



FILHOS DE IMPÉRIO E PÓS-MEMÓRIAS EUROPEIAS  
CHILDREN OF EMPIRES AND EUROPEAN POSTMEMORIES  
ENFANTS D'EMPIRES ET POSTMÉMOIRES EUROPÉENNES

Saturday, 1 February 2020



Rocé and Adolfo Kaminsky | 2019 | [artist's instagram @rocemusic](#)

1

## FAKE DOCUMENTS. SAVED DOCUMENTS

Fernanda Vilar

What is the connection between the forger Adolfo Kaminsky born in Argentina in 1925 to Russian Jewish parents, and the French rapper Rocé born in 1977 and of Tuareg-Algerian origin?

Adolfo Kaminsky migrated to France at the age of 6 with his parents. From the age of 13 he worked in a dyeing company removing stains. Once he was freed from the Drancy camp in 1943, this job put him



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into contact with the resistance. From then on he became a clandestine forger of documents. He saved rural Jews and after the war helped send Jews to Palestine until he became disenchanted with the new Jewish state. Until his marriage in 1950 he was stateless. In the end, convinced that colonialism was going to come to an end, he accepted French nationality.

In Paris he met people linked to the Algerian FLN (National Liberation Front). He made a deal with them: he would provide them with falsified documents as long as they did not start a war on French soil. He was driven by the ideal of ending a war that was only producing victims. As well as counterfeiting documents in a home-made laboratory, he continued to work as a dyer. In 1971, while helping a South African anti-apartheid group, he was threatened and fled to Algeria. He fell in love with a black, Tuareg Algerian who fought for the MPLA (the Angolan Liberation Movement). They had three children. He made documents for the Angolan and Guinea Bissauan liberation movements struggling against Portuguese colonial rule. He also helped people oppressed by dictatorships in Portugal and Latin America.

Adolfo Kaminsky was a clandestine participant in key historical moments in the 20th century. The meticulous work of his daughter, Sarah Kaminsky (1979), has brought his romantic story to light. Her research on her father's story of hiding, activism, escape and fear is published in *Adolfo Kaminsky, une vie de faussaire* (2009, Adolfo Kaminsky, The life of a forger). She portrays her father's thirty years of quiet work against the backdrop of ruthless political disputes, violent racism and the struggles of different peoples for freedom and human dignity.

Sarah Kaminsky inherited from her father the ideal that the citizen should live up to the slogan of "Equality, fraternity and liberty". This ideal has come to flourish too in the work of his son, Sarah's brother, José Kaminsky, known by the stage name Rocé. To honor his father and his activism, he wrote the song "Je chante la France":

My father fought Vichy and collaboration  
An expert in fake papers, he saved the victims of treason  
To step up and resist when a nation loses reason  
He showed humanity without waiting for approval  
Clandestine, because he belonged  
To struggles that put justice on trial  
Youth and health hidden in resistance  
Not French, no reward, no problem, he saves France.(1)



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Rocé puts the clandestine struggles of his father into his own poetry. He chooses rap because it is a first-person musical form in which he finds the words to define himself. Society cannot identify voices from the periphery. His family history makes him believe in a project of communication. He tells positive stories of, and for, people on the margins.

At the end of 2018, he launched the anthology/album “Par les damné.e.s de la terre, 1969-1988” (For the wretched of the earth, 1969-1988). It took its title from Frantz Fanon’s *Les damnés de la terre* (1961, *The Wretched of the Earth*). In the album the failures to transmit colonial memory are resolved by a collective artistic production that brings together 24 activist songs and speeches in French. With this album Rocé sought to recover historical figures from oblivion. The album highlights the many struggles that forged contemporary European history and puts the resistance of its former colonies in the foreground.

The urgency of transmission is written through the Kaminsky family’s history: the ideals of a father who forged documents to save lives, the persistence of his daughter who collected documents to tell his story, and the music of the son, which makes art from his father’s work and gives new life to songs of resistance. This is a family that constantly questions the present because it knows that failing to tell stories of struggle is to fail the weak all over again.

Notes:

[An exhibition](#) about Adolfo Kaminsky is on in Paris at the Museum of Judaism until April 19, 2020.

For [a short video](#) on the life of Adolfo Kaminsky.

For [a podcast](#) about Rocé’s work.

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(1) Rocé, “Je chante la France”, in: *Identité en crescendo*, 2006. The translation is mine. The original lyrics are: “Mon père a combattu Vichy et collaboration / Expert en faux-papiers, sauve les victimes de trahison / Agir et résister quand la patrie perd la raison / Il offre l’humanité sans prendre l’accord du président / La clandestinité, à cause de ses appartenances / De ces combats menés, pour mettre justice dans la balance / La jeunesse, la santé, sont cloîtrées dans la résistance / Pas français pas d’récompenses, pas d’problèmes, il sauve la France”

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Translated by **Archie Davies**

**Fernanda Vilar** is a researcher with the project MEMOIRS – Children of Empire and European Post-Memories (ERC n. 648624) at the Centre for Social Studies at the University of Coimbra.

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