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It has often been claimed that in the period immediately following 1945, France demonstrated no collective memory of the Holocaust. But is this true? Today, this theory seems highly questionable. Recent publications on the history of this memory greatly nuance the usual chronology that portrays the period from the liberation of France to the 1970s as one of absolute forgetting, before the "awakening" of memory. In this article, Simon Perego meticulously traces the milestones, vocabulary, and context of these historiographical debates, in order to better situate changes in recent years in the historical study of the "first memory" of the Holocaust.*

Paul Ricœur distinguished between two types of contemporary history: that of a recent past with an "end point"[1] (such as the history of the two world wars or the USSR) and that whose ending is not yet known. The study of memories of the Holocaust in Europe belongs to this second category, because the event still deeply marks the collective imagination and its memory is still a subject of vigorous debate in France, almost seventy-five years after the defeat of Nazi Germany. For around thirty years, we have been discussing the social and political uses of this memory, the artistic and cultural works that transmit it, the conflicts it triggers or brings into focus, and more broadly its prominence in the public sphere, all within the context of a wider reflection about the place of memory in contemporary societies.[2]

This significant presence of the Holocaust has often been contrasted against the supposed silence surrounding the event in France in the first two or three decades after the Second World War. The period between the liberation of France and the 1970s was long presented as a time when the genocide of the Jews was barely remembered in the public sphere, diluted in a broad and general understanding of Nazi crimes, deportation, and camps.[3] Various lexical fields have been used (sometimes in a more explicitly metaphorical manner than others) to describe this refusal (or inability) to recognize

(*) The author is sincerely grateful to Johannes Heuman and Sébastien Ledoux for offering the benefit of their expertise on the history of memories of the Holocaust by reviewing a first version of this text. Thanks also go to Alexandre Frondizi, Claire Miot, and Sébastien Schick for their valuable advice, and to the journal's anonymous reviewers.

(1) Cited in Robert Frank, "Une histoire problématique, une histoire du temps présent," *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 71 (2001): 79–90, 86. Translator's note: Our translation. Unless otherwise stated, all translations of cited foreign language material are our own.

(2) Pierre Nora, ed., *Les Lieux de mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997 [1984–1992]), three-volume English-language edition available as *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Tzvetan Todorov, *Les Abus de la mémoire* (Paris: Arléa, 1995); Jean-Michel Chaumont, *La Concurrence des victimes. Génocide, identité, reconnaissance* (Paris: La Découverte, 1997); Paul Ricœur, *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000); Georges Bensoussan, *Auschwitz en héritage? D'un bon usage de la mémoire* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 1998); Esther Benbassa, *La Souffrance comme identité* (Paris: Fayard, 2007).

(3) This article will only touch upon the related but distinct question of Jewish memories. For more on this point, see Simon Perego, "Première(s) mémoire(s): Les Juifs de France et la Shoah, de la Libération à la fin des années 1960. Introduction," *Archives juives. Revue d'histoire des Juifs de France* 51, no. 2 (2018): 4–17.

the scale and uniqueness of the Holocaust. These include voice and sound ("silence" followed by "speech" or "clamor"), sleep (the "awakening" of a "dormant" memory), concealment (the shift from "occultation" to "revelation"), the psyche ("trauma/repression/re-emergence of the repressed/obsession"), and individual memory ("remembering" and even "hypermnesia" after "forgetting," "amnesia," or "gaps in the memory").

To counter this idea, François Azouvi published *Le Mythe du grand silence. Auschwitz, les Français, la mémoire* (The Myth of the Great Silence: Auschwitz, the French, Memory) in 2012. The revised and expanded 2015 edition of this important work, with its new postface, gives us the opportunity to reconsider a recent debate in contemporary history and memory studies.[1] More specifically, this article examines the turnabout that has recently led researchers to uncover a presence where their predecessors saw an absence. After doing so, it moves on to highlight what these two interpretations have in common if we look beyond their diverging conclusions, seeking ways to refresh the historiographical, methodological, and conceptual discussion about the "first memory"[2] of the Holocaust, from the liberation of France to the end of the 1960s.

The first historiography of the memory of the Holocaust

It was at the start of the 1980s that historians began studying the French memories of the Second World War, the occupation of France, and the genocide of the Jews. At this time, the concept of memory began to find a place within the field of history. Still absent in *Faire de l'histoire* (1974),[3] it only really entered historians' work four years later, with Pierre Nora's contribution to *La Nouvelle Histoire*,[4] as sociologist Marie-Claire Lavabre observes. She considers that this article launched the "memory moment" by proposing the first concise definition of the concept that she associates with an emerging interest in "lieux de mémoire" (realms of memory).[5] The situation in the late 1970s clearly contributed to this historiographical development. In the shadow of the 1973 oil crisis, and against a background of profound political, economic, social, and cultural change, local identities were emerging, minorities were making their own particular histories heard, and increasing attention was being paid to the notion of heritage. These years also saw the development of oral history, bringing with it an interest in individual memories, particularly driven by the Institut d'histoire du temps présent (IHTP) (Institute of History of the Present Time).[6]

Contemporary history specialists, particularly Second World War experts, responded to Pierre Nora's historiographical appeal: "The analysis of collective memories can and must spearhead any attempt at contemporary history."[7] In 1980, Robert Frank wondered "whether a history of how our collective

(1) François Azouvi, *Le Mythe du grand silence. Auschwitz, les Français, la mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2015 [2012]).

(2) Henry Rousso, *Face au passé. Essais sur la mémoire contemporaine* (Paris: Belin, 2016), 268.

(3) Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora, eds., *Faire de l'histoire. Nouveaux problèmes, nouvelles approches, nouveaux objets* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974).

(4) Pierre Nora, "Mémoire collective," in *La Nouvelle Histoire*, eds. Roger Chartier, Jacques Le Goff, and Jacques Revel (Paris: Retz/CEPL, 1978), 398–401.

(5) Marie-Claire Lavabre, "De la notion de mémoire à la production des mémoires collectives," in *Cultures politiques*, ed. Daniel Cefaï (Paris: PUF, 2001), 233–252, 237. In the words of Pierre Nora, "a *lieu de mémoire* is any significant entity, whether material or nonmaterial in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community (in this case, the French community)," cited in the preface to *Realms of Memory*, "From *Lieux de mémoire* to *Realms of Memory*," xvii.

(6) Henry Rousso, *The Latest Catastrophe: History, the Present, the Contemporary*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2016), chap. 3 "Contemporaneity at the Heart of Historicity," 106–142.

(7) Nora, "Mémoire collective," 401.

memory has mentally reconstituted the events of 1939–1945 is precisely what contemporary history needs."[1] His words were heeded. Working with its local correspondents, the IHTP conducted a vast study called "Les Français et la Seconde Guerre mondiale depuis 1945" (The French and the Second World War since 1945). Its first phase focused on studying commemorations. Alongside this collective project, in 1983, Gérard Namer proposed a pioneering analysis of postwar commemorative practices, particularly focusing on the major patriotic demonstration of November 11, 1945. He noted that this event ignored "racial" deportees.[2] Two conferences were then devoted to memories of the Second World War. One of these took place in Metz at the end of the same year (1983). The other was held in Sèvres in 1985 and brought together the IHTP study participants.[3]

Henry Rousso then laid a fundamental building block of this developing historiography. After a first article in 1985, in 1987 he published *Le Syndrome de Vichy* (translated into English as *The Vichy Syndrome*), of which a revised and updated version was published three years later.[4] According to Rousso, the period of the occupation of France, particularly the Vichy regime and collaboration, established the matrix for a national "syndrome." He identified two different moments in the period between the liberation and the end of the 1960s that interests us here: the "mourning phase" from 1944 to 1954, during which "France had to deal directly with the aftermath of civil war, purge, and amnesty," followed by a period of "repressed memories" between 1954 and 1971, during which "the subject of Vichy became less controversial, except for occasional eruptions in the period 1958–1962." This repression was aided in particular by "what came to be a dominant myth: 'resistancialism.'"[5] According to this chronology, the memory of the Holocaust only truly emerged from the 1970s, during the third phase of the syndrome when "the mirror was broken" causing a "return of the repressed." If between 1971 and 1974, then it came to play a central role in the final period, "a phase of obsession, characterized on the one hand by the reawakening of Jewish memory and, on the other, by the importance that reminiscences of the Occupation assumed in French political debate."[6]

The Holocaust was not central in Rousso's research, which was primarily devoted to the memory of Vichy and collaboration. However, this genocide was the focus of a 1989 issue of the journal *Pardès*, edited by Shmuel Trigano. In it, several articles examined the invisibility of the Holocaust after the war. One of the authors, Annie Kriegel, saw the late 1940s and 1950s as a period characterized by "occultation, burial, sedimentation in the basements of consciousness, of the memory and knowledge about the Holocaust."[7] Three years later, Annette Wieviorka, who was also involved in this issue of *Pardès*, made a major contribution to the study of French memories of the Holocaust with her book *Déportation et*

(1) Cited in Laurent Douzou, *La Résistance française: une histoire périlleuse. Essai d'historiographie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005), 204.

(2) Gérard Namer, *La Commémoration en France, 1944-1982* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1983).

(3) Alfred Wahl, ed., *Mémoire de la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Actes du colloque de Metz, 6–8 octobre 1983* (Metz: Centre de recherche histoire et civilisation de l'Europe occidentale, 1984); François Bédarida, CNRS, and IHTP, *La Mémoire des Français. Quarante ans de commémorations de la Seconde Guerre mondiale (table ronde, 4–5 février 1985, Centre international d'études pédagogiques de Sèvres)* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS/Centre régional de publication de Paris, 1986).

(4) Henry Rousso, "Vichy, le grand fossé," *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 5 (1985): 55–80; Henry Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy de 1944 à nos jours* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990 [1987]. Published in English as *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

(5) Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome*, 10.

(6) Ibid.

(7) Annie Kriegel, "Les intermittences de la mémoire. De l'histoire immédiate à l'Histoire," *Pardès* 9–10 (1989): 248–58, 252.

génocide (Deportation and Genocide).[1] In this research based on her doctoral thesis, the historian sought to demonstrate that in France immediately after the war, there was no clear distinction between "deportation" (a term describing a wide variety of experiences) and the "final solution to the Jewish question." She argues that an all-encompassing concept of deportation obscured the distinctive nature of the Holocaust by conflating Resistance members (who were mostly deported to concentration camps in Germany) and Jews (sent to extermination camps, primarily Auschwitz-Birkenau, where the vast majority were killed on arrival).

Although this initial research did not extend beyond the late 1940s, Annette Wieviorka went on to publish several articles examining the evolution of the memory of the genocide in France over a longer period. She observed the limited manifestations of this memory in the French public sphere during the 1950s and 1960s, with a few exceptions, such as the literary successes of André Schwarz-Bart (Prix Goncourt in 1959 for *The Last of the Just*) and Anna Langfus (who received the same award in 1962 for *The Lost Shore*).[2] In this chronology, a major role was attributed to the repercussions of the Six-Day War (June 5–10, 1967), the event behind the wide publicizing of a "Jewish memory" of the Holocaust in reaction to the Jews' acute perception of the risks to the Israeli population if its army was defeated. This idea was taken up by Joan B. Wolf, who saw 1967 as the start of the French public debate on the Holocaust, to which she devoted a book published in 2004.[3]

The consolidation of the consensus

In the wake of this initial research begun during the 1980s, the idea that postwar France barely acknowledged the genocide of the Jews became established. This phenomenon was explained by various factors: the return to the traditional Jacobin-Republican reluctance to distinguish one group from the rest of the nation, a dominant tendency to regard deportation as an extension of the experience of Resistance fighters, a devaluing of "victims" compared to "heroes" in "the moral economy of recognition,"[4] the wish to bury France's role in the persecution and deportation of the Jews, and the supposed desire of the Jews to reintegrate into French society without dwelling on their painful and tragic experience. It was purportedly only from the 1970s (with the memory of Vichy starting to hit the national headlines and following the works of Robert Paxton),[5] then increasingly in the 1980s and 1990s, that the fate of the Jews during the war and the French state's responsibility for their suffering captured the attention of public opinion. According to this interpretation, the genocide of the Jews (commonly known as the "Shoah" following the release of Claude Lanzmann's film of this name in 1985 and its television broadcast in 1987) entered the public sphere as a new generation reached adulthood, and via political scandals, major trials covered in the media (those of Klaus Barbie, Paul Touvier and Maurice Papon), a new readiness of the public authorities to address the issue, major books and films, and the work of historians. We will return to this period, because it was also when the first works on the memories of the Second World War mentioned above appeared.

(1) Annette Wieviorka, *Déportation et génocide. Entre la mémoire et l'oubli* (Paris: Hachette, 2003 [1992]).

(2) See, among others, Annette Wieviorka, "La construction de la mémoire du génocide en France," *Le Monde juif* 149 (1993): 23–38.

(3) Joan B. Wolf, *Harnessing the Holocaust: The Politics of Memory in France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

(4) Guillaume Piketty, "Économie morale de la reconnaissance. L'Ordre de la Libération au péril de la sortie de Seconde Guerre mondiale," *Histoire@Politique. Politique, culture, société* 3 (2007), http://www.histoire-politique.fr/index.php?numero=03&rub=dossier&item=26.

(5) Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940–1944* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1972).

Alongside the books and articles on the French case, researchers observed that other countries, such as the United States and Great Britain, paid just as little attention to the genocide of the Jews in Europe in the decades immediately following the war.[1] Thus, during the 1990s, research on a wide range of countries converged. A key manifestation of this came in 1996 in a collective work: *The World Reacts to the Holocaust* edited by David Wyman.[2] In this work, David H. Weinberg asserted that, in postwar France, "efforts to discuss or remember the tragic events of the war were ridiculed or suppressed [. . .]. Most disturbing was the refusal to recognize the distinctive nature of the Jewish genocide."[3] As Tony Kushner wrote in 1994, summarizing the convergence of views at the time, "before the 1960s at the earliest, the Holocaust as a self-enclosed entity had not yet entered the general consciousness or memory of the Western world."[4]

Since the establishment of this consensus on the "time of silence,"[5] the subject of the first memories of the Second World War in France has been revisited by Pieter Lagrou and Pierre Laborie, for example, in works published respectively in 2000 and 2011.[6] Re-evaluating the dominant role that *résistancialisme* (resistance-ism) supposedly played in the French postwar memory landscape, the Belgian historian and his French counterpart both de-emphasized it, but both remained convinced about the belated emergence of a specific awareness and understanding of the Holocaust in the public sphere. According to Pieter Lagrou, the two decades after 1945 were characterized by "the marginal attention paid to the fate of the Jewish victims" and even by "their exclusion from patriotic memories and their assimilation into other forms of persecution"[7] (translated from the French version of the work). Pierre Laborie describes "the belated awareness of the genocide of the Jews, of a longstanding indifference toward the persecuted, and of the role that the country played (via the state) by collaborating in the deportation of 76,000 foreign and French Jews."[8]

Thus, until recently, what might be called the first historiography of the memory of the Holocaust mainly presented the early postwar decades as a period of reluctance to dwell on the fate of the Jews during the Second World War. These theories even became established outside of research circles, within the media and school textbooks. For example, in 2012, the official resources from France's Ministry of National Education described the first phase of memory after 1945 using these words:

> It was the need to bandage these wounds that determined the construction of the first memories. Focusing on the national heroization of Free France, the Resistance, and deportation, they were constructed through tales of combat and sacrifice; the (initially forgotten) memory [. . .] of the genocide victims faced with both the initial indescribableness of their suffering and the

(1) Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999).

(2) David Wyman, ed., *The World Reacts to the Holocaust* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

(3) David H. Weinberg, "France," in *The World Reacts to the Holocaust*, ed. David Wyman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 3–44, 20.

(4) Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination*, 2–3.

(5) Nicole Lapierre, "Le cadre référentiel de la Shoah," *Ethnologie française* 37, no. 3 (2007): 475–482, 476.

(6) Pieter Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945–1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), and the French translation by the author, Pieter Lagrou, *Mémoires patriotiques et occupation nazie. Résistants, requis et déportés en Europe occidentale, 1945–1965* (Paris/Brussels: IHTP/Complexe, 2003); Pierre Laborie, *Le Chagrin et le venin. La France sous l'Occupation, mémoire et idées reçues* (Montrouge: Bayard, 2011).

(7) Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation*, 254.

(8) Laborie, *Le Chagrin et le venin*, 234.

will to bury the role that certain French citizens had played in the crime.[1]

Refuting the "myth"

At the end of the 1990s, however, Alon Confino wrote in a note that "the narrative trajectory of Holocaust and World War II memory as one of repression (1950s–60s), awakening (sometime during the 1960s), obsession (the 1970s and after) has an air of predictability"[2] that is somewhat questionable. In fact, this model was soon challenged with regard to the French case. For example, in 2005, Samuel Moyn looked at the 1960s to study the reception of Jean-François Steiner's book, *Treblinka* (1966), in France and examine how it affected the awareness and understanding of the genocide of the Jews.[3] The American historian showed how the controversy unleashed by this bestseller helped to create a clear distinction in people's minds between concentration camps and the extermination camps where huge numbers of Holocaust victims were killed. In 2009, Michael Rothberg examined the "multidirectional" interaction of the memory of the genocide with other layers of memory in the age of decolonization.[4]

Nevertheless, the book that has contributed the most to the ongoing historiographical shift is still François Azouvi's work. This well-researched text aims to "trace the history of the genocide's penetration into the French consciousness"[5] from the end of the war to the 1990s. However, as the title suggests, it pays particular attention to the two decades following the liberation.[6] The author challenges what he calls "the myth of the great silence," meaning the idea (which he refutes) that between the liberation and the start of the 1970s, French society ignored the persecution and genocide of the Jews. To highlight the importance of this period, he situates it within a periodization of Holocaust memory that moves away from the theory of a slow and painful progression from "a traumatic neurosis" to "an obsessional neurosis."[7] Azouvi believes that the French were not so traumatized by the genocide that they shrouded it in silence and denial: "The analysis of what was said, written, and shown in this quarter of a century during which the French supposedly carefully protected themselves, let alone beyond, suggests that the genocide was *never* [emphasized in the original] absent from the French memory."[8]

According to Azouvi, the process by which the French became familiar with the Holocaust began with debates within the small circle of the intellectual elites, then continued in the 1950s with "the acculturation of French opinion"[9] to the event via a long series of novels, accounts, and films. During the 1960s, the genocide started to penetrate beyond the cultural sphere. It crossed the border into the public sphere (the space for debate and criticism within modern societies, as described by Jürgen Habermas), particularly in the wake of

(1) Cited in Thomas Fontaine and Yannis Thanassekos, "Un livre très attendu. *Le Mythe du grand silence. Auschwitz, les Français, la mémoire*, de François Azouvi," *En Jeu. Histoire et mémoires vivantes* 2 (2013): 60–63, 63 (note 1).

(2) Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method," *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (1997): 1386–1403, 1394 (note 21).

(3) Samuel Moyn, *A Holocaust Controversy: The Treblinka Affair in Postwar France* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2005).

(4) Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009). See also Christian Delage, "*Nuit et brouillard*. Un tournant dans la mémoire de la Shoah," *Politix* 61 (2003): 81–94; Sylvie Lindeperg, "*Nuit et brouillard.*" *Un film dans l'histoire* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2007).

(5) Azouvi, *Le Mythe du grand silence*, 186.

(6) Besides the book, see François Azouvi and Maurice Kriegel, "La mémoire française du génocide. Un grand silence?," *Le Débat* 177 (2013): 186–192; Thomas Fontaine and Yannis Thanassekos, "Interview de François Azouvi autour de son ouvrage *Le Mythe du grand silence. Auschwitz, les Français, la mémoire*," *En Jeu. Histoire et mémoires vivantes* 2 (2013): 64–74.

(7) Azouvi, *Le Mythe du grand silence*, 17.

(8) Azouvi, *Le Mythe du grand silence*, 19.

(9) Azouvi, *Le Mythe du grand silence*, 20.

The Deputy, a play by Rolf Hochhuth, which was staged for the first time in France in December 1963. Through its critical portrayal of the papacy's role during the genocide, this play made the event into a question of interest for both Jews and Christians.

As a consequence of this demonstration, Azouvi re-evaluated the former interpretation of the Six-Day War as a matrix, considering that opinion had been largely prepared for the surge of genocide references provoked by this conflict on the side of the defenders of Israel. The final stage in this familiarization was the appropriation of the event by the public authorities, when their representatives embarked upon a process of recognition, while the memories of the Holocaust and of Vichy intersected. "*Opinion*, *public sphere*, *state* [emphasized in the original]: these were the three areas successively penetrated by the memory of an event whose repression had been only very partial and highly localized,"[1] writes the author, summarizing his theory. This is why he proposes viewing the evolutions of this memory like "concentric circles getting larger until they occupy the whole space."[2]

Although Azouvi's work was pioneering in France, it is worth remembering that it was part of a historiographical renewal within an international context, just as the French works in the 1980s and 1990s converged with research on other national spaces. In fact, if we situate *Le Mythe du grand silence* in this wider context, the work no longer looks so "iconoclastic."[3] The author himself states that his title takes inspiration from a book by American historian Hasia Diner, which has become an essential reference for researchers wanting to re-examine the memories of the Holocaust in the postwar years.[4] As one such researcher, David Cesarani, notes, "over the last few years fresh research has challenged the notion that during this phase survivors held their tongues, that little was published in the way of memoirs, that historical research was both sporadic and patchy, and the subject barely figured in films or other mass media."[5] Thus, a new consensus seems to be emerging internationally, as shown by the publication in recent years of collective works and by the organization of conferences often involving researchers examining the French case.[6]

A closer look at the 1980s

The presentation of this historiographical evolution raises questions about the context in which the first works on the memory of the Holocaust were produced. Azouvi highlights the fact that the genocide of the Jews brought, as part of its very essence, the fear of its impossible memorialization, "as if the event itself, in its enormity and its power to shock, immediately generated the conviction that it could never be the subject of a work of memory, that it was doomed to oblivion."[7] This is an interesting hypothesis. However, the context of the 1980s, which Azouvi's book takes into account,[8] surely played a greater role, and at different levels, in the appearance of a first wave of works that were initially so sensitive

(1) Azouvi, *Le Mythe du grand silence*, 21.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Laurent Douzou, "Deux relectures iconoclastes de la mémoire de l'Occupation en France," *Critique* 798 (2013): 889–905.

(4) Azouvi, *Le Mythe du grand silence*, 580–1, note 20. See Hasia R. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945–1962* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

(5) David Cesarani, "How Post-War Britain Reflected on the Nazi Persecution and Mass Murder of Europe's Jews: A Reassessment of Early Responses," *Jewish Culture and History* 12, nos. 1–2 (2010): 95–130, 97.

(6) See David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist, eds., *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence* (London/New York: Routledge, 2012); Regina Fritz, Éva Kovács, and Béla Rásky, eds., *Before the Holocaust Had Its Name: Early Confrontations with the Nazi Mass Murder of the Jews* (Vienna: New Academic Press, 2016).

(7) Azouvi, *Le Mythe du grand silence*, 562.

(8) Azouvi, *Le Mythe du grand silence*, 509–18.

to the silences of the postwar years that they sometimes considered them the overriding trait of memory in this period.

First, those who adhered to this first historiography were contemporaries of Pierre Nora's conceptualization of a term-by-term opposition of history and memory. This view of the two notions as opposites could lead to claims of history being superior to memory in terms of the "veracity" of the events studied or remembered.[1] The approach adopted by pioneers of the study of memories of the Second World War was also strongly reliant on "the idea of a primary 'origin' of which memory is just a distortion."[2] In fact, in their initial attention to "errors of collective memory"[3] (in the words of Marc Bloch), many historians adopted this idea of a deviation analyzed in the light of the "historical truth." Thus, re-examining *The Vichy Syndrome*, Marie-Claire Lavabre emphasized that its author, while recognizing that the event viewed through the lens of memory loses its strictly positivist value, at first sought to measure the observable distance between historical reality and collective representations of the past.[4] Henry Rousso himself states that he tried "to draw attention to the problems created by the *discrepancies* [my emphasis] between real events and their interpretation."[5] In *Déportation et génocide*, Annette Wieviorka used the reality of the facts established by historians (the genocide as a radically specific phenomenon in the history of Nazi violence) as a starting point to measure the observable differences between this historical knowledge and the memory discourses produced about the event in the immediate postwar period.[6]

We undoubtedly also need to situate this approach in a global historiographical context marked by the strong comeback of political history.[7] In turning its attention to memory, the historical discipline initially proposed a study of the political and public uses of the past, rather than adopting a sociological approach that follows Maurice Halbwachs by focusing "on memories and the social conditions that transform them, that authorize or impede their evocation."[8] In this respect, it is telling that an authoritative historiographical overview presents the historical study of memory as "a history of the *uses* [my emphasis] of the past in successive presents."[9] This widespread definition in historiography leads us to separate two forms of memory, distinguishing "individual, emotional memory" from "collective, rational, and even strategic memory,"[10] but with an analytical focus on the latter, whether this involves examining the relationship to the past at work in partisan formations or analyzing local and national memory policies. However, such a focus on the "choice of the past,"[11] tends to promote an instrumental and agonistic view of memory, by exploring its handling by parties who are prepared to distort the past to serve

(1) Pierre Nora, "Entre Mémoire et Histoire. La problématique des lieux," in *Les Lieux de mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997 [1984–1992]), 23–43.

(2) Sarah Gensburger, "Fragments de mémoire collective. Les Justes parmi les Nations," in *La Topographie légendaire des Évangiles en Terre sainte. Étude de mémoire collective*, Maurice Halbwachs (edition prepared by Marie Jaisson) (Paris: PUF, 2008 [1941]), 99–112, 100.

(3) Marc Bloch, "Mémoire collective, tradition et coutume. À propos d'un livre récent," *Revue de Synthèse historique* 118–120 (1925): 73–83, in Marc Bloch, *L'Histoire, la Guerre, la Résistance*, eds. Annette Becker and Étienne Bloch (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 337–346, 343.

(4) Marie-Claire Lavabre, "Du poids et du choix du passé. Lecture critique du syndrome de Vichy," in *Histoire politique et sciences sociales*, eds. Denis Peschanski, Michael Pollak, and Henry Rousso (Brussels: Complexe, 1991), 265–78, 267.

(5) Henry Rousso, *La Hantise du passé. Entretien avec Philippe Petit* (Paris: Textuel, 1998), 29.

(6) Wieviorka, *Déportation et génocide*.

(7) René Rémond, ed., *Pour une histoire politique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1988); Serge Berstein and Pierre Milza, eds., *Axes et méthodes de l'histoire politique* (Paris: PUF, 1998).

(8) Marie-Claire Lavabre, "Michael Pollak et la mémoire collective," in *Michael Pollak. De l'identité blessée à une sociologie des possibles*, eds. Liora Israël and Danièle Voldman (Brussels/Cachan: Complexe/CNRS-IHTP, 2008), 115–26, 123.

(9) Christian Delacroix, François Dosse, and Patrick Garcia, *Les Courants historiques en France, XIXe–XXe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007 [1999]), 549.

(10) Lavabre, "Michael Pollak," 122.

(11) Lavabre, "Du poids et du choix du passé."

their present interests, with these "manipulations" inevitably leading to memory "rivalry" and "wars" between the different tellings of the past, in a competition for material or symbolic resources that are synonymous with recognition.[1]

Interestingly, this "paradigm of strategic memory," deconstructed by Sarah Gensburger based on a reinterpretation of the works of Tzvetan Todorov, Jean-Michel Chaumont, and Paul Ricœur,[2] permeated the first historiography of Holocaust memory particularly strongly. The main authors of this historiography saw the memory of the genocide as a tool that served those who leveraged it, as shown by a few examples from outside France, from the 1990s and early 2000s. For example, Tom Segev studied how in Israel, "over the years, there were those who distorted the heritage of the Holocaust," while others "have used it, toyed with it, traded on it, popularised it, and politicised it."[3] Meanwhile, Peter Novick has proposed examining how, in the United States, "in one period, [Holocaust memory seemed] inappropriate, useless, or even harmful; in another period, appropriate and desirable."[4] Accordingly, it was possible to see the postwar period as a time when the issues being faced meant that the memory of the genocide proved "inappropriate" and was therefore ignored.

The historiographical context was also influential on another level. The historians who were the first to take an interest in the memory of the Holocaust witnessed (and sometimes contributed to) French society's growing recognition of the unique nature of the crimes that the Nazis and their supporters committed against the Jews. The 1980s saw the first French-language publication of Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews* and several major conferences in Paris, such as those organized by the Centre de documentation Juive Contemporaine (CDJC, Contemporary Jewish Documentation Center) in 1979, by the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS, School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences) in 1982, and by the IHTP in 1987.[5] According to François Bédarida, the mid-1970s brought a new phase (but not the beginning, he was careful to emphasize) of French writing about the history of the Holocaust: that of a dynamic development benefiting from the "repercussions on the general public via the media."[7] The aforementioned idea of a deviation might therefore have seemed even more legitimate because the study of the memory of the Holocaust was concomitant with a flood of works about the history of the event itself, with increasing recognition of its radically unique and even (there was heated debate) unparalleled nature.

More generally, outside of the narrow circle of historians, it was during the 1980s and the early 1990s that there was growing recognition in the public sphere of the completely specific nature of the fate suffered by the Jews.[8] Several

(1) See, for example, Pascal Blanchard and Isabelle Veyrat-Masson, eds., *Les Guerres de mémoires. La France et son histoire : enjeux politiques, controverses historiques, stratégies médiatiques* (Paris: La Découverte, 2008).

(2) Sarah Gensburger, "Les figures du Juste et du résistant et l'évolution de la mémoire historique française de l'Occupation," *Revue française de science politique* 52, nos. 2–3 (2002): 291–322. See Todorov, *Les Abus de la mémoire*; Chaumont, *La Concurrence des victimes*; Ricœur, *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli.*

(3) Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 11.

(4) Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 5.

(5) Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961); André Kaspi, Serge Klarsfeld, and Georges Wellers, eds., *La France et la question juive, 1940–1944. Actes du colloque du Centre de documentation juive contemporaine, 10 au 12 mars 1979* (Paris: Sylvie Messinger, 1981); EHESS, *L'Allemagne nazie et le génocide juif* (Paris: Gallimard/Éditions du Seuil, 1985); François Bédarida, ed., *La Politique nazie d'extermination (journées d'étude organisées par l'IHTP, 11–13 décembre 1987)*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 1987).

(6) On the first steps of the historiography of the genocide in France, see (among others) Johannes Heuman, *The Holocaust and French Historical Culture, 1945–65* (Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

(7) Cited in Azouvi, *Le Mythe du grand silence*, 514.

(8) On this context, see Valérie Igounet, *Histoire du négationnisme en France* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000); Wolf, *Harnessing the Holocaust*; François Azouvi, "Le

factors combined to establish this presence of the Holocaust in the French public sphere. These included television (Marvin Chomsky's *Holocaust*), cinema (Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*), literary accounts (the new French edition of Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man*, which this time gained recognition and acclaim), judicial news (the Barbie and Touvier trials, and the developments in the René Bousquet, Jean Leguay, and Maurice Papon affairs), and the memory policy actions of the public authorities, all in a period marked by the need to fight negationism and anti-Semitism and by the rise of the Front national (National Front) party on the French political scene.

However, this political-memorial context also undoubtedly influenced the retrospective belief in an initial postwar inability or reluctance to acknowledge the uniqueness of the genocide. Moreover, this perception served the interests of those who sought to make the memory of the Holocaust a "public problem" and who, according to Azouvi, used the "narrative of the supposed belated recognition of the genocide thanks to the intrepid action of the defenders of the Jewish memory" to do this.[1] Directly or indirectly, historians could be stakeholders in this legitimating discourse, as argued by Sébastien Ledoux, who emphasizes their entanglement in "interdiscursive processes constantly mixing [. . .] scientific, political, media, legal, and cultural discourses."[2]

Critical assessment

But does this mean we should invalidate the first historiographical layer, to which the surely too monolithic concept of "silence" alone does not always do justice? And what are we to make of the renewal by Azouvi and other researchers, particularly outside of France? The primary merit of these researchers is undoubtedly that they complicate our understanding of how memory was configured in the postwar years, which can no longer be characterized solely in terms of an irresistible inclination to "forget." In this regard, Azouvi's uncovering of the intense and early reflections by Catholic and Protestant intellectuals and his attention to the controversy unleashed by the play *The Deputy* are particularly important for our understanding of the French case. His work also invites us to move away from a sometimes rather teleological interpretation based on metaphorical references to a psychoanalytically inspired interpretative framework, whose use on the collective level presents heuristic issues. Sébastien Ledoux rightly states that this interpretation "strengthened the process of essentializing and making obvious the memories of certain events," despite the fact that "it is not the 'memories' of historical events that become evident to us via a progressive and inevitable unveiling."[3]

We can, however, wonder whether Azouvi himself escaped this tendency, in that he proposes interpreting the entry of the genocide into the French public and memorial sphere as a "*normal* [emphasized in the original]"[4] process. This term gives the phenomenon in question a potentially ahistorical and therefore problematic linearity. In this regard, Pierre Vidal-Naquet was correct when he wrote that "to understand historical reality, sometimes we need to *not know the ending* [emphasized in the original]."[5] In the original postface to the new edition of his work, however, Azouvi responds to this criticism, recognizing that he "did not

génocide dans la sphère de l'État," in *Le Mythe du grand silence*, 361–518; Floriane Schneider, *Shoah, dans l'atelier de la mémoire. France, 1987 à aujourd'hui* (Lormont: Le Bord de l'Eau, 2013); Sébastien Ledoux, *Le Devoir de mémoire. Une formule et son histoire* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2016).

(1) Azouvi, *Le Mythe du grand silence*, 568–9.

(2) Sébastien Ledoux, "Silence et oubli de la mémoire de la Shoah. Une 'illusion' historiographique?" *En Jeu. Histoire et mémoires vivantes* 2 (2013): 76–93, 82.

(3) Sébastien Ledoux, "Écrire une histoire du 'devoir de mémoire,'" *Le Débat* 170 (2012): 175–85, 182.

(4) Azouvi, *Le Mythe du grand silence*, 19.

(5) Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Les Juifs, la mémoire et le présent* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995 [1991–1995]), 87.

do enough to mark the discontinuity in the process of the reception of the genocide in French society"[1] and the turning point of the 1970s and 1980s.

Other reservations can be expressed regarding the progress brought by this second historiography of Holocaust memory. First, in recognizing and considering its contributions, we should not lose sight of the specific nature of the years preceding the 1970s. On this matter, Henry Rousso rightly points out that "in many European countries, sensibilities of the time were not as indifferent to the genocide committed against the Jews as has been said in recent decades. It is nonetheless true that there is no comparison possible between the place occupied by the memory of the Holocaust in the collective European consciousness since the 1990s and that which it occupied in the 1950s."[2] Perhaps, then, what distinguished the first two decades after the war was that several types of discourse on the Holocaust coexisted, whereas the more recent period seems to have been characterized by a tendency toward standardization in the production of discourse on this issue.

In this regard, it is important to remember the many powerful voices (greatly highlighted by the first historiography of Holocaust memory) that struggled or refused to capture the distinctiveness of the fate of the Jews. As François Azouvi himself states, we cannot neglect the existence and importance at this time of "discourses dominated by confusion and conflation." The author of *Le Mythe du grand silence* emphasizes that we need to avoid "going too far in the other direction by only remembering those that see the genocide in terms of its unprecedented nature."[3] On this point, it is interesting to look at the nuanced position adopted by David Cesarani. In an article concerning the British case, he wanted to reveal the many discourses in the postwar period that explicitly highlighted the radical and specific character of the genocide of the Jews, but he also sought to analyze the writings on Nazi criminality that, at the same time, did not acknowledge the uniqueness of this genocide. For this reason, he emphasized the need to understand "the curious phenomenon whereby 'the Holocaust' was simultaneously present and absent"[4] within the same society, depending on who was speaking about it and their reception in various groups and circles.

With this in mind, it is essential to situate the early discourses about the Holocaust revealed by Azouvi up to the end of the 1960s in a French memory context dominated by numerous powerful references to other aspects of the Second World War. These include, first of all, the glorification of the Resistance fighters driven by a "patriotic memory" (in the words of Pieter Lagrou), within what Johann Michel calls a "memory regime of national unity."[5] In fact, Azouvi's postface in the new edition of his book reflects on this point, drawing on Denis Peschanski's concept of a "regime of memoriality," in order to emphasize that "there is no doubt that in the aftermath of the war and into the 1970s, it was the heroic memory that had the upper hand."[6]

It is also important to acknowledge that, in such a context, the "countless traces of the early reception of the genocide"[7] may have lacked relevance, and therefore (possibly) resonance, within French society. Although undeniably tenacious, did these multiple evocations actually have only slight echoes among the general

(1) Azouvi, *Le Mythe du grand silence*, 564.

(2) Rousso, *The Latest Catastrophe*, 104. For a more direct critique of Azouvi's book on this point, see also Rousso, *Face au passé*, 39–41.

(3) Azouvi and Kriegel, "La mémoire française du génocide," 188.

(4) Cesarani, "How Post-War Britain Reflected on the Nazi Persecution," 124.

(5) Johann Michel, *Gouverner les mémoires. Les politiques mémorielles en France* (Paris: PUF, 2010), 76.

(6) Azouvi, *Le Mythe du grand silence*, 565.

(7) Azouvi, *Le Mythe du grand silence*, 568.

public, compared to other memories and other narratives? To answer this question, we need to re-examine the scales, tools, and concepts used by historians to explore the shared representations within a society and to separate dominant discourses and minority accounts while capturing and understanding both. In this respect, I believe that the debate on the first memory of the Holocaust in France remains open, and that Azouvi deserves credit for having powerfully reignited it.

Beyond the debate?

There is another observation that needs to be made here. Despite the fundamental disagreement between historians who have described the postwar years as a time of silence on the Holocaust and those who, in contrast, see a series of clues that there was early and profound recognition of the event, their works have more in common than is immediately apparent. In fact, both sets of research are dominated by what we call the "paradigm of emergence." They seek first of all to date the appearance or emergence of the Holocaust in the national public sphere and therefore to detect periods of low or high intensity in the economy of remembering, like a kind of barometer that can measure memory by the degree to which it is publicized, broadcast, or exhibited in the public sphere. To do this, the authors attempt to determine the "turning points"—such as the Eichmann trial in 1961, the controversies surrounding the play *The Deputy* in 1963–1964 or the book *Treblinka* in 1966, and the Six-Day War in 1967—from which the representation of the Holocaust reached its current form: that of an event that was fundamentally distinct from the rest of Nazi criminality.

Thus, while some believe that the genocide of the Jews was initially lost in a sweeping understanding of deportation and a unidimensional view of the "concentrationary universe" (David Rousset), others emphasize discourses that recognized its uniqueness from immediately after the war. This observation does not apply only to French historiography, as shown by the widespread usage among English-speaking historians of the words *turning point*, *awareness*, and *consciousness* to describe the moment when a given society fully understood the true nature and significance of the Jews' fate during the Second World War. The aim is therefore to trace, initially on the national level, the genealogy of the representations of the Holocaust produced by the country's elites in a public sphere often reduced to the world of books, cultural works, and major newspapers.

There are several comments that could be made about this type of approach. On the one hand, the focus on those who generate the discourses studied is often accompanied by a difficulty understanding the sphere of reception and assimilation, evoked at best by an author's book sales or by film viewing figures. Azouvi himself recognizes this limitation when he writes that "something like a French library of the genocide began to exist from the late 1950s, if not *in the minds of readers, which I cannot scan* [my emphasis], at least in the minds of critics."[1] On the other hand, the focus often falls on imprecise subjects, which creates the risk of a somewhat disembodied study of memory phenomena. One significant example is that despite disagreeing on the question of the French silence regarding the genocide of the Jews between the liberation and the late 1960s, Joan B. Wolf and François Azouvi use similar vocabulary to define their subject: Wolf refers to "Holocaust consciousness in France" and "national consciousness,"[2] while Azouvi uses the terms "consciousness of the French" and "French opinion."[3]

The adoption of the national scale and the almost exclusive attention given to the

(1) Azouvi, *Le Mythe du grand silence*, 225.
(2) Wolf, *Harnessing the Holocaust*, 192 and 193.
(3) Azouvi, *Le Mythe du grand silence*, 13 and 20.

discourses disseminated in the public sphere by intellectual, cultural, and political authorities give access to a certain layer of memory. However, they make it difficult to study at ground level the concrete interactions at work in memory activity, actors' positions in relation to it and according to it, the interweaving and interpenetration of the levels of expression of memory, the materiality of the practices involved and the strength of the emotions aroused, and finally how memory is socially inscribed in groups and its functions within them. After all, in the case that interests us, social history must complement the approaches to memory often seen in political and cultural history.[1] Therefore, the study of French memories of the Holocaust in the postwar period remains a fertile subject of research for historians. However, as in any field of research, they would benefit from a renewal of their investigations, their sources, and their methodological and conceptual toolkit.

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Abstract

In the period between the liberation of France and the 1970s, the genocide of the Jews was barely remembered in the French public sphere. This claim, made by what might be called the first historiography of the memory of the Holocaust, was countered by François Azouvi in his 2012 book Le Mythe du grand silence *(The Myth of the Great Silence), in which he studies the early memory of the Holocaust in postwar France. The publication of the revised and expanded edition of Azouvi's book gives us an opportunity to reconsider this recent and divisive discussion in contemporary history and memory studies. This article presents and contextualizes this controversy while highlighting the similarities between the two interpretations, in order to propose ways of refreshing the discussion on the "first memory" of the Holocaust.*

Keywords

France, memory, Holocaust, historiography, François Azouvi

(1) See, for example, Jean-Pierre Rioux, "La mémoire collective," in *Pour une histoire culturelle*, eds. Jean-Pierre Rioux and Jean-François Sirinelli (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1997), 325–353; Philippe Poirrier, *Les Enjeux de l'histoire culturelle* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004), 199–216.