjuring trick was made possible by an operational reserve police force from which staff were diverted into the Elysée. All this behind the scenes, to “defend” Emmanuel Macron and free him from any remaining opposing powers.

place them in a position of authority over the national security forces, how would he have done it?

In exactly this manner.

And why would he have done so?

Only those who laughed at the strange parallels, written about elsewhere, between the particular regimentality of Macronist politics and the neo-fascist leanings of Macronist power, will fail to understand why the first would almost inevitably lead to the second.

Here we are getting to the other facette of Mr. Macron's presidency. Finally, we are joining up all the threads.

Mr. Macron had done a very good job of creating his notoriety. But he still needed to construct his legitimacy and impose himself upon the State that he had pillaged but never served.

He had to find the means and the allies that would enable him to act with authority. The beast is not easily tamed, and if Macron had been chosen, it was indeed because he was seen to have the traits necessary for getting things done.

But this was not enough. He needed at the same time to be introduced to the public, to polish his image, gather people around him, and be sure that once he was in power he would have the weapons he needed.

The person who made it possible not only for him to accede to power, but to consolidate it, not only to charm the nation, but to control the State, was the star-struck Jean-Pierre Jouyet, who was probably unaware of the interests he was serving at the time.

And how did this happen? Through a certain Ludovic Chaker, a long-standing but invisible acolyte of Alexandre Benalla, who also had the job of feeding information to the press from the Elysée.

Ludovic Chaker is not just anybody. He organized Benalla's recruitment into En Marche, of which he was the first general secretary before being placed at the heart of the anti-terrorism section at the Elysée. His mission was to gain authority as his colleague had done, but in his case over the armed forces.

With this aim Ludovic Chaker was introduced into the heart of the State, and benefitted from the unique privilege of not answering to any military hierarchy. He was the only person in this position in the president's military cabinet. Why? You have probably worked it out.

Placed there, using Alexandre Benalla to communicate with Mimi Marchand when necessary, he became the doorway into the military⁷⁷ for Ismael Emelien, Emmanuel Macron's closest advisor (in charge of his correspondence and his private affairs), and he was able to organize all of this without any outside help.

So Chaker, with access to State secrets and the trust of his fellow student from Sciences Po, was able to transmit information likely to help Mr. Emelien in his mission of getting Mr. Macron's dirty work done, without ever being implicated.

What sort of maneuver do we mean? Imagine, for example, discretely feeding information to the press from the heart of the State, through an anonymous internet account, and then pointing out that information to a journalist friend of a friend who can be counted on to repeat it. There are enough intermediaries for the special advisor never to be implicated. Through his access to the police and the military via people answering to no authority, he was able to protect the source of his orders.

It is not by chance then that we find Mr. Benalla where he is on May 1. Through a militant member of La France Insoumise who had filmed the scene, in which a senior official was to recognize a certain Benalla, the story came out. A story which revealed that Mr. Macron was putting into place at the Elysée, through his special advisor, a system for feeding the various social networks, which in turn supplied him with the information necessary to protect himself or discredit his adversaries.

In a way, it is by accident that *Le Monde* revealed this plan. It reported that Mr. Benalla had passed video surveillance images of the 2018 Mayday demonstration to Mr. Emelien, who had probably gone on to diffuse them through anonymous social media accounts. All this was reported with no explanation, for fear that the denials of the people involved would not be enough, legally, to cover up what the evidence was clearly showing. This time, the information came from the police, not the military hierarchy. It had been Mr. Benalla's job, not Mr. Chaker's, which was not always the case.

Mr. Chaker has not been elected and was not even an official. His name was not on any list of employees before the Benalla affair made him visible to everyone. The reason for this was to create an extra interface in order to protect and keep clean Mr. Emelien and his hierarchy. As soon as the story came out, so did the rumors that several people wanted Mr. Emelien to resign, in this way it would not look as though he was being brutally dropped due to the revelations, which would make things even worse for his master.

Why were these individuals made use of? Like many people far from their milieu and with no particular abilities, Mr. Chaker, we were told by people close to him, was extremely loyal and was always arduously running around.

⁷⁷ Unique in the Fifth Republic: a civilian had never before been integrated into the military cabinet of the president.

Men like this are always of use to the powerful. Having served only a few years at the DGSE before being thrown out, he held his position purely thanks to the good graces of, and services rendered to, his master.

The way in which he got the job tells us even more about the game he was trying to play. His promotion to a position close to Emmanuel Macron just before the presidential campaign, and then at the Elysée, reveals the deep entanglement of the candidate with another layer of the country's oligarchy, which will be the last part of our investigation: the layer which makes sure that the interests of the powerful will always be transmitted to the heart of the State, whoever wins the election. It shows the extent of the influences which weigh on the Macron presidency, the endogamy of our elite, but also the indigence of the system of co-option, which led to the first phase of his ascension, before his media launch and subsequent election.

For if we have shown how Mr. Macron was projected into the public arena by a few powerful men, creating an enormous imbalance between his notoriety and any genuine interest shown in him, we now need to explain how he was co-opted in the beginning, and went on to be consecrated.

Chapter 40

In order to become president of the republic it is not enough to surround oneself with large fortunes looking for legitimate power - something that already requires certain qualities such as an immaculate public profile and some ability to appear seductive and efficient, innocent and committed - it is also necessary, after being co-opted, to surround oneself with a loyal army.

These loyal acolytes must be capable of concretizing the projects of the powerful; their job is basically to provide a sufficient appearance of legitimacy to assure the loyalty of the State apparatus so that it can be put to use, without anyone noticing, by the power behind the throne. They must be cynical and selfish enough to feed the power machine without ever betraying or denouncing it. This explains the frequent signs of affection shown by Mr. Macron to Mr. Benalla after his departure.

These private agents in the service of the president must be well-paid and sufficiently protected so that they never need doubt the reasons for the political choices being made, or the pillages carried out, their own interests being the only things that matter. They complete the machinery we have already described around Séjourné and Gabriel Attal, those political hussars who, in theory, are the intermediaries with the rest of society.

Mr. Macron was particularly young when he launched his presidential campaign, and his career path did not allow him to build up and call upon such loyalty; this explains why he appealed to borrowed baronetcies, of which Mr. Collomb's was the most important, a precarious plan which could only fail once they had extracted everything they needed from Paris. Macron was obliged to build up his assets artificially, which caused him to make a few mistakes, like the hiring of Mr. Benalla by Mr. Chaker, himself recruited by Mr. Emelien.

Driven by third party interests, he had to draw from another layer of the oligarchy, the one which had initially co-opted him to defend its interests.

The plan was in place all around Mr. Macron. Ludovic Chaker was the invisible point of contact of a system headed by Jean-Pierre Jouyet, whose power over the techno-structure was the second teat of Macronism, and whose fragility shows to what extent Macron's power was flimsy.

He was not ready.

Noticed and recruited by Richard Descoings at Sciences Po, a public institution inscribed in a power structure that is partly described in a book by Raphaëlle Bacqué⁷⁸, Chaker was made responsible for the Asia department there. He met a certain Edith Chabre, executive

⁷⁸ Raphaëlle Bacqué, *Richie*, Grasset, 2015

director of the law department at the time, who was visibly close to Brigitte Taittinger-Jouyet, heiress of one of the most important industrial families in France, used by Sciences Po to bring money into the school coffers through fancy dinners or horse racing events with the *Petit Paris*. Her husband, Jean-Pierre Jouyet, was the powerful director of the Treasury, who became the very powerful director of the finance inspectorate, then the all-powerful general-secretary of the Elysée. He was also a member of the board of directors at Sciences Po and, having shown himself to be very insistent in recruiting his wife there, he mobilized his networks to support a certain Emmanuel Macron, who at the time he saw as a pillar of the regime of his best friend, François Hollande.

Chapter 41

Mr. Jouyet met Mr. Macron as he was leaving the Ecole Nationale d'Administration [École Nationale d'Administration is a French *grande école*, created in 1945 to train senior leaders of the French government, Ed.]. The latter had been placed in the same overall section as Mr. Jouyet, a section that the latter would in fact find himself in charge of the following year. Intrigued by such a clearly ambitious young man, Mr. Jouyet took him under his wing and made him a high-ranking official, close to the director of the all-powerful inspectorate of finance.

Mr. Jouyet, who until then had described himself as a Socialist and the best friend of François Hollande⁷⁹, accepted shortly afterward the nomination as secretary of state for European affairs alongside Nicolas Sarkozy, before becoming secretary-general of the Elysée under François Hollande.

This has perhaps already been said, but if, at the time, Emmanuel Macron was offered a place in the Cabinet of the then prime minister, François Fillon, it is through the intermediary of the same person - Jean-Pierre Jouyet - who will go on to bring him into the Elysée under François Hollande, after having been presented to Jacques Attali⁸⁰.

While the French people are fed with stories of irreconcilable differences between individuals or parties, here we see the actual respect these people have for political differences, between which the people believe they are making a choice when they turn out to vote.

In Paris, the democratic principle becomes very unimportant when it comes to helping friends out and boosting their careers.

And so we begin to understand where the “at the same time” of Macron comes from.

Because it was indeed Mr. Jouyet who, after having “betrayed” his friend of thirty years, François Holland, who had passed him his job at the inspectorate of finances, was to put into place a European “mini-treaty” under Nicolas Sarkozy, which was adopted by parliament although the 2005 referendum had rejected the idea just two years earlier,

⁷⁹ He inherited his job at the Inspection des Finances from Mr. Hollande, who made room in order to give him a leg up, and soon after they would meet up again.

⁸⁰ This affair is even more significant if we add the name of Antoine Gosset-Grainville, couch potato turned lawyer who was to receive Mr. Macron when the latter left the ministry of the economy. Far from wanting to create a “start-up in education”, the former, on the contrary, was ready to try his hand as an advisor to big multinational companies, in order to help them win their cases against the State, obtain privatization mandates, etc. It is this man who will formally propose the nomination of Mr. Macron to Matignon, which Mr. Macron will repay by proposing him the directorship of the Caisse des Dépôts. Mr. Gosset-Grainville will turn him down in order to keep his profits, which were inversely proportionate to his respect for the common good.

before returning to the service of Mr. Holland when the latter was elected, and promoting Mr. Macron into Bercy.

Yes, this is the origin of the “at the same time”, proposed as a political innovation, but in reality just a pretext for a merger of previously fragmented elites. This condensation of interest in the service of galloping endogamy was presented as a sign of progressivism and modernity.

The most naïve journalists - or the most compromised and comfortably installed in the system - did not see any contradiction, and merely transcribed what the power told them.

However, we must assess the scale of the revolution proposed by Mr. Macron, at a time when the system was on the verge of collapse. Inspired by the initiative of his mentor, Jean-Pierre Jouyet, he resolved to guarantee, in exchange for subservience to him, an ongoing supply of privileges and positions, where previously the elites were obliged to wage regular wars for the chance to become enslaved to someone or other every five to seven years.

This cut out the costs of opportunist allegiances that were previously unavoidable. Why are we talking about all this? Because the alternation of power had an effect: it allowed democracy to breathe, by supplying the press with information that the different factions were collecting on each other. And we suddenly understand how our democracy was stifled during the long months that followed the election of Mr. Macron, and the impossibility of saying anything about it. Sucked into the strategy of confrontation staged by Mr. Macron and the far right, all the traditional elites had been integrated into a single power which, from then on, made sure nothing was to leak out.

Now let us take in just how much praise was heaped on Emmanuel Macron from this fascinated class, in a procedure initiated by Mr. Sarkozy, who knew exactly what he had to compensate for in order to be accepted by the elites that despised him.

But we are going too fast, at the time that the above events are taking place, Mr. Jouyet makes do with introducing Mr. Macron to his family and his wife, and thereby to one of the greatest financial-republican dynasties of the century.

He also presents him to the intelligentsia of Sciences Po, where Mr. Descoings is the director. Sciences Po, where Mr. Macron is offered, like any graduate of the best schools, a post to teach some vague course. He was to choose general culture, to get a foothold before being offered, by Laurent Bigorgne, the direction of the module, to supplement his salaries and start putting his pawns into place there.

Mr. Jouyet, structural upholder of the thinking inherent in the system (the term “ideology” would be too grand for him) - maintaining economic inequality in France while advancing the affairs of his adopted family - was the first to initiate the strategy of crushing democratic

processes which, under Sarkozy, had the slogan of “openness” and, under Macron, “at the same time”.

Before appointing Mr. Macron to Bercy, Mr. Jouyet introduces him to a certain Jacques Attali, who in turn introduces him to François Holland. Mr. Attali, accompanied by Mr. Minc, uses Mr. Macron to impose his ideas under the presidency of François Hollande, through Mr. Macron’s Homeric struggles with, among others, the European advisor, to get Mr. Hollande to concede.

Emmanuel Macron, as a representative of the finance inspectorate, is appointed rapporteur of the Attali Commission thanks to the same Mr. Jouyet, in order to be introduced to the lesser economic and financial elite - the one in the second row that depends on or submits with great regularity to the aforementioned fortunes. Unhappy with this address book, Mr. Macron gets a job at Rothschild’s to carry out, with the necessary support gathered during his work with Mr. Attali, a merger and acquisition transaction worth nine billion euros.

So this is Mr. Jouyet, whose wife Brigitte, in addition to her excellent skills as a matchmaker and heiress, also had a post at Sciences Po alongside a certain Edith Chabre, recruited and appointed director of the law school by Richard Descoings. Edith Chabre, coincidentally, happens to be the wife of Édouard Philippe.

Deep breath.

Exhale.

Because Édouard Philippe, who was then deputy and future successor to the mayor of Le Havre, was to award subsidies to finance the creation and operation of a branch of Sciences Po in Le Havre⁸¹ after having been its main initiator⁸², and it was not clear whether this was a service to Richard Descoings and his wife Nadia Marik, who had recruited his wife - Edith Chabre - or vice versa, or if all this was just a matter of happenstance. Later he was to inaugurate a monument in honor of Richard Descoings, to which inauguration I was invited after almost being absorbed by someone who was to become one of the pillars of Macronism.

Meanwhile, Nadia Marik, who had preceded Brigitte Taittinger-Jouyet as director of development at Sciences Po, had in fact become a widow of the man who was the lover of Guillaume Pepy⁸³, head of SNCF, and who had recruited me to Sciences Po. She was also

⁸¹ The simple refurbishment of the premises cost eleven million euros, of which six million was contributed by the region, three and a half million by the town's community, one and a half million by the local council.

⁸² Richard Descoings is behind the implementation of the Sciences Po offshoot in Le Havre. Solicited by Édouard Philippe, the director was not immediately convinced of the value of such an institution: “I knew that a first cycle Europe-Asia at Sciences Po had to be created. With my arguments I went to see Richard Descoings, it was in 2005. At first, he was dubious but he came, met different local agents, realized what this city was about. It was he who then made this project possible” recalls the mayor of Le Havre. Solène Bertrand, “Le Havre greets Richard Descoings, a controversial figure”, *Actu.fr*, January 31, 2013 [Online].

⁸³ Marie-Laure Delorme, “The Last Secrets of Richard Descoings”, *Le Journal du Dimanche*, June 20, 2017 [Online].

a secondary oligarchic relay and the right-wing insurance policy of the love of her life, Richard Descoings, who relied on Pepy to feed his left-wing networks. All of them were very close to Jean-Pierre Jouyet and were kingmakers in the great world of Laurent Bigorgne, who was appointed president of the Montaigne Institute thanks to the interpersonal skills of Richard Descoings, who had considered Mr. Bigorgne as his possible successor.

The first domicile of En Marche would be Bigorgne's home; Ludovic Chaker would be the first secretary-general. Laurent Bigorgne was responsible for connecting the CAC 40 with Macronism and for putting the Montaigne Institute, where Richard Descoings had fast-tracked him, at the service of Mr. Macron. This theoretically neutral institute was in fact created to flood the public space with neo-liberal analysis, supporting the business of the oligarchs who finance it. The close links with Sciences Po provided legitimacy, maintained by Olivier Duhamel's social skills, which served as the bridgehead to Henri de Castries in order to support Fillon, before the latter passed the baton to Macron, taking away a share of CAC 40 with him.

Laurent Bigorgne is also the vice-president of the association Teach for France, created by the sister of Alain Weill and taken up by Nadia Marik after the death of her husband. Teach for France was preparing the country's future education policies by privatizing the management of teacher replacements in Seine-Saint-Denis. Its board of directors included Maurice Lévy, CEO of Publicis, Emmanuelle Wargon, then lobbying director at Danone, Olivier Duhamel, President of FNSP, and Patricia Barbizet, CEO of Artemis, the holding company of François-Henri Pinault.

We are beginning to understand why *Le Point* would be reluctant to publish our revelations.

Laurent Bigorgne, allied to Nadia Marik, right-winger enthroned in the elite by Richard Descoings, at one time a possible successor of Richard Descoings, before the latter's death which forced the appointment of Frédéric Mion as the head of Sciences Po, in order to sweep things under the rug. Frédéric Mion himself was close to Richard Descoings and godfather to the children of Édouard Philippe and Edith Chabre.

Laurent Bigorgne was the first to support Mr. Macron when he had no troops. He was close to Maurice Lévy, CEO of Publicis, and presented as an advisor to Emmanuel Macron during his time as minister⁸⁴, alongside Patricia Barbizet, the most powerful woman in France and a friend of Brigitte Taittinger-Jouyet. He was also close to Emmanuelle Wargon, who had been appointed secretary of State under Édouard Philippe after using her address book at Danone, introduced to Edith Chabre by Nadia Marik, and to Edouard Philippe by Edith Chabre.

⁸⁴ Marc Baudriller, "How Macron became a media phenomenon", *Challenges*, August 31, 2016 [Online].

Édouard Philippe, unknown to the battalion, having no glorious achievements to speak of since gaining admittance to the ENA, having come close to Juppé after serving at Areva, being close to Jouyet through his networks, became a deputy and mayor by succession. It is hard to tell whether his wife was recruited there to serve her husband or to serve his recruiters. He would then be introduced to Emmanuel Macron and become prime minister, not because of any talent or a prior position on the national scale, but through endogamous ties and the deep nepotism allying these many individuals, who used all their public or semi-public means to campaign for Mr. Macron, shamelessly violating all the electoral rules and regulations supposed to ensure equality among candidates.

Deep breath.

Exhale.

For when Édouard Philippe became prime minister, although completely unknown to the general public the day before, he would become overnight the subject of hollow but laudatory articles in the newspapers and on the radio and television networks mentioned above, legitimizing and whitewashing a career that had nothing to do with either representation or democracy.

By blind conformity rather than by conspiracy, for months to follow, everyone was to excessively praise his talents, trying to justify in retrospect what no honest person could admit was true.

Journalists integrated into the system cannot stand exposing their ignorance, and prefer, although doubtful, to glorify their subjects and thus ensure that they will never be in trouble.

Jean-Pierre Jouyet, who was instrumental in the appointment of Emmanuel Macron to Bercy, after his election was to be appointed to one of the most prestigious French embassies, in London, to thank him and to remove him from the scene.

To enthrone all of them, to interconnect all this beautiful world, Sciences Po had been used all this time not only to employ these individuals but also to implement more widely a system of nepotism, which was on a level with that of the financial oligarchies, a system that would be offered to Mr. Macron. At the same time, one of his multiple offshoots, Teach For France, designed to insert these individuals into the heart of the country's education policymaking, discovers a certain Jean-Michel Blanquer, former servant of Nicolas Sarkozy, whom Édouard Philippe appointed minister of education after Richard Descoings had considered appointing him chief of staff when he himself was offered a post as minister. The illustrious newcomer with absolutely no political base would thus take the place of the no-less illustrious Laurent Bigorgne.

In the meantime Olivier Duhamel, now a lawyer at the Veil law firm, which would defend the interests of Nadia Marik, with the latter and some of the technocrats of Sciences Po, was doing the rounds of Parisian dinner parties, supported by Laurent Bigorgne, to further their interests and build the campaign of the new darling of the elite, who was holding fundraising dinners from New York to Algiers via Beirut, the entry to which would cost up to fifteen thousand euros per head, the cost of the honor of getting close him.

These are the people who are sponsoring Ludovic Chaker, recruited to Sciences Po but leaving there after the death of Richard Descoings; Chaker, who in turn recruits Alexandre Benalla and installs his networks of corruption at the heart of an enslaved power, while their peers, from the secretary general at Sciences Po to François-Antoine Mariani, see themselves appointed, after the victory of their protégé, to prestigious positions within the State, sometimes by special dispensation.

Let's move on.

Have you heard of any of these names before? Yet they are the pillars of the oligarchic movements of our country. Have you read a single investigative article about their activities? Were you surprised by their successive appointments to the government or elsewhere?

Here, we hope, things are starting to become clear.

Chapter 42

Let's ask an annoying question, one that should annoy any consumer of the “mainstream media” which claim to expose the truth: was Édouard Philippe (whose wife, we may remember, was conveniently recruited at Sciences Po using public funds) first introduced to Mr. Macron between the two ballots of the presidential election, as we have been blithely and repeatedly told?

Did he land the job of prime minister purely on merit, due to his hastily invented political importance, as everyone has been saying over and over again?

Isn't it rather his adroitness and his ability to serve and be served, his participation in a decades-old festering endogamy that makes it possible to gain importance through inertia, by simply advancing through the republican system? Thus he was generously paid to join Areva when he was already a State councilor, harnessing his networks in the service of the company, a company that was at the time mired in the Uramin secret payments scandal which had to be covered up by any means necessary in order to save the compromised soldier⁸⁵.

Am I deviating from the subject? Not at all.

The Uramin scandal destroyed three thousand jobs and two and a half billion euros disappeared from the State treasury, sent to unknown destinations. The ramifications were to stretch all the way to the Elysée. Ten years later, still, nothing has been investigated.

Let's laugh.

Because in this world, where you can drift from the left to the right, through the center, indifferent to the desires of the voting public, appearing to believe in the illusion of division in order to better control society... it is a joke to use the word democracy.

So let's laugh, as they do.

A thousand invisible networks have quietly supported Mr. Macron. Everyone involved was happily complicit and used State resources to achieve their goal. Oh, and we are no longer talking about the secret fundraisers organized by Rothschild in the pavement cafés of the Champs-Élysées.

⁸⁵ See on this subject my long investigation in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, November 2016, “The strange business of Areva in Africa”. [https://www.academia.edu/29665602/BAKOUMA - Le Monde Diplomatique Long version - FR EN - unedited](https://www.academia.edu/29665602/BAKOUMA_-_Le_Monde_Diplomatique_Long_version_-_FR_EN_-_unedited)

This is simply to show how one public institution, among many others, was instrumentalized to serve private interests.

Chapter 43

In those circles where everyone belongs to the same *body* — what an apt expression — the salaries, directly provided by the State (or when it's no longer possible, by State looting via revolving doors), are comfortable and steady.

They provide a safety net in the event of election failure. Up to six or seven figures. And when they cannot evolve they are supplemented by the businesses of the spouses. The revolving door between the public and the private sector is a guarantee — for the price of a few minor compromises — of securing a privileged position.

They have thus procured themselves a cozy situation at all times with no need to show any substance or commitment. At Sciences Po, they will have lunch at the administration's restaurant, here again waited on by butlers in livery, with a view on the gardens and the students when the aim is to make an impression.

When I was eighteen, someone tried to initiate me. I was twenty when they asked me to deceive for the first time: Richard Descoings suggested I take part in the high school commission, which would eventually become a path for him into the ministry of education, I pulled back abruptly, never to return.

Others did not make this choice.

And for those others, it is not a problem that this system has worn out the authority of public life, emptying it of all meaning.

The Balladurian period was the most violent in this respect, inaugurating a predation that exhausted the resources of the State so much that fewer and fewer senior officials have been able to establish themselves in good positions, accelerating a seemingly endless transferring of resources.

Certain predators, like Jean-Pierre Jouyet, held the house together before handing the keys to Mr. Macron.

This is how trust is created in these places: through mutual compromises until no one dares to disassociate themselves for fear of being attacked in turn. It is not even Machiavellian: the players become accustomed to secret alcoves, where it is understood that the betrayal of one would expose the compromises of another. Like dominoes, this would cause the intolerable fall of all those who exist only because of these compromises, without which they are nothing. So, everyone keeps quiet and trades bodies, as in the most primitive tribes.

In such circumstances how can we think about democratic principles, or even of the idea of politics, when the State appears above all as a mere tool for reproducing legacies and positions, stabilizing the nation and authorizing its exploitation?

When they stand and look at each other, co-opting and shaping each other over the years to ensure the preservation of a monopoly over public resources, they avoid thinking.

From this vantage point, Mr. Macron seemed an ideal candidate, capable of regenerating a system on the verge of collapse. To serve and at the same time to serve himself, prolonging the system while giving credibility to a State apparatus that he was preparing to hack again and again. To devitalize. To loot.

There, elected but powerless, was a being that had the appearance of being new, with an authority now known to be corrupt, finding himself obliged to appoint a prime minister chosen from an ever more endogamous circle

Chapter 44

So, this story all begins with Ludovic Chaker who had been tapped to head the Asia Pacific Center at Sciences Po the very same year that Philippe became mayor of the city of Le Havre. Chaker was enthroned as the first secretary general of Macron's party at the home of Laurent Bigorgne who would become the former successor of Richard Descoings. It was this same Laurent Bigorgne who, while at Sciences Po and saddled with responsibilities, saw fit to hire the wife of Édouard Philippe without any mention of how or why.

Chaker, instructed to pull together his 'praetorian guard' after having been recruited by Descoings, thus created the bridge between Descoings' and Emilien's buddies together with Bigorgne's circle of friends, of which Philippe was one. Thus, Ludovic Chaker, the alter ego of Alexandre Benalla, acceded to the highest post in government and was responsible for *protecting* the privacy of all these individuals and for *attacking* the privacy of anyone who would threaten them¹, including me.

In this ambiguous role, Ludovic Chaker, leads us to the structural intersection of the whole affair: Ismaël Emelien, Macron's very discreet 'special advisor' who at one point worked at Havas SA [a French multinational advertising and public relations company, headquartered in Paris, France—Ed.] where he met his wife. Subsequently this very same company was offered a deal of more than 300,000 euros by the Minister of the Economy, *our* Minister of the Economy without so much as an RFP (Request for Proposal) to promote the unofficial launch of Macron's political campaign in Las Vegas. The event's sole objective was to engage the press and to introduce the future president. The operation was concocted out of nothing thanks to a ruse orchestrated by Business France, the government agency whose hallmark was just this type of excess. And who was at the helm? None other than Muriel Pénicaud².

No one knows this but Emelien met Macron for the first time as he was preparing for a trip with Laurent Fabius to Latin America organized by the Jean Jaurès Foundation. At first Macron was cozying up to Fabius; then, hesitating to get involved with Fillon, finally introduced himself to Hollande on the recommendation of Jouyet. Contrary to popular belief, this first meeting between Emelien and Macron did not take place in Chile. At the time the Jean Jaurès Foundation was headed by one Gilles Finchelstein, research director at Havas, in which Vincent Bolloré was a principle shareholder. Havas was the recipient of ministerial contracts at first from their former employee, Ismaël Emelien, but later through the intervention of Muriel Pénicaud who made it a point to let her secretary know that these dealings were to remain confidential. All in the name of the government.

And so, it goes...

1 Heightened sense of privacy created by the sensibilities of bourgeois privilege, exercising this sacred role as it might serve the powers-that-be, threatening those who would challenge it, fueling these powers and, indirectly, inciting the press to cover up their intrigues and corruptions.

2 Muriel Pénicaud, as a reminder, was rewarded with the position of Minister of Labor for Emmanuel Macron, without having any credentials.

Chapter 45

In these ecospheres, the notion of competence is considered to be secondary. All too often we see just how conditioned people are by networks of allegiance and counter-allegiance which drain them of any semblance of independence.

Edith Chabre, the wife of Edouard Philippe, attended a little-known, private law school before graduating from Sciences Po at Lille, but there she was, director of the all-powerful Sciences Po law school just two years after her husband approved large grants for the construction of its campus at Le Havre.

Nadia Marik was a magistrate of the administrative court [court of first instance in the administrative court system which has jurisdiction over lawsuits involving the French government, local authorities or any authority ruled by public law. Ed.]. Yet, there she was, adjunct director of Sciences Po after having been recruited by her future consort, Richard Descoings, who had supervised her oral exam at the ENA. After that she headed up Teach for France with the help of all the big shots of Paris. And together with Laurent Bigorgne, parlayed this position into the meeting ground for everything that the Macronist machine would come to defend.

Ludovic Chaker rose through the ranks as an interloper. Like Alexandre Benalla, he appeared out of nowhere in the hallowed halls of government charged with the supervision and training of the government's secret services.

Catherine Gassier-Weill had a quiet career as a research assistant before taking the lead role at Teach for France.

As for Emmanuelle Wargon, it would be absurd, of course, to think that her arrival in government would have had anything to do with her close friendship with Nadia Marik and the Philippe couple, Laurent Bigorgne or Brigitte Taittinger. For some reason, however, her recent nomination caused a genuine stir, so much so that the arrival of yet another lobbyist without any political or governmental background became a real cause for concern. And finally, there is all the networking that occurs under the radar. The nomination of Jean-Pierre Jouyet's daughter-in-law as deputy director of a prestigious Paris museum at the tender age of twenty-five caused as little noise as when the son of Le Drian, Socialist minister turned Macronist by means that should be brought to light one day, was appointed to a key position at the important Paris bank Caisse des Dépôts. At under thirty years of age, these accomplishments are something of a French record across the board.

At the Caisse des Dépôts, a public bank managing the money and pensions of retirees, wards of the state and modest, family savers of all sorts, the baton of privilege has been passed from generation to generation.

Here talent would appear to propagate through transmutation. Like everything else in Macron's world, recruitments, loves and alliances operate according to the criteria of money and power, and are made and unmade under the benevolent eye of the oligarchs.

Chapter 46

Thus, we have arrived at the end of our journey. The people we have been discussing, the go-betweens, their intrigues and their origins, have been concealed or masked, made to look presentable by a press who in large part have become complicit and impotent, incapable of playing their role of social arbiter which could have prevented honest people from being taken in. Therein lies the perversion of an operation which, by snatching people in their formative years, winds up desensitizing them to the role that each will have to play. First Descoings, then Attorney General of the International Criminal Court, then Filippetti and others attempting successively to ensnare me, provoking/inducing schisms just when I was feeling that the ideas which had brought us together were being betrayed. Others did not have this good fortune, this strength or this opportunity and were taken in. I saw a classmate Quentin Lafay being devoured and then breaking away. I saw Gabriel Attal himself plunging into this world without any self-reflection.

This creates a landscape that the press, indentured to this network, was supposed to embellish in order to make us believe in a popular fairytale where democratic interests, questions of platform and engagement, the will of the people in effect will somehow win out.

This master plan, incubated by the triumvirate of Arnault, Niel et Lagardère who ensure the promotion of stalwart soldiers handpicked by Emmanuel Macron, dominates our age. One such soldier is the supremely malleable and highly applauded Mr. Philippe, introduced notably by Taittinger and Jouyet (who represent the quintessential amalgam of state aristocracy and common bourgeoisie) under the watchful eye of the likes of Mimi Marchand and the afore-mentioned collaborators. Under this system, one is hard-pressed to see where democracy might fit in.

This rapacious band that we have described, was born of a drunken (euphoric) envy, snatching up all the young schemers who demonstrated a willingness to offer back their youthful vigor for the continuation of the species.

So many times, I had felt drawn to and seduced by this world that was all around me. But it didn't work. I had to extricate myself, decisively and get away to the Central African Republic and North Kivu to teach in the most forgotten places heading to the roots of those whom this gang exploited on a regular basis. Unlike several of my friends, colleagues, loves, men and women from the Alsatian School, these eager young wolves, I tore myself away. After allowing myself to be taken in, I became free.

I watched Emmanuel Macron intervene the 13th of December, in a somber Élysée where his very survival was at stake. He announced that he would ask business owners to pay a bonus to salaried workers. I saw Messrs. Niel, Drahi, Lévy and Richard—the latter having been counselled at great cost by Mr. Emelien—announce immediately and

piteously their support for the President's proposal to offer a one-time bonus designed to mask the absurdity of such a proposition.

I watched their squirming, with a sense of pity for their vulgarity and their drawn faces, feeling sorry about this broadcast where Xavier Niel, head bowed, sang the praises of Mr. Macron who was announcing the Estate Tax Reform. Gabriel Attal would not be authorized to make this reform public for another two months, still hoping for better or worse to pretend that he was the architect of a project that was decided by those well above his pay grade.

So I said to myself that, in order to complete the picture, I should have given you a glimpse into the bourgeois networks of Amiens, the affluence and the power of Emmanuel Macron's father, Jean-Michel Macron, professor of medicine and former chief of service at the Academic Medical Center of Amiens, also the rift with his son and the divorce of his parents; but, especially, I should have introduced you to the Trogneux family whose alliances much more than their financial strength were determinative and attendant factors to the beginnings of a power which, through the support of local fiefdoms, notably those of Messrs. Collomb and Le Drian, Patriat and Ferrand, believed itself to be part of the clan but which in fact had only borrowed from it.

How all that gave rise to the Great Debate, a project shepherded by Ismaël Emelien, which was nothing more than a desperate attempt at re-establishing an electoral base for which the prior campaign had not laid the proper groundwork.

I would have wanted to help you get the back story on these fiefdoms which will have, for a time, compensated for the absence of a social footing for En Marche by knitting together a network of support and a means for sharing the spoils. I would have liked to tell you how these petty overlords ruled lesser kingdoms. How, not having been established by this power, this fabric would unravel at the first sign of difficulty.

I would have liked next to describe how, beginning with all that—through Laurent Bigorgne and the Descoings clan, along with the review *Esprit* and the think tank Terra Nova, the newspaper *The One* financed by the millionaire Henry Hermand¹ in order to, as admitted publicly by Eric Fottorino, its director, support Mr. Macron—the networks of Strauss-Kahn and Huchon, Moscovici being the connection, the machine was put into motion.

How the mobilization of intellectual, political and financial resources was organized/brought together to give substance to his power and for getting the lesser elites to go along with this coopting of power as his challengers were dropping like flies under the influence of corruption allegations and attention-getting fratricidal struggles.

It would have been necessary to recount each of the thousand and one meetings that I attended designed to dupe the public, using journalists with ever-diminishing independence who had donned the mantle of these intertwined interests in order to propel an empty shell onto the political stage.

I would have had to tell you the story of the Terra Nova conference in Lyon organized by Marc-Olivier Padis who would become director of the venerable review *Esprit*. A spectacle that had taken on the trappings of a political rally so much so that it had to be cancelled at the last minute in order not to look foolish.

It would have been necessary to show you how all these lesser networks, tasked with promoting the budding power's propaganda amidst the public's bewilderment, used government resources and were expecting, as promised by François Hollande in his time, to be rewarded for their efforts.

It would have been necessary to describe how ministerial services were transformed into machines for amassing large amounts of money in the service of personal ambition. To tell you about the Ministry of the Economy where Ismaël Emelien had not only utilized government funds to pay unsolicited contracts to Havas but also to enlist six advisors at the ministry who were responsible for managing publicity for Macron. These were all comfortably paid out of the government till to organize public events even though three of them did not appear on any of the ministry's official org charts.

Next, with the help of Séjourné, how he managed to create an expansive network of 900 donors in record time who would provide the candidate with nearly 7M euros worth of contributions and thus, while technically staying within the law, to finance Macron's campaign in exchange for promises of tax cuts which he would not delay in granting just a few months later.

I would have to describe Bruno Tertrais and his minions who were tasked with throwing together a platform designed to sell the operation to the public at large. Knowingly and shamelessly, this same group was questioned as "independent" experts after the election by *Le Monde* to comment on Mr. Macron's achievement. Jean-Louis Beffa, who sat on the board of directors of *Le Monde*, was one of Macron's main supporters. He moved seamlessly amongst the elites of Paris to wangle money and support. His partner in crime, Anne Sinclair, editorial chief at the *Huffington Post*, whose boss was none other than Louis Dreyfus [add footnote as to his position at *Huffington Post*, Ed.], would speak to Henry Hermand regularly to assure him of her support for the future president without mentioning a word to her readers who never stopped believing in the independence of her editorial line. Add to this the help of Alain Minc, distant predecessor to Dreyfus on the board of directors of *Le Monde*. In this position, Minc had morphed into a great supporter of Edwy Plenel, before coming to support Emmanuel Macron and inciting him to betray the editors' guild at *Le Monde* by selling the newspaper. Add also

the help of Jacques Attali who would play the role of anointed envoy over all these areas, as he had done under all administrations since Mitterrand.

I would have had to reveal all of this for you to understand in greater detail how a candidate in the service of the few, incapable of independent action or thought, wound up selling himself to the highest bidder. I would of necessity have to explain in minute detail the many corrupt activities—from handing out judicial posts to the awarding of contract solicitation rights—which allowed this system to hold its own, while the people bled dry, with no knowledge of these goings-on, were suffering and felt ravaged to the point of exhaustion where there was no alternative but to rebel.

And finally, it would have been necessary to tell how the foot-soldiers of Macron's political machine, whose ascent I have described for you, behave with unmitigated arrogance and self-assuredness, seeking to crush the spirit of those whom until now they had used to the point of exhaustion and obliteration, pretending to embody a republic which they had pillaged.

This final tale would amount to replaying a battle where democracy came out the loser. These individuals are not corrupt. They are the corruption. The propagation of the Paris elites and their private ecosphere and a meritless bourgeoisie posing as aristocrats have turned our country into a refuge for the arrogant and the insipid, the mediocre and the pernicious. These stand behind a thin veil of legitimacy to justify every excess and have abandoned the pursuit of social engagement and endowment. We need to ask ourselves: did we really think that those dedicated to the service of private interests would at some point come to promote universal ideals? Did we think that these individuals who spent their entire lives feeding an insatiable ambition would now seek to uplift society?

Journalism in this country has long functioned as an arbiter, striking a balance between the left and the right, where the swinging of the pendulum often led to collusion and inertia.

For a while, this created the impression of living in a democracy where judicial investigations, betrayals and diverse power struggles would on occasion break the monotony of endless compromise.

For a while, this created the impression of living in a democracy, until the “at the same time” of Emmanuel Macron began to neutralize its active principle, achieving the illusion of a functioning republic that might guarantee some respite to people finally aware of the schemes and the special interests which were developing behind their backs.

How can we be surprised now by the dreadful consequences that all this has spawned and will continue to spawn because the repression is systematic and will not change.

How can we not call for impeachment, for institutional upheaval, for the establishment of a profoundly parliamentary system of government which will finally restore the people's own resources.

How can we not see this as the only alternative to an increasingly authoritarian regime? Since the only other possible option is its overthrow by the “law and order” party, namely, the National Rally Party [French: Rassemblement national, is a right-wing, populist and nationalist political party in France, Ed.], which has already promised the elites exactly what they were looking for.

Although he denies it, President Macron is conscious of his fragility and of the difficulty in retaining the interest of those who made him. Thus, he has once again hit the campaign trail. Expending a crazy amount of energy, he manages to appear composed. Nonetheless we are given to understand that he is surrounded by a faltering and declining entourage, struggling desperately against his impending demise.

It was time to tell all and, faced with a power threatening us with utter collapse, to rise up.

¹ By providing financial support to Emmanuel Macron, Hermand made sure that his young protégé would never be given to personal compromise and would preserve the façade of incorruption as head of state.

Postface

Since the first publication of this text, in October 2018, ten thousand people have been arrested and more than two thousand injured. Thirteen people have lost their lives as hundreds of thousands have risen to claim their dignity.

Among them, some of the most vulnerable members of our society.

Political violence has erupted everywhere. Circumspect, stupefied, indignant, we watched the images emerging from the underbelly of a barbarian State, a State willing to do anything to preserve its “authority” - forcing dozens of high school students to kneel down on the bare soil, filming their humiliation, rounding them up as they were preparing to mobilize in their turn, willing to put out people's eyes, tear off their hands and feet in order to win the battle.

In the month of December 2018 alone, more than three thousand children were arrested in an attempt to avoid the spread of a mounting protest against the dirty and opaque politics that was plundering collective resources.

Politics that sanctioned killing anyone who dared to challenge it.

The movement didn't stop. While the yellow jackets continued to take to the streets in the face of general indifference, the biggest ever movement to withhold the results of the *baccalauréat* was born. The largest social movement within hospitals was launched by non-trade-unionist members of staff. Fire-fighters and police, too, tried to play their part.

Everywhere, a sense of urgency and an outcry, a clamor that said: society is dying, something must be done.

The only response, violence and payoffs. Inane politicians, enjoying the power they had so easily won, were unable to put into question the underlying reasons for their success.

This authoritarian drift, this spinning out of control of a whole society, began very soon after Emmanuel Macron came to power. The anthropological reasons for a degenerate power have been described in my book *Against Macron*, published online in July 2017. Like *Crépuscule*, no one would publish it until, just a few weeks before the emergence of the Yellow Jackets, a courageous young man, Johan Badour, stepped up against all odds to sound a warning of what was to come.

This ontological deviation is the result of an oligarchic grip that has subverted the production of information and ended up devastating an entire society.

It is closely linked to the Yellow Jackets. The latter arose in reaction to the fuel tax, which, as the author of this text has shown, with supporting evidence, had only one goal from the outset: to finance the long-term reduction of employer contributions, not the ecological transition, as was the government's unchallenged claim.

In other words, this “ecological tax” had no other purpose than to allow a direct transfer of resources, estimated at more than seven billion euros, away from the general public and into the pockets of the wealthiest members of society, in order to thank them for helping those now elected into power.

To summarise, the election was used to protect the interests of the class that had placed the winners in power - thus the ISF, Flat Tax, and so on, were added to the package.

And how was it done? By controlling the public's perception of reality, with the help of several oligarchs and the growing complicity of enslaved journalists, an intermediate caste, financed and protected through subsidies and investments with no need for profitability.

The Yellow Jackets movement was attacked massively, unilaterally and overwhelmingly by the bourgeois castes who in recent decades have become servile and useless. The Yellow Jackets fought back bravely. These castes - in the etymological sense of the term - intellectual, political, media - had been instituted to think, talk and decide *on behalf of the population*. They gained their sovereignty in the eighteenth century, in the context of the emergence of a new political system, liberal democracy, which offered the people an opportunity to choose who would speak, think and decide in their name.

Meager progress, it would seem today, compared to the aristocratic system, where society was organized hierarchically through a clever system of selection. A huge step compared with the serfdom to which our “elites” have since pledged allegiance, betraying those who elected them to power and financed them through their labor.

Why did these “elites”, created by and in theory dependent upon society, rise up and fiercely defend their masters, despite being constantly humiliated by them through criticism and career brokering? Why didn't they have enough lucidity to understand that their survival depended on their reconnection with the population, on breaking the chains binding them to the most powerful? Why couldn't they see that their survival depended upon cleaning up the public space once and for all, and becoming once again the true representatives, not of private interests, but of the population and, from now on, of ideas?

Because they were bought. Literally. And their cries of outrage are pointless in the face of this obvious reality, borne out by the facts. These people have been purchased. Funded, paid by other people who sleep, live, eat together, by former pimps, corruptors of the State, fraudsters and dysfunctional heirs.

These “elites” now depend on another elite, which dominates them and contaminates them with its multiple billions. And they felt threatened by the emergence of a movement that was only too conscious of having been exploited, of being the true source of these fortunes, despite the constant attempts of our journalists and politicians to make us believe they came from the thighs of Jupiter. A movement that wanted to break off from them and demolish them.

Our bourgeois castes were very aware that the Yellow Jackets, calling for direct democracy, threatened their entire existence. A third political revolution would finally grant people their own direct say in the political arena, without passing through intermediaries. The very people who had delegated to the bourgeoisie the right to speak on their behalf were now taking it back, thus rendering them useless, taking away the power they had so valiantly seized and then used to turn on the very people who had granted them their privilege.

These castes began to tremble. Because they saw that the time had come when all the resentment aroused by centuries of compromises was about to come crashing down on them. Thanks to a technological revolution, which ended the possibility of focussing everyone's attention in the desired direction, thanks to the emergence of online social networks, which separated politics from information, their downfall was on its way.

And the Yellow Jackets have advanced. They had understood, and when their spineless and corrupted civil servants had turned a blind eye, they fiercely marched forward. They had been ripped off, they would take everything back. They would regain their sovereignty in the face of the ruling elite who, trembling, had a helicopter ready to leave, preparing to flee when the people, by the thousands, showed themselves able to stand up to the armed forces, to resist or sacrifice themselves in order to wrest what was due to them.

The proof of the State's lie which brought about this movement, and which no media outlet has until now relayed, can be read in the exchanges picked up in the Macronleaks between the president's two closest advisers: Alexis Kohler, secretary-general of the Elysée, and Laurent Martel, taxation advisor at the Elysee⁸⁶.

In 2016 Laurent Martel and Alexis Kohler were preparing the largest electoral fraud in history, with the help of all the Sarkozyite networks quickly mobilized to fast-track Macron and thus save the person who might otherwise destroy them. They wrote in black and white that they would always be able to “tell a story to the French people” about the fuel tax which, as they clearly indicated, was intended to fill the hole in public finances caused by the introduction of the CICE in 2013 by a certain Emmanuel Macron, acting hand in hand

86 Traductor's note : Equivalent of the US “White House” or the UK “10 Downing Street”, located in the heart of Paris. Also called “le Château” (the Castle).

with Jérôme Cahuzac, in an attempt to gain favor with the business community of Paris and to launch a political career that nothing in their professional lives could justify.

Seven billion euros for a corrupt destiny, which Bernard Arnault, a witness at Nicolas Sarkozy's wedding, Vincent Bolloré, who had hosted Nicolas Sarkozy on his yacht the day after his election, and Arnaud Lagardère, who regarded Mr. Sarkozy as his brother, would manufacture alongside the son-in-law of the former and his *sworn enemy*, Patrick Drahi.

Let's say it one more time. This lie, revealed by the author of these lines on December 24, 2018, a result of the corrupt arrangements involving many other individuals, from Antoine Bernheim to Alain Weil, including Olivier Dassault and François-Henri Pinault, was not taken up by any of the media outlets that now belonged to these people.

Alexis Kohler and Laurent Martel, the originators of the country's worst social crisis in fifty years, are still at the Elysée.

...

Since the first publication of this text, Marc-Olivier Fogiel, a close friend of the Macron couple thanks to Mimi Marchand, has been appointed head of BFMTV by Patrick Drahi, at the suggestion of the Élysée, after it was noticed that BFMTV was being “too favorable” to the Yellow Jackets.

Let's recall that Patrick Drahi had bought BFMTV in order to obtain from the then minister of the economy an authorization for the buy-out of SFR.

This minister of the economy was Mr. Macron, and this buy-out was financed by the laying off of several thousand employees, degrading a service used by millions of people in order to serve the interests of the few, and the interests of the bankers associated with the deal, Goldman Sachs. The affair was conducted by Bernard Mourad, who should have benefitted later from the project to privatize the Aeroports de Paris that was subsequently called off.

A few years earlier, another Ecole Polytechnique graduate, Bernard Arnault, had led the way, amassing a speculative fortune and enslaving the ruling class of his country. He did so with the help of the networks accessed via the military school, which is supposed to mold the elite of the nation. To satisfy his lust for domination, he destroyed local industries and crafts in order to supply a globalized market, leaving entire regions of the country devastated. In his contest for supremacy, he was compelled to outbid François-Henri Pinault and offer two hundred million euros, twice the sum that had been proposed by the latter, to restore Notre Dame Cathedral, razed by fire after eight centuries of existence due to a failure of the security systems, which had been subcontracted for lack of State financing.

Mr. Bern, a grandiose clown, had succeeded in raising only one hundred and fifty million euros for this national treasure, through a tremendous propaganda operation organized by the Elysée in a bid save our heritage. At the same time, it was revealed that Mr. Pinault's businesses had defrauded the European tax authorities to the tune of two and a half billion euros, and that Bernard Arnault had had to pay more than one billion euros to the State to settle a tax “disagreement”, which did not result in any criminal prosecution.

Mr. Fogiel's first decision at BFMTV was to recruit Alain Duhamel, a close friend of Emmanuel Macron, as a reporter for the channel.

The Ecole Polytechnique filed a complaint against Régis Portalez for wearing the establishment's uniform while supporting the Yellow Jackets in the street and asserting his republican patriotism.

...

Since the first publication of this text, Xavier Niel, who boasts of speaking to the president on the phone every day and whose fortune depends exclusively on State-regulated markets, has continued to expand his influence. He has invested in the regional press and initiated a takeover of *Nice-Matin* and *La Provence*, the only media to have defended *Crépuscule* alongside *Les Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace* and *Corse-Matin*, at the same time investing in cinema alongside Ramzi Khiroun and... Cyril Hanouna. Not a single journalist dealing with this matter has questioned whether it had anything to do with the upcoming municipal elections and the fact that the mayor of Nice, Christian Estrosi, is currently negotiating with the Elysée to harness its support instead of letting Marseille get all the attention.

As for Arnaud Lagardère, he earned two hundred million euros by selling the TV-channel Gulli, created for free fifteen years earlier with the help of the State. The audiovisual advisor of Mr. Macron at the Elysée, Claudia Ferrazzi, who supervised the operation, got rid of the France 4 children's channel in order to artificially increase the value of Lagardère's channel.

She happens to be the wife of a comfortably installed ENA alumnus, Fabrice Bakhouché, who wrote, with Mrs. Ferrazzi, the audio-visual program of Emmanuel Macron, and who was recruited by Arnaud Lagardère straight after the election.

As for Denis Olivennes, after having bankrupted and sold off a part of the Lagardère media hub to Daniel Kretinsky, he was recruited by the latter to run his “new” media hub. He was to benefit greatly, as we would expect, further increasing a fortune valued at tens of millions of euros. This fortune was created through the abuse of the privilege granted to him by the State upon leaving the ENA: access to government accounts, and to the inexhaustible resources which came with his job.

Bernard Arnault, Xavier Niel, his wife Delphine and Martin Bouygues, together with the U.S. Ambassador and outrageous proponent of minimum effort Thierry Breton, gathered, as they did every year at Yquem Castle. The police were there to protect them. A helicopter was in position, ten harmless Yellow Jackets being enough to frighten them.

In order to obtain thirteen billion euros for distribution to millions of people living in poverty, it had been necessary for the people to get so physically close to the Elysée that the president of the republic was ready to flee the palace. At the same time the fortune of Mr. Arnault, with no extra effort on his part, increased by twenty-seven billion euros. Today, it exceeds a hundred billion, although it was below fifty billion before the election of Emmanuel Macron.

Élisa Arnault-Niel and Zoé Bouygues-Bolloré were seven and six years old respectively.

According to INSERM, between ten and fifteen thousand people have died as a result of long-term unemployment.

Tens of thousands more have perished due to a level of poverty and insecurity that none of our leaders or those around them will ever experience or struggle with.

Hundreds of exploited journalists, insecure in their jobs, stooped to criticizing and putting down the testimonies of their friends and families, while thousands of local and national police unleashed the violence of the State to crush their fellow countrymen, thus preserving their petty benefits.

And yet they were affected daily by the same shame and humiliation, fear and anxiety, depression, domestic violence, worry for their children, as the millions of people they were ordered to suppress. The fear of going home. The crowded or canceled trains, the closed down maternity units, the outsourced jobs, the deserted city centers. Frightening tax bills. Money trickling away. Soaring rents.

During this period, nine million people have resisted and survived below the poverty line, trying as hard as they could to struggle on, or at the very least not break down.

Since *Crépuscule* was published, a hundred thousand copies have been sold, and more than eight hundred thousand have been downloaded. The book is still and will always be freely accessible online. It has been the subject of a lot of laughter and much hatred.

Since the publishing of *Crépuscule*, thousands of people have discovered the existence of the Christmas allowance, reserved for recipients of *RSA*⁸⁷. How heartwarming to hear that someone, somewhere in that cold machine called the State, had dreamed up such a

⁸⁷ (Revenu de Solidarité Active - a French welfare benefit, tn).

measure. It gave us the impression, even if only for a moment, that we were worth something.

Politics is a matter of urgency. For all those who, since 2008 or even further back, have been dying a slow and lonely death, believing themselves to be worthless, for all those who are still stuck with this notion today, born of the inanity of self-obsessed leaders, bear it in mind: we are here.

...

Since *Crépuscule* appeared, Stéphane Séjourné, having fast-tracked his companion Gabriel Attal into the government, ran an election campaign for the European Parliament and got elected by putting his own name on the list of candidates.

Before entering politics and obtaining his mandate, with the help of a certain Jean-Paul Huchon, he had done nothing that could justify a promotion of this kind. He was a lobbyist, in other words, his job was to use networks accessed through the State in the service of private interests, just like Amélie de Montchalin, appointed to the government of our republic for the same reason.

The list of candidates for the European Parliament, presented by En Marche and led by Nathalie Loiseau, got fewer votes than the far right, even though the president had publicly set a target to overtake it, promising severe consequences otherwise. Nathalie Loiseau, during her first day at the European Parliament, insulted all of her partners and was immediately demoted, thus making room for Stéphane Séjourné.

Nothing was learned from this incident, and the outcome was presented as a success across almost all the media.

Months of propaganda meetings, presented under the title of the “great debate”, were financed by the State and relayed across the media. They were followed by the parody of the election of “parliamentarians” who do not even have the power of legislative initiative and constitute a comfortable reservoir of bigwigs for political parties obsessed with grabbing power.

A major social movement, the longest in history, had just managed to prise some ten billion euros out of the hands of a government that was forced to call in the army to help the exhausted forces of law and order. To repress a social movement which, week after week, was “losing momentum”.

No political response to the movement was forthcoming. None of the results of the “great debate”, again unanimously presented as a success, was taken into account by the government. Thousands of elected officials were mobilized in vain, with the sole aim of giving Macronism the control over the country that it badly needed, so that it could hold

out until the March 2020 municipal elections, and finally anchor itself in real life, far from the small self-interested games of the *Petit-Paris*.

Political violence, ordered by the government to silence the social movement that was happening in parallel with the great debate and the elections, was, after months of silence, timidly qualified by the media as “police violence”, giving the impression of an institutional aberration, while in fact it was simply the result of a well-executed and fully assumed policy.

In fact, Mr. Castaner stated that there was no police violence. This was only slightly wrong. Because it was him and his patrons who, through their orders, were the source of this violence, not the police.

On December 3, 2018, Marine Le Pen, heiress of an oligarchical machine created by her father and the millionaire Hubert Lambert, found herself on the evening news on TF1, following the third act of the Yellow Jackets, while Emmanuel Macron was keeping silent. Having been given several minutes in front of the TV camera, she addressed the president on behalf of the French people then, on December 7, she demanded “respect for the institutions of the Fifth Republic”, thus presenting herself as a credible alternative to a declining power. Martin Bouygues, the owner of TF1, which is dependent on the dictates of the State, knew full well that by inviting her he would please the Elysée while protecting himself in the event of a political U-turn. A few months later, the MEDEF invited Marion Marshal Le Pen to its “summer camp”, before retracting the invitation under pressure from Emmanuel Macron.

The hydra that had lurked for so long was rising, those who had fed it were taking off their masks.

February 11, 2019, the day of the indictment of Havas for his involvement in the Business France case. Ishmael Emelien and David Amiel, the president's closest advisers, announced their resignations and the publication of a “progressive manifesto” by Fayard, owned by Lagardère, which in the general excitement would benefit from one of the biggest press coverages of the year, in order to conceal the catastrophic consequences of a forced resignation. The book, unanimously considered insignificant despite the intense promotion organized at the highest level of the State in order to cover up its latent corruption, would only sell 7,482 copies (1). The two individuals, portrayed as very talented in many articles dedicated to them by the enslaved press, were flabbergasting in their mediocrity whenever they appeared, all the way to the morning show on France Inter radio.

This would not prevent Clement Beaune, alter-ego of Stéphane Séjourné at the Elysée, responsible for the “blueprint” of Emmanuel Macron’s European policy, being the subject of an article in *Le Monde* while he was still waiting to be appointed to the government. In two paragraphs, signed by the ineffable Cedric Pietralunga, he was successively described as “tireless”, “always available”, “polyglot”, “wonderful” and “very competent”.

In *Le Monde* of August 27, 2014, another adviser to the presidency who was about to enter the government was described as the “Mozart of the Elysée”, “charmer”, “philosopher,” “pianist”, “dancer”. He had refused to run for insignificant municipal elections and had “an impressive CV”. It was Emmanuel Macron.

Emmanuel Macron's project for the European Union, drawn up and presented with great pomp by Clément Beaune at the Sorbonne, was, in the opinion of all observers, a great failure, just like the economic policy that Mr. Macron had developed at the Elysée, which would cause the downfall of François Hollande.

However, reality doesn't seem to matter in these places of servitude.

Emmanuel Macron was neither a pianist of genius nor a philosopher, nor a tango dancer. He was a below-average student from the Henri IV school, where he had been admitted thanks to his wife's networks. During his time there he had failed twice to gain entry to the ENS⁸⁸, which he would make a hat-trick the following year, before failing again at the ENA. A year later he finally succeeded in entering the State administration, where he failed miserably to be adopted by political leaders, so he had to finally settle for François Hollande, hoping the latter would bring him some petty advantage. *Le Monde* would ignore all these slight vicissitudes, because it had already fallen in line with the hidden flattery of a secret backer of this individual who had managed to find himself strong allies, from Xavier Niel to Bernard Arnault, so bypassing the difficulties which the republic seemed to be putting in the way of his ambition.

Clement Beaune had not been appointed, due to a lack of similarly powerful supporters, nevertheless *Le Monde* would publish a story about him.

Macronism was terribly lacking in charm, so Sibeth Ndiaye, communications adviser to Emmanuel Macron, heiress of one of Senegal's most powerful families, closely connected to the power of Abdoulaye Wade, was, for the lack of other candidates, fast-tracked to become the government's spokesperson in place of Benjamin Griveaux. She had never run for any election, yet multiple dithyrambic press articles quickly appeared, including the one by Raphael Bacqué in *Le Monde*, where he would “forget” to mention the reasons for her very sudden ascent.

Benjamin Griveaux, whose ministry doors had been demolished with a forklift truck by protestors he described as “blokes who smoke fags and drive diesel cars”, continued to prepare for his election to the Paris City Council, courting the glossy gossip magazines with the help of Mimi Marchand, still well integrated in the Elysée and at service of Alexandre Benalla. At the same time *Paris Match* published more and more articles about their comrade Attal, charged by the government with setting up a two-week work placement initiative

⁸⁸ Ecole Normale Supérieure, the most prestigious French *grande école*, tn.

for young people, with an estimated cost of 1.2 billion euros, the equivalent of the annual salaries of fifty thousand teachers.

The strike of emergency medical staff has so far obtained only fifty million euros from the minister of health, Agnes Buzyn, who is enslaved by the lobbyists and claims that the government's coffers are “drained”.

Manon Aubry, a classmate who was fighting for the leadership of the “left” at Sciences Po with her colleague Gabriel Attal, won six percent of the vote on the list at the European elections, where she had appeared for pure public image reasons.

As for *Crépuscule*, described as a “fascist”, “conspiracy theorist”, “confusing”, “mythomaniac” book, it was unanimously attacked by the supporters of the existing order, from the far-right supporters of Alain Soral to the anarchist far left, as well as by the entire mainstream press and intellectuals from Geoffroy de Lagasnerie to Bernard-Henri Lévy. Its author has been described as a mixture of “red pepito”, “zionist”, “freemason”, “controlled opponent”, “Attali's godson” and “global immigrationist” by the far right, or as a “great manipulator”, “homophobic”, “conspiracy theorist”, “neo-fascist”, “fascinated by violence” and “anti-democratic” by the State press. *Arrêt sur images* compared him with a neo-Nazi author, *L'Express* sullied him in an article devoid of any quotation, Cyril Hanouna called him “dumb”, Éric Naulleau called him the “new Beria”. He was pursued in a legal case for incitement to crimes and misdemeanors, described by Ariane Chemin as a Holocaust denier, called “mythomaniac” by Claude Askolovitch - words withdrawn after they were ridiculed - and accused by all, obviously, of siding with extremists.

Journalists from *Mediapart*, *L'Express*, *C8*, *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, “28 minutes”, TF1, *L'Opinion*, *Paris Match* and *Libération* who attacked the author took great interest in his adolescence, his romantic involvements, without ever reviewing the book or investigating the information revealed by the published text. Videos appeared, declaring the author's links with the cabal, freemasonry, global Jewish conspiracy, Satanism, crimes against children. Some of them approached one million views. At the same time, many journalists mentioned in the book attacked the author repeatedly and venomously on social networks - without ever mentioning the book - going so far as to insinuate a supposed alliance with the far-right in order to justify his expulsion from bourgeois social circles. Radio France Culture devoted an hour to the author under the initial title: “What does Juan Branco signify?”, which was quickly corrected. The show was finally called, more circumspectly, “What does *Crépuscule* signify?”, and would consist of a good-natured one-hour-long drawing-room discussion, with four interlocutors, about the character of the author in question.

Aurore Bergé, spokesperson for the president's party, had just reported the author to the Public Prosecutor for being a “rabble-rouser” and several MPs called for his imprisonment.

Bruno Roger-Petit, presidential adviser, publicly complained that a sales assistant at the Fnac⁸⁹ had promoted the book. Three others would quickly follow suit.

Dozens of reports would be forwarded to the CAF⁹⁰ to ensure that the author had not been unduly receiving welfare payments. My computer was stolen, an invented rape accusation emerged then was dropped, money was offered to me a hundred times, the Bar of Paris wrote to notify me of their decision not to pursue the demands for my suspension from practice.

There has not been a single defamation case aimed at the actual content of the book.

None of the facts revealed in this text has been refuted, with the exception of those concerning *Mediapart* and *Arrêt sur Images*. In these cases, contradictory and confused missives insinuated that the author was involved with the Chinese and Russian secret services to justify their disapprobation (*Arrêt sur Images*), that he tried to get commissioned to write articles that in fact had already been written, that he misinterpreted the information that was, however, accurately presented (*Mediapart*). The columns about *Crépuscule* at *Mediapart*, a monument of hatred, would receive eight hundred and sixty-eight comments, of which eight hundred and twelve criticized the newspaper.

None of the information published in this text has been picked up by journalists, despite it being an objective revelation of active corruption reaching all the way to the top levels of government.

Julian Assange, Hervé Kempf, François Bégaudeau, Michel Onfray, Annie Ernaux, Serge Halimi, Gérard Miller, Denis Robert, Pamela Anderson, Daniel Mermet and Vikash Dhorasoo are the only public figures who have openly defended the text.

Dozens of conferences on the subject of *Crépuscule* were organized across the country, with three hundred to one thousand people attending each meeting. Many conferences, including at Sciences Po in Paris, were canceled after intervention from management. More than a dozen reports on the book, ranging from *L'Obs* to the TV show “*Quotidien*”, plus several RTL broadcasts, including that of Marc-Olivier Fogiel, for various reasons suffered the same fate. Only *Paris Match* admitted explicit censorship.

Marc Endeweld, interviewed by Guillaume Erner, in “*Les matins*” on Radio France Culture, kept silent about a book which he had praised in private.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon said nothing.

The left wing said nothing.

⁸⁹ A nationwide bookstore, tn.

⁹⁰ Social welfare system, tn.

Quentin Girard, a journalist at *Libération*, was the first to talk about the book in his column, two months after its publication, as part of a laudatory portrait of Gabriel Attal, who was detested, by the way, by the entire editorial staff.

Quentin Girard, who had been in love with a woman who had loved me, thus settled his personal scores using a press outlet supposed to deliver the truth. As it so often happens in Paris, personal quarrels were to mislead an entire country, degrading a democracy that cannot exist without free, pluralistic and rigorous media.

Viewers, readers and listeners of all the public and private television stations, all the printed press (with the exception of *Le Point*), and every radio station (with the exception of Sud, RFI and France Culture) have never heard of the political book that had the biggest print run of 2019. As for *L'Express*, they were to allow themselves a destructive portrait of the author, a few weeks before the publication of the book, which was denounced by a member of the editorial staff as being a “settling of scores commissioned by Patrick Drahi and alimanted by the RG (sic)⁹¹”.

From Valerie to Agnes, including Yaou, Marie-France and Claudia, dozens of tiny hands helped with this work and must be thanked. Special secretaries who love camping, oligarchs' drivers who have to return every night to the sprawling Parisian suburbs, assistants of billionaires recruited on *Leboncoin*⁹², transsexual lovers raped by media moguls, an underpaid oligarch's gardener, all of them acted as secret agents of the little people who were finally able to touch the most powerful. From the tennis center in the Rue Saint-Jacques to Avenue Saint-Jean in Touquet, via boats named *Paloma* and haphazardly rented Corsican villas, they gave us access to the heart of power, which until now no one had dared to approach. Tired of humiliation and subjugation, they took the risk of losing their jobs in order to contribute to this text, which was born thanks to them.

Their employers will recognize themselves, and they, protected or about to be, will smile.

Crépuscule had already sold fifty thousand copies, had been reviewed in the mainstream Swiss, Belgian, Spanish and Portuguese press, mentioned in India, in the most important daily newspaper of Norway, and in Romania before the first article about it appeared in France.

Not a single favorable article appeared in the national press. Having been refused by all the approached publishers, sometimes accompanied by some outrageous remarks, the book was launched by two independent and incredibly courageous publishers, Marion Mazauric and Florent Massot. Thanks to them and their support, one hundred thousand copies were

⁹¹ RG – former interior secret French services, tn.

⁹² A small-ads site, tn.

put into circulation, at the same time as the text in its working version remained freely accessible on the web.

I thank the journalists of the websites of *Le Figaro*, Sophie de Ravinel and Radio France Info, Clément Parrot, for having been the only ones to take their role seriously and resist temptation.

As for Arnaud Montebourg, who I respected and who, after verifying that I was on welfare, would offer to pay generously to expose Patrick Drahi, receiving me on the top floor of 26 Avenue de l'Opéra, the enormous office space paid for by his patron, I hope that he will understand how mistaken he was.

To the million people who shared these words, thank you. Daniel Mermet, from "*Là-bas si j'y suis*", Bertrand, of Thinkerview, as well as the hundreds of roundabouts where this text circulated, to everyone who made this miracle possible, it is a collective creation.

To Maxime, who I had a chance to accompany during this period.

To the property owners, from the Rue d'Andigné to the Villa Montmorency and Barbet-de-Jouy, who have decided to plunder us: stop.

To Xavier in particular, with his sex shops and call girls, the business we were going to set up, the tuition that I proposed to his children before it became evident that there was nothing to connect us: you still have time to save yourself.

To Yannick, son of Vincent Bolloré, Martin, son of Francis Bouygues, François-Henri, son of François Pinault, Delphine, Frédéric, Jean, Antoine and Alexandre Arnault, Arnault's children; and Arnaud, son of Jean-Luc Lagardère: to all of you who have stolen our destiny through inheritance and do not stop sinking ever lower; all of you who, through the State, through the media, publishing, advertising, have acquired the means of political influence: renounce, before it is too late, the privileges that you do not deserve.

To Élixa Niel-Arnault and Zoé Bouygues-Bolloré, aged seven and six, heiresses born in an oligarchic country where violence is about to threaten them, the innocent fruit of rampant pillage, still unable to count and yet already in possession of the biggest fortune in the world: know that we don't blame you, and that it will be your elders, if tomorrow the people are able to overthrow them, who will need to ask for forgiveness.

To all my readers: this crepuscule that must be brought to an end.

Juan Branco July 1, 2019

Translation by Alice, Lesley, Vincent, Elias, Marion, Arthur, Daniel, Julien, Susana,
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CREPUSCULE,1

By JUAN BRANCO1

Foreword, by DENIS ROBERT2

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