The French experience of war and occupation, as remembered and commemorated during the Mitterrand years, 1981-1995.

Ph.D thesis
University of Glasgow,

ABSTRACT

My thesis assesses the state of the French collective memory of the Second World War, during the period from May 1981 until July 1995 (when the new president, Jacques Chirac, made his first public speech on the topic). It deals with the major themes thrown up by the intersection of subject matter and time scale, and also discusses the nature of collective memory and commemoration more generally. Particular attention is paid to the series of commemorations marking the fiftieth anniversaries of the crucial episodes of the war years. These fell between 1989 and 1995, roughly coinciding with François Mitterrand's second *septennat*. The form and content of the commemorations themselves, the public reaction to them, and the peripheral discussions they stimulated, are all analysed, in many cases with input from those involved in organising or coordinating them.

First of all the commemorations that took place during my period are seen from the perspective of a "national narrative" that organises and interprets the common past in such a way that it can foster a sense of national unity and belonging. This is the traditional mode of commemoration within the nation-state. However, undermining that approach were the harsh facts of war and occupation, which set Frenchman against Frenchman in a re-enactment of an intermittent "guerre franco-française". The "national narrative" was also threatened by a sense of guilt over the consequences of Vichy's policy of collaboration with the Nazis. Where once that guilt was suppressed or argued into abeyance, during our period it could no longer be avoided.

That process went hand-in-hand with the resurgence of those memories that had always been seen as potentially detrimental to national unity. Foremost among these was a specifically Jewish memory which was no longer willing to be coy about

apportioning blame and responsibility. The state's representatives, and France's collective conscience, had to take account of a new balance of power in which communities within the nation had increased their power and influence.

More pressure was being applied to the national commemorative framework from alternative ways of thinking about war and its remembrance. It was becoming more common to view the war in terms of human rights and the rights of minorities, rather than in terms of national sovereignty. Also, war remembrance was often seen as a tool in the service of European integration and international cooperation rather than national identity.

Finally, the state had to accept that it did not have the means to determine the composition of French collective memory. Often it could only give or withhold an official seal of approval to initiatives and trends instigated by pressure groups and fomented by the press and the media.

For my parents and Godparents

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all those who agreed to answer my questions during my research: Serge Barcellini, Jean-Noël Jeanneney, Michel Charasse, Rita Thalmann, Henry Bulawko, and the representatives of the different associations of deportees, POWs and ex-servicemen. I am also grateful for the cooperation of the staff at the *Institut Charles de Gaulle* and at the INA, and to Chantal Barry at Sciences-Po for wangling a "blue library card". I am indebted, especially, to Jean Kahn at the *Institut François Mitterrand*, for giving me access to his records and for explaining what it all meant.

PREFACE

By the 1990s it had become commonplace to point out that the French collective memory of war and occupation had changed since 1945. The general consensus was that Ophuls' 1971 film *Le Chagrin et la Pitié* marked a watershed, after which the taboos and myths that had taken hold since Liberation, or to be more accurate since de Gaulle's return to power in 1958, could and should be brought down to size. It was widely accepted, too, that during the 1980s and 1990s the iconoclastic impulse had become rather tyrannical, and that during this period "les années noires" were more present in the public imagination than they had ever been.

While many commentators simply made this observation in passing before moving on to the thrust of their argument, others made a genuine effort to analyse the phenomenon, and to explain why it had occurred. Thus, among the huge number of works dealing historically with aspects of the war years, there appeared a number of books and articles analysing how those aspects were commemorated,[1] and, at the third remove, a smaller number dealing with the whole issue of commemoration and collective memory of that period. Their approach might be described as meta-historical, in that they were not dealing with the events themselves but with the way in which those events had been recounted subsequently. Pre-eminent in this last group was Henry Rousso, whose books and articles continuously returned to these themes. *Le syndrome*

In this category I would place the CNRS's collection of studies entitled *40 ans de commémorations de la deuxième guerre mondiale* (Paris: éditions du CNRS, 1986), Gérard Namer's *La commémoration en France de 1945 à nos jours*, and the many studies of specific commemorations, such as Sarah Farmer's *Oradour: Arrêt sur mémoire* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1994), Nicole Racine-Furlaud's article, 'Mémoire du 18 juin 1940', based on a paper delivered at the commemorative conference of 1990 (see bibliography); or Rémy Desquesnes' articles on the D-Day anniversaries in *Contemporary French Civilisation*, vol.19, n°2 (1995) (referred to in chapter three of this thesis). And, casting its immense shadow on all of these works, is Pierre Nora's *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984-1992), the definitive study of a nation's relationship with its own past.

de Vichy,[2] published in 1987, was the first attempt to chart the evolution of France's national wartime narrative from the 1940s to the 1980s. In 1994 Rousso joined forces with Eric Conan to produce *Vichy: un passé qui ne passe pas*,[3] in which there was palpable exasperation at the inability of France to "get over" Vichy. The previous year, Henri Amouroux had published *La page n'est pas encore tournée*,[4] which framed a similar message. Amouroux made his point even more bluntly in 1998, when he published *Pour en finir avec Vichy* (Paris: Robert Laffont), whose title needs no explanation.

However, while many of these authors were astute in putting their finger on the *zeitgeist*, there were a number of gaps. In particular, the relationship between, on the one hand, specific instances of commemoration, and, on the other, that elusive set of received ideas and half-remembered facts known as "collective memory", was seldom addressed fully. Detailed studies of commemorative events rarely took on board the question of how they related to collective memory, while philosophical musings on collective memory rarely stopped to consider the impact of specific commemorative ceremonies, speeches, and parades.

An exception to this rule was Serge Barcellini, who directed the commemorative arm of the French ex-servicemen's ministry from 1981 to 1993. He was preoccupied with the way in which commemoration expressed and impacted upon collective (in this case national) memory and identity. His position gave him valuable insights into the procedures by which the state tried to frame and contain collective appreciations of past conflicts. Barcellini published a number of articles before undertaking, with Annette

[2] Paris: Seuil, 1987.
[3] Paris: Gallimard, 1994.
[4] Paris: Robert Laffont, 1993.

Wieviorka, a systematic inventory of French memorials of World War Two entitled *Passant, souviens-toi*,[5] which was published in 1995.

Yet it was difficult for someone working for an official body to form a completely balanced view of the situation, and to comment objectively on the role of the state. This thesis, then, is first and foremost an attempt to analyse the relationship between the common past as it is expressed in official commemorative discourse and the common past as it exists in people's minds. The question that underpins the thesis is, is it possible to express the collective memory of a hugely complex war, and if so, what is the true expression of it? Is it most faithfully expressed by commemorative ceremonies, by the media, by historians, or does any attempt at expression traduce its true nature? Did these means of expression evolve during our period (1981-1995), and, if so, how did that affect the way the common past was perceived?

This implies, first of all, a consideration of what collective memory is, and also a consideration of what commemoration is, and what it is for. This reflection forms the first chapter of the following study. The subsequent chapters are divided into different themes, but they all feature analysis of the commemorations themselves alongside manifestations of attitudes to the commemorated events. My primary sources, then, are accounts, descriptions or recordings of the commemorations themselves. Secondary sources are any documents which, from a more detached, philosophical standpoint, consider the wider issues involved in the act of remembering a past event collectively. However, both primary and secondary sources can take the same form: books, articles in the press and in periodicals, television programmes, interviews with the parties concerned, opinion polls. Some of these sources attain a higher level of detachment by dint of their being British or American.

[5] Paris: Plon, 1995.

Opinion polls are of course a contentious source to use in scholarly studies, for a number of reasons. Most obviously, the wording of the question, and of the choices available, can have a significant influence on the responses elicited. Another problem lies in what Alfred Grosser has called the "terrible dichotomy" which demands that, in the end, these surveys produce a yes/no or a for/against division.[6] Thus those who agree "a little" with the statement are herded into the "yes" camp, while those who disagree mildly are classed alongside those who disagree wholeheartedly. This *modus operandi* neglects the fact that those who agree tentatively are often much closer to those who disagree tentatively than those who agree completely. Yet, for the sake of the argument, this fact is ignored when the results are presented. In view of these problems, opinion polls are used with caution in the following study. They are used only in conjunction with other sources, and, where possible, several polls dealing with the same issue are used for comparison. That said, we have not yet devised a better method of finding out what the general public thinks about specific issues, and poll results can be useful in confirming attitudes suggested by other methods of analysis, especially where several polls give similar results. If due caution is exercised, they can make a valid contribution.

The period covered by this study runs from 1981 until 1995, that is to say from François Mitterrand's election victory until Jacques Chirac's speech at the Vél' d'hiv' on 16 July 1995, in which he officially recognised French culpability for crimes committed against Jews. It seems pertinent, therefore, to point out that this is not another biographical study of Mitterrand the soldier turned Vichyite turned Resistance hero. Certainly, the fact that there were question marks over the president's war record had an impact on the issues discussed, but that war record in itself is not our main concern. Rather, the period was chosen primarily because of the series of major fiftieth

[6] *Les identités difficiles* (Paris: Presses de Sciences-Po, 1996).

anniversaries which fell between 1989 and 1995. These gave rise to commemorations on an unprecedented scale, with the inevitable debates about the past that significant anniversaries spark off. Quite simply, much more was written and spoken about the war years than ever before.

Also, one could argue that the new post-1981 governing ethos encompassed a different attitude to the remembrance of war, and to related issues. There was certainly less attachment to the Gaullian myth of unified, heroic resistance, and to the French tradition of using "la France" to denote an ideal, rather than a real entity. Instead of ignoring what had been happening since *Le Chagrin et la pitié*, the new administration was more inclined to deal with it head on. Indeed, Ophuls' film was broadcast for the first time a few months after the socialist victory.

The new administration was characterised, too, by a *droit-de-l'hommiste* sensibility which implied a preoccupation with the rights of France's ethnic and religious minorities. This was bound to have a bearing on collective memory, since some of these minorities were pushing for more recognition of their specific experience of war and occupation, and found that the political climate was suddenly more favourable. Finally, the socialist government introduced measures which liberalised television and radio in France. These measures had a significant impact on the relationship between collective memory and the state. Put simply, the state could no longer rely on a compliant media to put its message across, and to avoid the controversial issues.

In this changing climate the generation that had lived through war and occupation was disappearing, and was putting the finishing touches to the version of the past it wanted to leave behind. This set the stage for a "bataille de mémoire" in which the different parties tried to ensure that their version would be accepted as the definitive

one, or that their experience would remain, or become, an integral part of the collective memory. There was, then, ample scope for analysis of the complex issues surrounding collective memory and commemoration of the war years.

CHAPTER ONE

DOES THE PAST MATTER?

"Les souvenirs sont nos forces. Ils dissipent les ténèbres. Ne laissons jamais s'effacer les anniversaires mémorables. Quand la nuit essaie de revenir, il faut allumer les grandes dates comme on allume des flambeaux."

-Victor Hugo

War and Occupation: a fragmented memory

Although the immediate focus of the following study is the period during which François Mitterrand was president of France, the subject matter - collective remembrance of war and occupation - clearly demands a longer view. It is apposite, at times, to compare and contrast commemoration of the events with the events themselves, and also to compare commemoration during our period with commemoration of the same episodes in earlier times, that is to say between the end of the war and Mitterrand's election victory in 1981. But as a starting point, it is useful to go back further, and compare France's experience, and the memory of that experience, from 1939 to 1945 to its experience from 1914 to 1918.

For one of the first things that must be said about commemorations of the Second World War in France is that they differ significantly from those marking the previous world war of 1914-18, even if many of the outward forms - wreaths laid at cenotaphs or memorials, solemn remembrance of heroic sacrifice, public celebration of victory - remain largely in use. The fundamental difference is that, broadly speaking, there exists a single, undisputed French national memory of the Great War (even if that memory

includes regret at the futility of all the killing), whereas there are a plethora of distinct memories subdividing the national memory of World War Two. One of the major themes of this study will be the manner in which collective forms of remembrance have attempted to deal with that fragmentation.

Initially, the French state did its utmost to "nationalise" collective memory of the war years in France. This entailed transposing the unanimity of the Great War onto World War Two. De Gaulle, especially, did not see the Second World War as radically different from the First. For him, the two conflicts marked the beginning and the end of a "thirty years war" which France had fought against German imperialism. In 1945 de Gaulle organised a grand ceremony during which the two wars were symbolically linked together: fifteen coffins bearing the remains of World War Two heroes were brought together at the tomb of the unknown soldier - symbol *par excellence* of selfless sacrifice for the fatherland - before being laid to rest at Mont Valérien, shrine to "la France combattante". In 1964, during de Gaulle's second spell as president, a double anniversary was celebrated: the fiftieth anniversary of the battle of the Marne, and the twentieth anniversary of the Liberation. Also in 1964, the ex-servicemen's ministry produced a film entitled *Trente ans d'histoire, 1914-1944*.[1]

It may seem odd, also, that a French experience involving so little combat should have given rise to so much rhetoric exalting "la France combattante". (The term was employed in order to bring together the London Free French, the *maquis* and the regular army under one banner, alongside all the soldiers who had defended France throughout history.) Yet in one sense this is a natural reaction. The humiliating defeat of 1940 was attributed in part to the pacifism that took hold after the First World War, a pacifism that propagated the idea that all war was futile and evil. In the 1930s the army did not

[1] Serge Barcellini in 'Resistance et mémoire, d'Auschwitz à Sarajevo. Actes du colloque de Lyon, octobre 1992', I, ed. by Emile Malet (Paris: Hachette, 1993), p.170.

have the unequivocal backing of the people and politicians that it had traditionally enjoyed. After 1945, then, France's leaders, de Gaulle foremost among them, wanted to ensure that the nation's capacity for self-defence should never again be undermined in this way. France was indebted to its fighting men and women, and they would always be indispensable, militarily and politically. If there was one thing that had to be avoided in the future, it was another military invasion of French territory. Hence, the policy of "independence", the well-equipped army, the "force de frappe", the culture of military grandeur, and the glorification of "le monde combattant".[2]

Despite such rhetoric, the discourse of a continuation of the *union sacrée* in defence of the nation simply did not ring true for the Second World War. The First World War was, for all its enormity, a straightforward fight between sovereign nations over territory, wealth and status. Tilly's observation that "war makes the state (and the state makes war)" can be applied readily to France's experience from 1914-1918.[3] The nation-state emerged from the conflict free of many of the divisions that had plagued it beforehand – or so it seemed. There were rough edges to the much-vaunted unity, but the indisputable contribution of the "poilus" to the defence of the homeland provided a stabilising factor. Memorials to the Great War all looked the same, and were distributed uniformly throughout the country. There was no distinctive socialist, or conservative, or Catholic, or Jewish, or provincial, or Parisian memory.

However, the nature of France's predicament during the next war was such that its people were divided into an unusually large and diverse number of distinct categories, each with its own experience and consequently its own memory. It brought ideological elements into play which cut across national frontiers, and which, in France, opened wounds that would not be easily healed. In the preface to their book on memorials of the

[2] See Robert Frank, 'La mémoire empoisonnée', in *La France des années noires*, 2 vols, ed. by Jean-Pierre Azéma and François Bédarida (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1993).

Second World War,[4] Serge Barcellini and Annette Wieviorka explained that they felt compelled to use the expression "lieux du souvenir" instead of the more common "lieux de mémoire", because they considered that the latter had overtones of coherence and unity which did not fit their subject matter. This subject matter was, they said, particularly atomised and fragmentary, and merited a special approach. They judged, in other words, that the title of a work spanning every aspect of the collective memory of France - Pierre Nora's *Lieux de Memoire* - was too narrow for a work covering the memory of a episode that lasted five years!

Their approach may of course be questioned like any other, but it serves to illustrate the perplexing diversity of collective memories of the last war. A non-exhaustive inventory would have to include Vichy officials, economic collaborators, "attentistes", members of the different interior resistance movements, de Gaulle's Free French, deportees, prisoners of war, hostages, STO workers in Germany,[5] "malgré-nous" from Alsace and Lorraine, and volunteers who formed the Charlemagne division of the Waffen SS.[6] And the single category of deportees, for instance, could be subdivided: after the war there were at least six different former deportees associations, each containing its own blend of communist or Gaullist resisters, Jews, hostages, and so on.[7] In Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris, there are nine different deportation memorials, corresponding to the different concentration and extermination camps.

---

[3] Quoted in Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Penguin: London, 1991), p.27.
[4] *Passant, souviens-toi* (Paris: Plon, 1995).
[5] Between June 1942 and July 1944, 732 626 workers went off to Germany under the *Service du travail obligatoire*.
[6] Around 7000 Frenchmen fall into this last category. Jacques Doriot, notably, won the Iron Cross for his bravery on the Eastern Front.
[7] These were the FNDIRP (*Fédération nationale des déportés internés, résistants et patriotes*), the FNDIR (*Fédération nationale des déportés internés de la Résistance*), the UNADIF (*Union nationale des associations de déportés et d'internés et familles*), the FIAP (*Fédération internationale des anciens prisonniers politiques*), the ANFROM (*Association nationale des familles de résistants et otages morts pour la France*) and the ADIR (*Association des déportées internées de la Résistance*).

During our period "l'oubli" was conceived of as a danger to humanity, and "la mémoire" (which sometimes translates as "memory", sometimes as "remembrance") as an end in itself, something that had to be defended at all costs (more details in chapter six). There was certainly no shortage of battalions willing come to its defence. The extent to which those battalions were capable of pulling in the same broad direction is another matter. On 7 March 1993 the *Journal Officiel* carried the decree establishing the new national commemoration of Vichy's "antisemitic and racist crimes and persecutions". Article Two dealt with the composition of a "comité national" whose task would be to defend the memory of these misdeeds. Clause three provided for the inclusion on the committee of no fewer than nineteen "représentants des principales organisations qui ont pour objet d'entretenir le souvenir des victimes des persécutions racistes et antisémites et la mémoire de l'internement et de la déportation". On the one hand, the proliferation of so many associations was in itself an argument "for memory" that could not easily be ignored. On the other, this facet of war memory had been divided up into so many different protectorates that all but the uninitiated risked losing their way completely.

Whereas in the aftermath of the war the diverse associations had devoted much of their energy to practical problems such as official status, pensions and allowances, as time wore on memory became the number one priority. The race was on to leave a mark on the memorial territory, permanently if possible. At the close of our period, the site of the former internment camp at Drancy, for example, was bristling with plaques and monuments, erected by different associations to commemorate different aspects of a phenomenon that was itself only one of many aspects of the war. At Drancy the inventory was impressive: there was a sculpture with inscription, a "wagon-témoin", a

"conservatoire historique",[8] and no fewer than six memorial plaques, commemorating, respectively, the victims of racist and antisemitic persecution, the route of an escape tunnel, the poet Max Jacob, the British troops held at Drancy for a time, the Jews interned there prior to deportation, and, finally, the other prisoners of war who passed through the camp.[9]

Defeat and occupation gave rise to a situation in which groups and individuals were forced to make complex political and moral choices, or to accept an ambiguous role composed of a number of variables; it produced the diverse collective traditions already mentioned, and also a large number of *individual* heroes, villains and martyrs. De Gaulle, Moulin, Pétain, Laval, Touvier, Papon, Aubrac, St. Exupéry, Mitterrand, Marchais: each of these household names represents a distinct experience and a distinct tradition. Even more significant is the number of memorials, usually plaques, dedicated to individuals who are not at all well known. For World War One there are very few memorials to individuals. It was the war of *collective* sacrifice, the war of the *unknown* soldier.

Some of the diverse experiences of World War Two were complimentary and reconcilable. The memory of people who were taken hostage and executed by the Germans was generally subsumed within the memory of the Resistance, for example. (This process had the double merit of turning death into heroic martyrdom, and swelling the ranks of the Resistance). Others, such as membership of the *milice* and imprisonment in an internment camp, were deeply contradictory. Plainly, finding a method of integrating all these parts into a homogeneous whole in a synthesised national memory was always going to be fraught with difficulties. Therein lies the

[8] Opened in 1989.
[9] There is now a website devoted to Drancy.

problematic but by the same token intriguing nature of the relationship between the French and this aspect of their past.

In contrast to World War One, then, the French have been unable to settle on a durable official memory of *les années noires* with the capacity to satisfy popular memory. Symptomatically, the date of a national day of commemoration has never been entirely consensual, unlike Armistice Day. The anniversary of the end of the war in Europe, on 8 May, cannot be said to have captured the imagination of the nation in the same way as 11 November. Valérie Giscard d'Estaing even decided to remove its official status in 1975. Such a decision would have been unthinkable for Armistice Day. The unpopularity of his measure could be taken as proof that the French were firmly attached to this commemoration; but this would be to neglect a welter of complicating factors - opposition to Giscard's quest for a symbol of Franco-German reconciliation, for example - allied to the simple fact that people rarely react positively to state interference in "their" national holidays. Although the Mitterrand administration reinstated the 8 May as a *fête nationale*, this date has had to compete with other, more populist, anniversaries, like those of the Normandy landings, and of course Paris's liberation and local liberations, as well as more poignant occasions such as Deportation Day or the Vél' d'Hiv' commemorations.

National memory and identity under pressure

In addition to the centrifugal forces inherent in the events of 1939-45, the idea of the nation was becoming less sacred in Mitterrand's France. It was no longer the uncontested reference point for collective identity. Ethnic, religious and other "differences" within French society were being proclaimed vocally, and the government

had to take account of the trend. In particular, as we shall see in chapter five, French Jews were insisting more vehemently than ever on the distinctiveness of their experience during the Second World War. This had important consequences for the forms of commemoration that had traditionally been used.

The rise of an ideology based not on national sovereignty but on universal human rights brought more pressure to bear on the "national narrative" approach to war and occupation (chapter six). The rights of individuals and minorities featured prominently in the discourse of the newly empowered socialists, and France ratified the European convention safeguarding "human rights and fundamental dignities" in 1981. Human rights was also one of the media's favoured topics. An important consequence was that France's experience of the Second World War was increasingly viewed as a struggle to safeguard basic human rights rather than as a question of national independence and dignity.

Similarly, the accelerated drive towards further European integration, powered by the "Franco-German motor", meant that German sensibilities had to be considered when war was remembered. More than ever, the war was reinvented as a symbol of the progress made in the relationship between the two countries, and commemorative speeches put forward the European project as an antidote to further conflict. It was no longer appropriate to talk of "les martyrs français" on one hand, and "la barbarie allemande" on the other.

Another striking feature of the collective memory of World Two, highlighted by most studies of commemorative practice, is the dominance of "le fait local":[10] people have felt more comfortable remembering events and protagonists directly related to the experience of their commune or region. This is a topic which has produced hundreds of

[10] *La mémoire des Français: 40 ans de commémorations de la 2ème guerre mondiale*, ed. by CNRS (Paris: éditions du CNRS, 1986), p.49.

books and articles, so it would be unwise to include it in a study of *national* forms of commemoration and remembrance. However, it is worth recording that the local dimension constituted another strain on the national synthesis. During the Second World War, different regions found themselves in vastly different predicaments. France was divided territorially, not only by the line drawn between *zone occupée* and *zone libre*, but by politico-regional affinities that can often be traced back to the Revolution. Some areas were barely affected by war and occupation; others have become synonymous with it. These regions in particular are sometimes reluctant to play along with a national synthesis that may sit awkwardly with local experience. *France 3*'s commemorative television series "La France libérée" attempted to do justice to the diversity of experience by devoting a programme to one each of twelve regions. According to the makers of the series, they had started from the principle that "il n'y a pas *une*, mais *des* France libérées".[11]

Indicative of this phenomenon is the lack of a *national* resistance memorial or museum, in spite of the proliferation of local and regional ones. (The national memorial at Mont-Valérien is dedicated to "la France combattante", not specifically the Resistance.) In 1989 the *Comité d'action de la Résistance*, an umbrella organisation for diverse groups, attempted to launch an initiative which would have resulted in a national Resistance memorial. There was also a plan to install a museum of "national defence", in which the Resistance would feature prominently, in the Hôtel des Invalides. However, by the end of our period, and to this day, neither project had been realised.[12]

[11] The makers were Pierre Azéma, François Bédarida and Olivier Wieviorka. Details in *Le Monde*, 26-27 June 1994.

[12] Jean Kahn's personal archives, held at the *Institut François Mitterrand*. (Jean Kahn was a member of the *Conseil d'Etat* and an Elysee adviser, with special responsibility for the fiftieth anniversary commemorations which fell during Mitterrand's second septennat. He draughted many of the president's commemorative speeches. M. Kahn is currently vice-president of the *Institut François Mitterrand*.)

Why does the past matter?

So the question that interests us is, how do national forms of remembrance, whose task it is to promote cohesion and unity, cope with such diversity and division? In order to answer that question, we must try to gain a deeper understanding of the nature and functions of commemoration. But even before doing that, it is useful to ask why the practice known as commemoration exists in the first place. In other words, why is the past important to collective entities, and why do they bother to organise the remembrance of that past?

It is no great revelation that the French are particularly attached to history, above all their own history. At a cabinet meeting in 1982, François Mitterrand declared that "un peuple qui n'enseigne pas son histoire est un peuple qui perd son identité".[13] His statement met with general approval, as one might expect. In France, the idea that history has some primordial significance is so firmly established that it is considered to apply universally. From a French point of view, it is difficult to comprehend a collective entity like the United States, whose coherence is drawn essentially from a stake in the present and a vision of the future. In France, historical periodicals such as *l'Histoire*, *Historama* and *Historia*, boast a total circulation of around 600 000. In the United Kingdom, by way of comparison, equivalent titles sell in the region of 30 000 copies.[14] Yet because France's past has often been divisive, because national history has often been the story of national schism, the fascination has a problematic side. How does the collective consciousness come to terms with this paradox?

A popular solution has been escapism. In the early 1980s Marc Ferro observed that the Asterix stories were by far the most popular "historical" texts in France. He

---

Defence minister Jean-Pierre Chevènement backed the Invalides project, but he resigned in 1991 before it could be implemented. A *musée de la France combattante* is planned at the *Invalides* for the year 2000.

[13] Quoted in Antoine Prost, *Douze leçons sur l'histoire* (Paris: Seuil, 1996), p.16.

[14] Prost, p.15.

concluded that this was because Asterix was the "hero of a period of which the history is not a matter of contention". Ferro drew attention to the uproar that had invariably greeted contentious films and other cultural material. He asserted that "the fear of the past in France is still clear, in whatever form it is written" and that "history-as-problem has a smaller audience in France than history-as-dream".[15] More recently, in April 1994, the journal *Autrement* grouped together a series of articles on a range of historical topics under the heading, "l'amnésie nationale: une spécificité française?"[16] Although conclusions varied with each article, the general consensus was that the French were particularly prone to a form of collective amnesia. It was felt that, in certain circumstances, fascination could transform itself into phobia.

One cannot but feel that such language is anachronistic. To claim that the French were only interested in the positive aspects of their history, and that self-esteem and civil peace invariably came before the historical facts, was a cliché that could no longer be glibly applied to our period. With regard to World War Two, indeed, one might even claim that the situation was being reversed. As we shall see in what follows, during the Mitterrand years there was an obsession with the "difficult" history of 1939 to 1945, while anything too positive was, increasingly, eyed with suspicion, and in some cases debunked. History-as-dream was becoming passé; history-as-problem was, it seemed, what the public demanded.

Famously, the schools of the Third Republic immortalised the formula, "nos ancêtres les Gaulois". It was applied even where patently inappropriate, notably to African children in the colonies. And because of the integrating zeal of the republican tradition, for a significant number of French people, too, "nos ancêtres" were certainly

[15] *The Use and Abuse of History* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p.104.
[16] n°144.

not the Gauls. In its rather surreal way, however, this fallacious profession of common ancestry points to the unbreakable bond that links collective identity and collective memory. The "nos ancêtres les Gaulois" formula is best understood as a sort of metaphor, meaning not that French identity is contingent on a direct biological link to ancient ancestry, but that it is stronger and more durable if cemented by a knowledge of, and affinity with, the nation's past. In 1997 the leading French intellectual Edgar Morin wrote a newspaper article in which he described how he came to identify with France, the land to which his parents had come as immigrants: "cest à l'école et à travers l'histoire de France que je me suis identifié à la personne France. J'ai souffert de ses souffrances historiques, j'ai joui de ses victoires, j'ai adoré ses héros".[17] In other words, he began to feel French as he became imbued with a sense of the nation's past, a past of which neither he nor his forebears had any direct experience.

Yet it must not be forgotten that memory can also be an obstacle to collective identity. The totalitarian régimes of the twentieth century were all too aware that their subjects' attachment to their common past was deep enough to hamper the creation of the desired "new man". They therefore went to great lengths to cut people off from that past. Books, archives, and other documents were destroyed or altered: these classic methods had been used in previous centuries. But the likes of Hitler, Stalin and Pol Pot, realising that a popular, collective memory existed beyond the domain of books and documents, took things a stage further, and tried to reach into people's minds in order to cleanse them of any material that might be incompatible with the new order. At the same time, they realised that it was not prudent to leave a void where the old ties used to be: The gaps were to be filled with a state-produced historical identity. A particularly efficient method of instilling this was the practice of commemoration, which offered the convenience of being easy to stage and control without having the shrill quality of

[17] *Le Monde*, 5 July 1997.

blatant propaganda. Hence Jacques le Goff's observation that "la commémoration connaît un sommet dans l'Allemagne nazi et l'Italie fasciste".[18]

It would be naive, however, to believe that only dictatorships try to manipulate collective memory.[19] Democracies, too, attempt to cover up or obscure the troubling parts of their own pasts, just as they endeavour to accentuate the parts that do them honour. But unlike under totalitarian régimes, there is less centralised control in democracies; in fact one often finds that the collective relationship with the past is largely that which the majority of people have wanted. In many cases the priority given to certain aspects of the common past, far from being forcibly applied from above, is a matter of general consensus. Indeed one of the features of democratic systems is their in-built disincentive to political leaders to grapple with truths which reflect badly on their electorate or with which that electorate identifies strongly.

The stubborn reality of human nature obstructs both the noblest and the most dastardly designs. Those political regimes – from the *Jacobins* to the Khmer Rouge - that have experimented with a radical, "year zero" approach to history, have ultimately foundered. The traditions in which collective memory is sustained usually prove to be resistant. People *do* seem to want to look backwards to work out who they are. The past counts. Even the leaders of the French Revolution must have realised this deep down. True, the Revolution was presented as heralding a new chapter in the history of mankind. Human history was to be reset at zero: the Gregorian calender was replaced by the Revolutionary calender. Yet at the same time the revolutionaries took care to advertise their historical credentials: France was reconnecting with a mythologised age of freedom, that of the Gauls, which pre-dated the tyranny of absolute monarchy. There was also a change of emphasis from the lives of kings and queens that constituted

[18] Tzvetan Todorov, *Les abus de la mémoire* (Paris: Arléa, 1995), p.25.
[19] Ferro, *The Use and Abuse of History*, p.97.

history under the Ancien Régime to the story of the development and origins of the newborn nation. Thus the past was not eradicated but democratised, and a crucial idea - that history includes not only the rulers but the people they rule - was introduced, however tentatively. Ever since, and in spite of their professed confidence in man's intelligence and reason, French republicans have often had recourse to this instinct to seek comfort in "ancestor-worship" in order to instill a sense of belonging. They have realised that a nation is not so much the sum of a territory and an ideology as the sum of a territory and a memory.

So memory, routine and tradition have always had to be rehabilitated in the end. Dismissed by "progressive" thinkers and politicians as a hindrance to improvement of the "new man", this cultural baggage has been impossible to discard. There is nothing extraordinary about this. After all, collective memory carries the accumulated intellectual capital that has permitted the survival of the group until the present time. Even if it had the necessary *material* capital, no group would be able to function without its stock of custom and tradition. As André Levi-Gourhan has remarked, "La tradition est biologiquement aussi indispensable à l'espèce humaine que le conditionnement génétique l'est aux sociétés d'insectes".[20]

Collective memory

So what is the nature of this "collective memory" we are dealing with? Collective memory is not like memory in the normal sense. In France, no one actually remembers the storming of the Bastille, but we say that the event is part of the nation's "collective memory". This is not just a matter of laziness of thought or language: while no individual French person remembers what happened in 1789, he or she forms part of a

clearly defined group which has retained the memory as part of its heritage. Indeed, it is for this reason that people are willing to dissolve their individual identity in that of a group. The memory of the individual is alarmingly short – shorter even than his or her life. That of the group, on the other hand, extends far beyond the individual existence; it precedes it, and will keep on running after it has ended.[21] It acts almost like a secular form of immortality of the soul, guaranteeing that each brief, fragile, individual existence will live on in some form within a continuous collective tradition.

Collective memory, which helps to form collective identity, is not just a collection of individual memories. Its very nature is different. As Vincent Engel has pointed out, in a healthy society the individual has access to both an individual memory and a collective memory.[22] If the latter is totally dominant, the society could be described as totalitarian. If, on the other hand, individuals have no access to a collective conscience, then society does not meaningfully exist.

Commemoration under Mitterrand

The degree to which individuals have access to that collective conscience can be measured by attitudes to commemoration. Therein lies one motive for studying commemorations during the Mitterrand years. Another justification is, quite simply, that the commemorations were so numerous. In 1990 Michel Kajman wrote an article in *Le Monde* entitled "l'obsession commémorative" in which he asked, "à quoi rime cette fièvre commémorative qui ne cesse de monter, qui a ses institutions, ses stratégies, ses rythmes, ses points aveugles?"[23] Robert Gildea observed in 1994 that "the taste for

[20] Jacques Le Goff, *Histoire et Mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), p.174.
[21] Smith, *National Identity*, p.160.
[22] Malet, ed., *Résistance et mémoire*, 1993.
[23] 24 November 1990.

commemorating anniversaries has not faded". What is more, he added, "so long as anniversaries are celebrated past struggles, past achievements and past heroes will be dredged up to define, publicise and legitimate political cultures".[24] The weekly news magazine *Le Point* attempted to come to terms with, and coin a phrase for, the phenomenon with a special dossier, in July 1995, on what it termed "la commémomania". It was only the latest in a long line of newspapers and magazines to do so.[25] Writing in 1996, Liliane Lazat had the following complaint to make about contemporary mores: "Un des maux de notre société contemporaine est ce besoin de commémorer à tout propos. On commémore, rend homage, célèbre les plus grands hommes comme les plus insignifiants".[26]

During the Mitterrand era the communicative potential of commemoration was indeed utilised to the full. The tone was given right at the outset, with Mitterrand's famous visit to the Pantheon on 21 May 1981, when he laid a rose at the tombs of Jean Jaurès, Jean Moulin and Victor Schoelcher. Gérard Namer wrote that "la première année du nouveau septennat sera donc caractérisée par une reprise de toutes les anciennes formes de commémoration", allegedly gone to seed under the modernising liberal Giscard d'Estaing.[27]

If anything, the commemorative frenzy increased during Mitterrand's second mandate, thanks to a busy anniversary calendar. The cycle of anniversaries took its toll on the head of state. In September 1994 Elysée adviser Jean Kahn acknowledged this in a note to Mitterrand: "J'ai bien compris", he wrote, "que l'accumulation des cérémonies du cinquantenaire vous a laissé comme un sentiment de saturation".[28] The catalogue

---

[24] *The Past in French History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), p.343.
[25] 22 July 1995.
[26] Liliane Lazat reviewing Bernard-Henri Levy's *La Pureté dangereuse* in *The French Review* vol. 69 (February 1996).
[27] *La commémoration en France de 1945 à nos jours* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 1987), p.207.
[28] Note of 23 September 1994. Jean Kahn's archives.

published annually by the *Délégation aux célébrations nationales*, a branch of the ministry of culture, is a good ready-reckoner. When it was launched in 1986 this catalogue, which lists the events of the year which have been officially recognised as "célébrations nationales", was still nothing more than a leaflet, although it was already clear that it would have to be enlarged. In 1988 the brochure took up one hundred pages; by 1997 there were 238 pages, with an index and illustrations.[29] On the whole, the French people seemed happy enough with this state of affairs. In April 1994, 67% considered that "les commémorations historiques sont une bonne chose car c'est ainsi que l'idée de la nation reste enracinée dans notre pays".[30]

What is commemoration?

Commemoration permits reappraisal or reaffirmation of the connection, sometimes undervalued or taken for granted, between past, present and future. Commemorations are historical debate (even if promoted as consensus) conducted in public, with all the politicisation and manipulation this implies.[31] Of the very public nature of these commemorative debates, there can be no doubt. As a measure of the interest they stimulate, it is sufficient to point out that, in 1989, around half of all opinion polls commissioned in France were related to the French Revolution's bicentennial; in 1994, the same proportion took some aspect of the Second World War as their subject.[32] In bringing "our past" so clamorously into the public domain, these commemorations are also about identity, since they both express and help to determine

[29] Article by Jean Leclant (president of *Délégation aux célébrations nationales*) in *La Revue des sciences morales et politiques*, n°1 (1998).
[30] *Sofres* for *Le Figaro-Magazine*, 30 April 1994.
[31] M. Woolacott, *Guardian*, 25 May 1994.
[32] According to CEVIPOF data base.

a collective view of a common past. Any collective identity, any sense of belonging which extends beyond the individual, has a vertical and a horizontal context: we define ourselves with reference to what exists around us at a given time, but also with reference to what has gone before, and with an eye on what will come after. Commemoration has a privileged position on the intersection of the vertical and the horizontal axes. It is of its time, but necessarily reaches back into the past and forward into the future.

The very existence of the practice of commemoration testifies to the importance which our society accords to the "vertical" definition of its identity. Even more revealing perhaps is the fact that we consider it perfectly natural to want to mark the anniversaries of certain events every so often. Anniversaries punctuate our lives in a seemingly natural way, taking their place among the other notable dates in the diary. Serge Barcellini has spoken of "la vertu pédagogique du rythme régulier des anniversaires, qui permet de faire entrer la mémoire nationale dans le temps de la vie quotidienne des Français".[33] Over time, regular anniversaries act like points fixed on a graph, which one can join with a line and then project into the void, forming a figure that lies beyond what is empirically known, beyond the domain of "what has happened". So it is essential that commemorative events leave a lasting impression on the consciousness, just as the stelae and plaques associated with them leave a lasting impression on the landscape. "La commémoration est un message épique que l'on envoie vers le futur, vers des commémorations futures, vers des public futurs".[34] To look at things from the other direction, we see that commemoration tends to become not

[33] Former director of the *Délégation à la Mémoire et à l'information historique*, then *directeur de cabinet* at the ex-serviceman's ministry (now part of the ministry of defence). Interview in Pierre-François Raimond, 'Un exemple de politique publique de la mémoire: la délégation à la mémoire et à l'information historique' (unpublished masters dissertation, Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, Paris, 1994), p.4.

[34] Namer, *La Commémoration en France*, p.154.

just a moment when an important event is remembered, but a moment when all the other commemorations in between are also remembered, if only involuntarily. Indeed, the form and content of commemorations sometimes depend more on a previous anniversary than on the event that is ostensibly being remembered. Not only does this make their organisation easier, it provides a crucial sense of continuity from anniversary to anniversary.

We are always seeking to leave an imprint, physical or mental, which will remain when we are gone. In 1945 the *Fédération nationale des déportés, internés, résistants et patriotes* produced a brochure for ceremonies marking the fiftieth anniversaries of the liberation of the concentration camps.[35] The slogan it used, "Notre mémoire, une garantie pour l'avenir", sums up the close relationship between one's memory of the past and one's vision of the future, and gives an indication of the importance people attach to transmission of their experience. We seem to need to remind ourselves regularly that we are not floating in a void, that we are fixed on a straight and continuous course, that there is a relatively coherent link between our past, our present and our future. Yet there is nothing that obliges us to consider the passage of blocks of time - which has no intrinsic form - to be of any significance, nor is there anything that makes an event more relevant fifty years after it took place than it would be fifty one years later, or forty eight years and two months later.

Our modes of commemorating the past seem to be connected to the complex view of history that characterises late twentieth century western society. In one sense it is seen in terms of progress, and expresses confidence in our capacity to learn from and build on what has gone before. And yet a pre-condition of this ability to progress is our fundamental *sameness*, or lack of progress. We can pay homage to and learn lessons

[35] Jean Kahn's archives.

from our ancestors because we are made of the same stuff or invested with the same values, whether this "stuff" be specific to a nation, to a religion, to a political organisation or to a football club. Commemoration is based on a central contradiction which assumes that the future will function according to the same basic principles as the past, but that its direction can be changed according to lessons drawn from that past.

It is important to bear in mind, also, that we can only conceive of the future in terms of what we have already experienced. The truth about the past experience of the group we belong to, and the significance we choose to attach to it, is therefore crucial. And of course this debate about the past would be futile, and would certainly lack the passion so often in evidence, if the world was going to end tomorrow. If that were the case, there would be no posterity to pass one's history on to, there would be no future to imagine. Commemoration, allowing as it does for a more public airing of historical debate than is customary, matters because it frames the image of the past that is projected into the future.

The value of past events as foundations on which the future may be built becomes all the clearer in the "post-modern" (a term which seems to be no more than another way of expressing a state of confusion) context of the end of a century during which the steady march of history has accelerated to a sprint before fragmenting into a chaotic free-for-all. When the reality of the present is elusive and self-contradictory, and the future appears to open out in a million different directions, the reference points provided by a common past, even if these, too, are not as stable as they once were, take on the allure of precious assets. So the conception of commemorative events as a method of transferring identity, values, and lessons from the past to the future via the present is, amidst the confusion, more firmly rooted than ever. This is something that will become more evident as specific instances are analysed.

That, at any rate, is the more positive reading of the status quo. It may be that commemoration has started to serve quite simply as a refuge from the future. There is a long-held tradition that emphasises the mysterious, cyclical nature of history, and engenders a feeling of helplessness in the face of the tribulations "fate" or "destiny" holds in store. If this is the attitude that prevails, the significance of commemoration may be that enables those who would rather bury their heads in the sand to do so more easily.

Applying this last theory to, say, French party politics in the Mitterrand era, we can appreciate its pertinence. By the mid 1990s some commentators were claiming that the mainstream parties, bereft of ideas, had retreated into a sort of commemorative cocoon. Politics were dominated less by memorable achievements than by memory *tout court*. Ideological argument was replaced by historical discussion (not without passion, on occasion). To borrow Thomas Ferenczi's succinct résumé, "la gauche, qui a perdu sa foi dans le socialisme, se partage entre la nostalgie et le reniement. La droite, qui se divise, hésite entre le gaullisme et son contraire".[36]

Yet this phenomenon does not mean that all the forward-moving energy of modern democracy was simply abandoned in favour of a return to ancestor worship and the cyclical laws of nature. In an important sense, Mitterrand's France still considered itself superior to what had gone before. For commemoration gives us the right to pick and choose the aspects of the past we wish to revisit, and we reserve the right to filter them through our modern consciousness and represent them using modern media. As Gilles Lipovetsky has explained, "L'ancien n'est plus un modèle. Nous commémorons, autrement dit, ce que nous ne prenons pas pour modèle".[37] While this is perhaps going a

[36] *Le Monde*, 29 August 1994.
[37] *Le Point*, 22 July 1995.

little too far, in the final analysis we are often tacitly thankful that we are in a position to commemorate, in other words that we have moved on since then.

CHAPTER TWO

NATIONAL NARRATIVES

"Tant que les lions n'auront pas leurs propres historiens, les histoires de chasse continueront de glorifier les chasseurs."

-African proverb

Collective identity

It was Ernest Renan who said that "la nation est une âme, un principe spirituel".[1] What he meant is that collective life is not only about the policies employed to deal with taxes, employment, education, state institutions, and so on, it is also about shaping or galvanising collective identity. Doing so involves mobilising forces, often historical, that talk the language of belonging. The most renowned politicians in all ages have been so not because they have lowered taxes or overhauled the social security system, but because they have been able to tap into the soul of the nation, they have been able to give to that nation a sense of style and purpose uniquely suited to its inclinations and traditions.

These themes have always preoccupied French statesmen and intellectuals. Michelet wrote in 1846 of the people of France sustained "by our heroic legend, the invisible spirit of the heroes of our wars, the wind of the old flag".[2] Conversely, France had never been so prosperous as she was in 1968, yet the whole country nearly imploded because the coherence of the collective entity was lost. In our time Jacques

[1] *Les lieux de mémoire*, ed. by Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), vol.II, part1, p.328.
[2] Hans Khon, *Making of the Modern French Mind* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1955), p.41.

Attali, former adviser to François Mitterrand at the Elysée, has said that the role of élites in a given society is to produce for its people "une idée claire de son histoire", without which "aucun peuple ne peut vivre longtemps".[3] Alain Duhamel wrote that "Une nation ambitieuse ne se contente pas de pain et d'eau. Il lui faut un supplément d'âme, c'est-à-dire un style, un dessin et une spécificité.[4] Man does not live by bread alone, especially if he is French. That is why the past, and people's conception of it, is not of merely academic interest.

Robert Gildea was evidently directing his thinking along these lines when he said of commemoration that "the sacralisation of its triumphs and defeats, its heroes, its martyrs, is the obvious way in which a political community defines itself, establishes consensus, and legitimises its claims."[5] The past is not merely the sum of persons and actions which happen to have preceded us in time, but an inventory of interacting ideas, values, heroes and heroines - potential or ready-made identities - that can be deployed in the political battles of the present day. Hence the common spectacle of politicians squabbling about which group "owns" which hero of national history. Jeanne d'Arc, who seems to have been claimed by every political formation at some point, is a prime example. But the phenomenon is always with us. So it was that in 1994, when the time came to remember the heroic resistance fighters of the Vercors, the prime minister Edouard Balladur decided to make a personal appearance. This caused François Mitterrand's advisers at the Elysée to react. Jean Kahn, who advised on war commemoration, told the president that "le Vercors est une affaire nationale, qu'il ne serait pas opportun (. . .) d'abandonner à M. Balladur".[6]

---

[3] *Le Monde*, 15 December 1995.
[4] Alain Duhamel, *Les Peurs Françaises* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993), p.267.
[5] 1994, p.10.
[6] Note from Jean Kahn to François Mitterrand, 10 June 1994. Jean Kahn's archives.

So commemoration and collective identity are intimately linked. By definition, collective identity needs a public forum in which to express and consolidate itself. Like anything belonging to the world of ideas, it only exists meaningfully in so far as it can be expressed in words or deeds. Commemorative ceremonies provide for such expression. They also provide an opportunity to deconstruct these collective identities, which are socially constructed (as opposed to naturally occurring) in the first place. What is constructed can always be deconstructed, even if it does present itself as timeless and natural. As Eisenstadt and Geisen explain:

> Membership of, and partaking in, a collective identity depends on special processes of induction, ranging from various rites of initiation to various collective rituals, in which the attributes of "similarity" among its members, as against the strangeness, the differences, the distinction of the other, is symbolically constructed and defined.[7]

One of the key aims of official commemoration, then, is to reinforce a sense of unity among members of the group, by recalling, within a controlled framework, an instance or instances when its core values were brought to the fore. Thierry Gasnier, writing in 1994, complained that official commemorations were nothing more than "une machine de plus à fabriquer facilement du consensus".[8] It is worth noting that the "grands hommes" to whom Mitterrand paid homage at the Pantheon (see above, p.16) were not exclusively of the left. The group that was "rassemblé" was intended to be wider than a single political party and its electorate. Jean Moulin in particular had come to be regarded as the ultimate unifier, having formed the different branches of the Resistance into a coherent force destined to save the honour of the nation. Also, it is

---

[7] 'The Construction of Collective Identity', in *Archives européennes de sociologie*, 36 (1995), p.74.
[8] 'La France commémorante', in *Le Débat*, n°78 (January-February 1994).

often forgotten that on 18 June 1981, the new president visited the crypt at Mont Valérien, shrine to "la France combattante". He meditated for a full five minutes – much longer, it was noted, than any previous president – at the tombs of the fifteen martyrs inhumed there since 1945. In doing so, said Gérard Namer, "le président témoigne auprès des Français de l'*obligation morale* qu'il y a à se souvenir".[9] Even amidst the euphoria of a landmark election victory, amidst all the neo-revolutionary bravado, Mitterrand's choice of symbols was designed to *in*clude rather than *ex*clude; or, at any rate, to balance the alternative discourse which prioritised the "glorious rupture" with the "ancien régime".

The main protagonists and episodes of national history are powerful because they appeal to what is already implicit, to what does not need to be said; they do their deftest work under the surface, calling on a set of values, prejudices and emotions that form the shared cultural hinterland of a given group. Successful politicians generally possess a symbolic sense, which tells them which gesture or reference is appropriate at which moment and for which purpose. By and large Mitterrand had a keen sense of symbolic value, and the symbolic figures he invoked in 1981 have in due course become part of the mythology of that time. Nadine Gautier and Jean-François Rouge justly observed that "François Mitterrand est passé maître dans l'art de manier les symboles historiques ou préhistoriques: la roche de solutré, le combat désespéré de Vercingétorix, autant d' épisodes érigés en parangons de l'unité nationale et du terroir français".[10]

All this lends credence to Arnaud Teyssier's observation that, by 1995, "la démocratie contemporaine française est prisonnière de symboles".[11] The imprisonment was secured with the aid of the media, through which politicians and others must

[9] Namer, *La Commémoration en France*, p.207; my italics.
[10] *Autrement*, n°88 (1987).
[11] Arnaud Teyssier, *La 5ème République 1958-1995* (Paris: Editions Pygmalion/Gérard Watelet, 1995), p.366.

channel their messages to the wider public. Political and collective organisations were increasingly adept at feeding the insatiable appetite of the media, particularly television, for concise but powerful images, words and pictures that catch the imagination in an instant. Mitterrand and his advisers knew that his visit to the Pantheon would be followed by reporters and television crews whose remit would be to crystallise the moment in a few lines or in a few seconds, to capture and convey its essence briefly, but to make the moment last.[12] The same can be said of the many other instances during the Mitterrand era where past and present were brought together and charged with meaning.

Traditionally, then, one of the key functions of official commemoration has been to distract attention from the fact that the whole is made up of many different parts, not all of them complementary. While, in France, this role may have evolved in recent years, this is essentially what happens when any group remembers as a group. A selection is made, and those elements which are to be recognised as "our" memory are retained, while others are discarded. This process has been lucidly described by Robert Frank:

> La fonction de la mémoire officielle (. . .) est précisément de donner une unité à cet ensemble hétérogène, agité de forces centrifuges. C'est elle qui donne ou refuse le droit de cité aux mémoires de groupes. Mémoire structurante, elle est particulièrement sélective, et sa choix du passé est mise au service de sa fonction de base: assurer l'union et maintenir l'identité de la communauté.[13]

Thus official commemoration complements the group's formal institutions, one of whose functions, to quote Jean-Jacques Rousseau, is to "transporter le moi dans l'unité

[12] *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, II, part 2, p.145.
[13] 'La mémoire empoisonnée' in *La France des années noires*, vol.II, ed. by Jean-Pierre Azéma and François Bédarida (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1993).

commune".[14] This is easy enough to see when the event commemorated is a "positive" one - a victory or an outstanding achievement. Commemorations of "negative" episodes, apart from being less frequent, have a less straightforward relationship to collective identity. When the French Republic commemorates Vichy, the values celebrated are those which were momentarily betrayed, but which are all the more precious for that betrayal. In this way has commemoration of unpleasant events come to be presented as crucial to maintaining a state of watchfulness that will prevent them from recurring.

Commemoration, in short, is often a reminder of what makes us "us" and them "them". It seems particularly well suited to a geopolitical arrangement in which each state has its own space in which to govern its own people and cultivate its own culture and identity. Thus most nations see themselves as the product of a unique heritage in which is inscribed a unique bank of national attributes. These things fit in to a "national narrative" which reaches back into the past and brings order and meaning to the jumble of characters and episodes. The national narrative is employed even when manifestly inappropriate: the election of Hugues Capet or the baptism of Clovis are remembered retrospectively as part of "national" history, even though the concept of the nation is largely irrelevant to the periods concerned. It is as if there is a fear that, if not incorporated into the solid and recognisable framework of National History, they will be condemned to float in some unidentifiable limbo.

During our period people began to seriously doubt that the Second World War fitted into that national template. Nonetheless, certain episodes still lent themselves to the "national narrative" approach. French unity and French heroism were far from obsolete when the time came to commemorate.

[14] Raoul Girardet, *Mythes et mythologies politiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), p.145.

Resistance

"Ce n'est certes pas de beauté et de sens que manque l'aventure de la France combattante, on la soupçonne plutôt de manquer de réalité".[15]

Whatever the net military contribution of the Resistance to the Allied victory, it was negligible compared to its contribution to the post-war reconstruction of a positive national identity. In this case "what happened" mattered less than the interpretation of "what happened". Without the Resistance, or rather, without the national narrative subsequently built around the Resistance, it is doubtful that France could have emerged from the war with its self-respect and unity intact. In the words of Jacques Semelin, "si la résistance d'un peuple hier martyrisé par un envihasseur n'existait pas, il faudrait l'inventer".[16]

So every effort was made to hold up the Resistance experience as representative of the national experience of the war years. Throughout France, plaques and memorials in remembrance of Resistance martyrs sprang up almost immediately. In 1995 it was calculated that these still accounted for between 50% and 80% of all memorials relating to the Second World War.[17] These figures are eloquent when one considers that roughly 1% of the population was involved in active resistance, and that it was only one of many facets of an immensely complex period.[18] But of course, collective memory does not operate on a system of proportional representation.

Although there are nuances to be added (see chapter three), it is clear that French public opinion during our period certainly did not regard the Resistance as insignificant.

---

[15] Paul Thibaud, 'La République et ses héros', in *Esprit* n°198 (January-April 1994).
[16] *Esprit*, n°198 (January-April 1994).
[17] Barcellini and Wieviorka, *Passant, souviens-toi* p.238.
[18] According to Henry Rousso in *L'Histoire* n°41 (January 1982), 220 000 cards for "combattants volontaires de la Résistance" were distributed after liberation.

A survey commissioned in 1994 found that 56% of French people thought that the Resistance played a "very important" role in the outcome of World War Two.[19] Another revealed that 84% thought that the Resistance had been very effective or fairly effective after the Allied landings.[20] And according to another fiftieth anniversary poll, for *CNN* and *Le Monde*, 64% of French people were of the opinion that the Resistance and the Allied intervention contributed "à part égale" to the liberation of France.

Perhaps the same questions would have been answered less positively in 1993 or 1992, when the commemorative profile was lower. However it is precisely because the major commemorations fell in 1994 that the polls were conducted around that time. "A new survey to coincide with the forty-eighth anniversary" feels rather forced. The "perhaps" is an extremely tentative one, though, for the capacity of a nation to continue to believe in its own heroism in the face of evidence to the contrary ought never to be underestimated. This capacity was resolute enough to defy apparently solid evidence to the contrary. With regard to the Resistance's contribution to the war effort, opinion had remained remarkably stable throughout our period. A survey published in *L'Histoire* in 1983 illustrates this point.[21] Asked which of the Allied forces contributed most to the liberation of France, some 34% chose the French Resistance (15% for the London Free French, 19% for the *maquis*). Only the United States received more plaudits (40%). The Soviets, in spite of their heroic sacrifices on the Eastern front, were credited by a mere 6%, while the British polled only 4%.

It is entirely natural that a nation should remain attached to its past heroes and heroines; yet in this case it seems to contradict the process of "demystification" that had already been going on for perhaps twenty years by the 1990s, and which one might have expected to register during our chosen period. While certain uncomfortable truths, such

[19] *Scotsman*, 25 May 1994.
[20] In *Le Figaro Magazine*, 17 December 1994.

as Vichy's complicity in the persecution of Jews and other minorities had been taken on board, others had not. Evidently, the books, articles and programmes produced by specialists have a limited impact on the consciousness of the nation as a whole. Human beings are reluctant to accommodate themselves to new ideas, and derive a certain comfort from those with which they are familiar, however vague that familiarity may be.

Part of the Resistance myth had always been the union between de Gaulle's Free French and the heterogeneous groupings of *maquisards*. Gaullist ex-servicemen's minister Jean Sainteny spoke of a "symbolique fusion de deux actions convergeantes de la France combattante, nouvelle union sacrée"[22]. The theme of *union sacrée*, whereby all baser concerns are set aside for *la patrie*, sets the memory of the Second World War alongside that of the First, which had been fought and commemorated as a unified nation. If there was one thing to be avoided, it was any official acknowledgement that France had been unable to fight as a unified nation in the Second World War.

The importance of that unity was retained by collective memory, which focused particularly on the unifier and martyr Jean Moulin. Barcellini and Wieviorka have evoked "un véritable culte" of Moulin's memory.[23] He had been "Pantheonised" on 19 December 1964, and, as we have seen, his was one of the three tombs visited by François Mitterrand when he made his famous pilgrimage to the Pantheon on 21 May 1981.

Throughout France, 37 monuments or stelae, 119 plaques, 978 streets or squares, and 281 educational establishments were dedicated to him by the mid-1990s. Like de

---

[21] Henry Rousso, *Le syndrome de Vichy* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), p.296.
[22] Speech at the Liberation monument at Bayeux, June 1964. In *Le Monde*, 7-8 June 1964.
[23] *Passant, souviens-toi*, p.203.

Gaulle, he had become part of the physical as well as psychological landscape. In the inscriptions that featured on the various forms of memorial, he was invariably referred to as the "unificateur" or the "organisateur" of the Resistance. It had not been forgotten that unity was a precious commodity in a nation prone to schism.

Moulin's courage and skill in carrying out his unifying mission was, not surprisingly, one of the main themes of the presidential address delivered to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Moulin's capture and execution. On the 17 June 1993, at the montagne Sainte-Geneviève in Paris, François Mitterrand spoke of the first meeting of the *Conseil national de la Résistance*. The significance of that event lay not in the issues that the delegates had discussed, but in the fact that "il portait témoignage de cette unité tant cherchée, enfin atteinte, même si elle était encore fragile, unité de la France combattante, de l'ensemble des mouvements de Résistance, auxquels s'étaient associés tous les partis républicains".[24]

18 June 1940[25]

No one was more acutely aware of the need for a "national narrative" than Charles de Gaulle himself. He realised that the very fact that France's role in the war had been

---

[24] Text of speech kindly provided by Jean Kahn at the *Institut François Mitterrand.*

[25] *A TOUS LES FRANCAIS*
La France a perdu une bataille!
Mais la France n'a pas perdu une guerre!
Des gouvernants de rencontre ont pu capituler, cédant à la panique, oubliant l'honneur, livrant le pays à la servitude. Cependant, rien n'est perdu!
Rien n'est perdu, parce que cette guerre est une guerre mondiale. Dans l'univers libre, des forces immenses n'ont pas encore donné. Un jour, ces forces écraseront l'ennemi. Il faut que la France, ce jour-là, soit présente à la victoire. Alors, elle retrouvera sa liberté et sa grandeur. Tel est mon but, mon seul but!
Voilà pourquoi je convie tous les Français, où qu'ils se trouvent, à s'unir à moi dans l'action, dans le sacrifice et dans l'espérance.
Notre patrie est en péril de mort.
Luttons tous pour la sauver!
VIVE LA FRANCE!

ambiguous rendered a unified, heroic memory all the more necessary. In 1941 de Gaulle was already commemorating his call to resistance of the previous year. Right from the start he wanted to mark out the 18 June 1940 as the initiation of a vast movement of resistance. Although he was completely isolated at the time, he insisted that he spoke for a united majority of French people. On 18 June 1941 de Gaulle stated boldly that "Nous avons ranimé l'esprit de résistance de la France et rassemblé les espoirs d'une majorité".[26]

For de Gaulle, the *appel* was essentially a call for unity, and he was keen that no political party should monopolise its remembrance. Therefore the *Chancellerie de l'Ordre de la Libération* was given the task of organising the commemorative ceremonies. Many of its members were of course de Gaulle loyalists, but the *Chancellerie* itself was not a political formation.

In theory, then, the 18 June was to be a non-partisan, national celebration. Its forms were in the classic, "France combattante", mould: the keystone was the "ravivage" of the flame under the Arc de Triomphe, at the tomb of the unknown soldier, which had been placed there after the First World War. The flame was then taken to the crypt at Mont-Valérien, where fifteen heroes of "la France combattante" killed in World War Two were laid to rest. It was on 18 June 1960 that de Gaulle inaugurated the *Mémorial de la France combattante* at Mont-Valérien.

So the commemoration was non-partisan in theory. In practice, commemoration of 18 June would give rise to a series of "batailles de mémoire", nourished by the political squabbles of the day. During de Gaulle's exile from power there were often shouts of "vive de Gaulle" and "de Gaulle au pouvoir" at the ceremonies. In 1946 the communists tried to establish an alternative 18 June commemoration. In 1949 the

---

(from *Revue de la France libre*, special edition June 1940).
[26] Nicole Racine-Furlaud, 'Mémoire du 18 juin 1940', p.550.

parties of the "third force" (SFIO, MRP, RGR) protested against the partisan nature of that year's 18 June celebration, and refused to participate.[27] Subsequently interest in the commemoration waned, only to be revived when de Gaulle returned to the Elysée Palace. De Gaulle also started the convention whereby it was the president of the Republic who took in hand the commemoration, giving it a truly national dimension.

The communists had ended their hostility to the 18 June commemoration by the mid-1970s. From then on they talked of the "complimentarity" of the *appel* of 18 June and that of 10 July.[28] Attitudes were beginning to soften with regard to de Gaulle, and a relative consensus was taking the place of political bickering. In 1980 Max Gallo had written an article asking whether "nous sommes tous devenus gaullistes?"

After the alleged "betrayal" of the "monde combattant" by Giscard d'Estaing, it fell to Mitterrand and the socialists to do justice to the memory of the war. The priority was to revive the 8 May commemoration but there was a feeling that war remembrance ought to be put back on track, and that all the important anniversaries ought to be commemorated with good grace. In 1981 much was made of the fact that, for the first time since 1968, the ceremonies were presided over by a former member of the Resistance. From then on it was no longer a "fête de famille" for Gaullists but a celebration of the Resistance in its entirety. The 18 June was, according to Nicole Racine-Furlaud, being "nationalised" again.[29]

De Gaulle as "l'homme du 18 juin" was embedded deep within the national consciousness; in opinion polls this aspect of his career was consistently placed more prominently than a later one, of which France is still living with the direct consequence:

[27] Above taken from Nicole Racine-Furlaud, 'Mémoire du 18 juin 1940', p.550.
[28] Nicole Racine-Furlaud, 'Mémoire du 18 juin 1940', p.561.
[29] Nicole Racine-Furlaud, 'Mémoire du 18 juin 1940', p.561.

the establishment of the Fifth Republic.[30] The de Gaulle of 18 June had long ceased to be a political figure who could be criticised and contested like any other. While certain high profile Resistance figures, such as Jean Moulin and Henry Fresnay, were being fought over by rival factions, de Gaulle's position in the national memory became more and more exalted. Neither this, nor the fact that the Gaullists had ceased to dominate French politics since 1974, appeared to have jeopardised that position.

Pierre Lefranc, president of the Charles de Gaulle Institute, made this clear in an article heralding "l'année de Gaulle" in February 1990.[31] The gist of his argument was, quite simply, that France had finally become Gaullist in spite of itself: "Ses prévisions s'accomplissent et ses vues sont reprises par la majorité de la classe politique et, parfois même, avec conviction par certains, qui s'y étaient opposés". Around the time of the fiftieth anniversary of the general's call to arms, there was eulogy from some unusual sources. The left-wing writer and sometime politician Régis Debray published his *A demain, de Gaulle*, in which he expressed regret for having despised de Gaulle when the latter was in office, and for his lack of gratitude for the general's actions during the war. *Le Canard Enchaîné* brought out a special edition for the June anniversary, in which the tone was almost affectionate: "Ce n'est pas que de Gaulle nous manque. Mais il faut bien l'avouer, une tête de Turc de cette trempe et de cette envergure, en n'en a pas retrouvé".[32] *L'Humanité* carried a celebratory account of the process of rapprochement between the head of the Free French and the communists.[33] On an occasion such as this

[30] For example, in a *Sofres* survey for *l'Express* of 10-16 November 1975, 38% of those polled said that de Gaulle was "avant tout", "l'homme du 18 juin; 16% saw him first and foremost as "le fondateur de la Cinquième République"; in a *Sofres* survey for *l'Institut Charles de Gaulle* in February 1990, he was "l'homme du 18 juin" for 44% of those polled.

[31] Published in *Le Monde* 1 February 1990. Among some of the other notable events that took place during "l'annee de Gaulle" were: a UNESCO conference on the theme of "de Gaulle en son siecle" (19-24 November 1990); a conference at the National Assembly organised by "le carrefour du gaullisme"; a tribute organised by the *Académie française*.

[32] 13 June 1990.

[33] 19 June 1990.

one they couldn't but call for "rassemblement", even if it was really an invitation for "tous ceux qui se prononcent pour la souveraineté nationale" to revolt against the pro-European consensus.

De Gaulle had become synonymous with the most positive vision of "la France", and had thus been removed from the political fray. No matter what indices one choses, the conclusion remains the same: the memory of Charles de Gaulle united the French people in non-partisan appreciation. In 1990 one survey found that 50% of French people considered de Gaulle to be "en dehors des partis".[34] Another revealed that 62% thought that he had been "au-dessus des partis" when in power! When one considers that he was in his time one of the most divisive and even detested political figures in French history, this comes as something of a surprise. It is easy to forget how often de Gaulle was on the outside looking in during his political career, how many times he was abandoned by his countrymen. Virtually no one took him seriously in 1940; he resigned in 1946, leaving the nation indifferent; he was only allowed back because he was the last resort; and he felt compelled to step down because he had lost the support of the people, in 1969.

Raymond Barre was not alone in drawing attention to what he saw as a distinguishing feature of the French mindset: a compulsion to "canonise historically" men who were "au coeur des grands événements, au centre des controverses et même des affrontements, et dont le rôle national devient incontesté avec le recul du temps".[35] An IFOP opinion poll published in 1990 revealed that 81% of French people were satisfied with de Gaulle's record.[36] Another, a few months later, corroborated the first:

---

[34] *Libération*, 18 June 1990.
[35] *Sofres, l'Etat de l'opinion 1991.*
[36] *Libération*, 18 June 1990.

84% took a postive view, only 4% a negative one.[37] In a similar survey in 1970, when the memory of de Gaulle in power had not yet mellowed into nostalgia, the figure was "only" 67%.

The French seemed to have talked themselves into perceiving de Gaulle-as-historical-figure quite differently from the way in which they perceived de Gaulle-as-political-figure. Collective memory does not welcome politicians as they are in reality - governed by impulses that are not always noble, embroiled in uneasy compromises, riven with doubt and confusion. It prefers to deal with public life as it often appears in the rhetoric of the leaders themselves - heroic, momentous, a battleground in which the fate of men, nations, and ideas is played out.

Nor was de Gaulle's popularity a mere blip brought about by that year's celebrations. Very few historical or political figures consistently received the approval ratings that he did. In 1980, just before the start of our period, when France was preparing itself to vote for the Fifth Republic's first socialist president, 81% of those polled had considered that de Gaulle's record was either very or quite positive.[38] Only 7% held an opinion that was in any way negative.[39] And the phenomenon proved itself to be durable, lasting from the 1970s right through to the 1990s. By 1995 those approval and disapproval ratings had moved only one point in each direction, to 82% and 6%. Also, in 1995, when asked to nominate "les plus grandes personnalités de ce siècle" from a prepared list, 67% of respondants chose de Gaulle.[40] The general had become, to

[37] *Le Monde*, 9 November 1990.
[38] *Sofres/Histoire-magazine*, November-December 1980. An IFOP poll published in *VSD* the same year corroborated this: 80% of respondants described de Gaulle as "un homme, une personnalité sympathique" (12-18 June 1980).
[39] De Gaulle himself had predicted in 1952 that every Frenchman would become a Gaullist if he wasn't already – because Gaullism was nothing other than the continuity of the "essential France".
[40] *Sofres, l'Etat de l'opinion 1995*.

use Pierre Nora's phrase, "champion toutes catégories de la mémoire collective des Français".[41]

Even before 1990 de Gaulle had been part of the very landscape of the nation, both in a psychological and a physical sense: 63 of the 127 *communes* making up the *banlieue parisienne* had a street or square named after the general.[42] The mythical date of 18 June was also popular as a street name. To herald the fiftieth anniversary, another fifty or so streets and avenues were rebaptised with that name.[43] One might also mention the "opération plaque du 18 juin 1940" that had been launched in 1986 by the *Association des Français libres* and others. It sought to encourage municipalities to erect a plaque bearing the text of de Gaulle's speech. By 1990, there were more than a thousand of these plaques. Every *arrondissement* in Paris had one, as did a number of lycées. There were eleven plaques in Neuilly alone.[44]

However, not everyone saw the consensus in a positive light. Serge July, in *Libération*, thought that the "quasi-unanimisme" was symptomatic of a society desperate to recognise itself in the heroes of its history.[45] Jean-Luc Pouthier regretted that legend had defeated history, and that there had been no real debate about the circumstances of de Gaulle's broadcast, that is to say the political, moral and military collapse of the Third Republic.[46] Prominent Gaullist Georges Broussine concluded that the main reason for the general's posthumous popularity was remorse.[47] He claimed that the French felt retrospective guilt for their unappreciative treatment of him in 1940, 1946 and 1969, and, ever since, had been trying to make amends.

---

[41] *Lieux de Mémoire*, III, part1, p.347.
[42] Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.189.
[43] Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.165.
[44] De Gaulle's entire World War Two itinerary, including offensives he led at the front, the aerodrome from which he took off for Jersey, his temporary home in Khartoum, etc. is recorded on memorial plaques.
[45] *Libération*, 18 June 1990.
[46] *Libération*, 18 June 1990.
[47] *Lettre de la Nation*, 19 June 1990.

Certainly it seemed that a balanced view of de Gaulle's life and times had not been attained. The myth surrounding the appeal on the BBC was left largely intact, because this epic tale offered a gallant role to the nation as a whole. Which is not to say that the myth was presented as gospel truth, simply that few people showed any inclination to destroy it. The French seemed to have come to the conclusion that it was not such a bad thing to leave some myths intact. Writing in the Gaullist newsletter *Lettre de la Nation*, George Broussine asked rhetorically whether France was witnessing "l'apogée d'un mythe".[48] In a different context, one might have expected a debunking to follow; but Broussine was of course writing in complete approval of de Gaulle and his legend. It suited everyone to commemorate the origins of Resistance without asking the difficult questions. This, after all, is what sets commemoration apart from history.

The organisers of the commemorative events insisted on their non-partisan character.[49] Pierre Lefranc, general secretary of the Charles de Gaulle institute in 1990, was especially keen to stress this point. He pointed out that the international conference organised in November gave a forum to all shades of opinion. The temptation to turn it into a Gaullist celebration was avoided, he said, in the interests of academic objectivity.[50]

The prevalent apolitical perspective was typical of an era in which overt ideology was viewed with suspicion, in which politicians fought for control of the middle ground, leaving the fringes to their own devices. Politics no longer had much to do with ideology: the "tournant de la rigueur" of 1983 had put paid to leftist economics;

[48] 19 June 1990.
[49] Interviews with Pierre Lefranc (11 May 1999), Jean-Jacques de Bresson (21 May 1999). Between these two there was a distinct difference in appreciation of the role of president Mitterrand. Lefranc had absolutely no complaints about the president's conduct and attitude, while de Bresson was more critical, and felt that the president had been a half-hearted participant.
[50] Interview of 11 May 1999

following the socialist scandals of the mid-1980s, "les partis" were as unpopular as de Gaulle could have wished; Jacques Chirac's confrontational term as prime minister, between 1986 and 1988, had been badly received. It was exploited by Mitterrand in the 1988 presidential elections; proof, if proof were needed, that the French people wanted a unifier, not a divider. For his second septennat Mitterrand proposed a particularly timid form of unity - he wouldn't do anything that was likely to upset too many people.

Nevertheless there had been a fear among non-Gaullists that 1990 would be "confisqué" by the RPR and used for overtly political purposes.[51] However as Jean Kahn said bluntly, "on a laissé confisquer". Among the governing socialists it was thought that it would have been counter-productive to indulge in any sniping against Gaullist initiatives. The traditional guardians, loyal to the general, were given a free hand. The organising committee was made up of representatives from the *Institut Charles de Gaulle*, the *Chancellerie de l'Ordre de la Libération*, the *Association des Français Libres*, and the *Association des Médaillés de la Résistance*. It was allowed to carry on with its work without interference from central government. In fact André Méric, ex-servicemen's minister, while acknowledging that "le comité (. . .) a souhaité garder son autonomie par rapport à l'Etat",[52] promised that "mon Département ministériel apportera l'aide qui lui sera demandée".[53] The promise was honoured, since the organisers were given the funds they requested.

On the fiftieth anniversary of de Gaulle's celebrated "appel" of 18 June 1940, Mitterrand presided over a national ceremony at the Arc de Triomphe during which a bronze casting of the text of the appeal was unveiled. In an interview published in *Le*

[51] For example in a letter of 30 January 1989 from Jean-Mathieu Boris, the nephew of a left-wing *résistant*, to Jean-Louis Bianco at the Elysée. Boris wrote that, "il conviendrait d'éviter que cet événement soit confisqué par le RPR". Jean Kahn's archives.
[52] André Méric's statement to *conseil des ministres*, 2 November 1989. (From Jean Kahn's archives.)
[53] Letter of 8 November 1989. (From Jean Kahn's archives.)

Monde the same day, he said of de Gaulle that "du début à la fin, il fut grand". The mutual enmity between de Gaulle and Mitterrand has been well documented, but if the 1990 commemoration was difficult for the latter to embrace, he was too politically astute to show it at this stage. Although it seems that the decision to participate in the above ceremony was only taken after "some hesitation" at the Elysee,[54] Mitterrand plainly understood that the stature of de Gaulle could command almost universal recognition in France, and that to disturb the consensus would have been political folly.

Illustrating further the apolitical direction that remembrance of de Gaulle had taken, the exhibition devoted to de Gaulle, which opened on the 15 June 1990 at the National Library, was inaugurated by culture minister Jack Lang and prime minister Michel Rocard, both of them socialists. Michel Rocard also gave a speech at the opening ceremony of the conference that was held in November that year.[55] He was full of praise for de Gaulle, and recalled that his own father had been aligned with de Gaulle during the war, giving him a personal incentive to embrace the commemorative events. One of the lessons he had learnt from his father was, he said, that there were times when political divisions had to make way for "unité et rassemblement". "La conduite de mon père m'empêche de commettre jamais l'erreur de croire que la division gauche-droite puisse recouvrir celle du bien et du mal, des bons et des méchants."[56] Rocard's time as prime minister was indeed marked by a spirit of openness. His government's policies were driven by pragmatism rather than pure ideology. This took the sting out of French politics, and undoubtedly facilitated an atmosphere of consensus and *rassemblement* for the anniversaries of 1990.

---

[54] According to Jean-Jacques de Bresson, who in 1990 was treasurer of the Charles de Gaulle Institute and president of the *Association des Médaillés de la Résistance*. (Interview of 21 May 1999.)
[55] The title of the conference was "de Gaulle en son siècle"; it was held at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris from 19-24 November.
[56] *Actes des Journées internationales*, introduction.

As far as mayor of Paris Jacques Chirac was concerned, 1990 was a godsend: a chance to celebrate Gaullist values through one of the few personalities that united the French people. Chirac was a driving force, ensuring that the opportunity would be maximised. Substantial sums of money were released to permit celebrations worthy of their subject: the *Mairie* was particularly generous, releasing 50 million francs for the capital's commemorations.

The themes and vocabulary of June 1990 were unmistakably Gaullian: unity, grandeur, independence, rank, *rassemblement*, destiny. One thing can be said about de Gaulle without any qualification: his message was loud and clear. It was clearly understood by France in 1990. A survey identified the three most important strands of his message as France's independence (45%), the *rassemblement* of the French people (17%) and France's role in the world (12%).

For "political" Gaullists the familiar catchphrases were certainly not, in 1990, tired clichés. The RPR was beset by internal problems at this time, and its leaders needed to squeeze all the inspiration they possibly could out of this fiftieth anniversary and the entire "année de Gaulle". So there was both a national and a political dimension to Jacques Chirac's message that "Même lorsque les circonstances se conjuguent pour conduire le pays à douter des valeurs morales qui cimentent son unité, à douter de son destin, subsiste en son tréfond, une irréductible ressource de sursaut national".[57] Such rhetoric was especially apposite in a commemorative context, when the past was presented in a double form, both as a constituent part of "what we are today" and as an example to follow or to avoid following. Jacques Chirac was not only saying, "these values *do* exist in us as a nation", he is also saying, "these values *ought* to be more apparent than they are at the present time".

Not surprisingly, Paris in June 1990 was a living memorial to de Gaulle: "Partout: sur les panneaux d'annonces établis par la municipalité à travers la ville, sur les murs des stations de métro, d'immenses affiches montrent les exploits du général de Gaulle".[58] This poster campaign, reminiscent of an election, was timed carefully to build up interest the week before the actual anniversary.[59] Also, from 13-19 June a three minute film devoted to de Gaulle was shown in 475 cinemas in the Parisian region; from 14 to 23 June images of the Liberation (not, strictly speaking, what was being commemorated) were projected every evening onto the façade of the Hôtel de Ville.

The day of 18 June itself was of course entirely given over to de Gaulle: from five o'clock in the morning, a massive replica of an old-style radio, built around the obelisk at Place de la Concorde, repeated the historic message non-stop. There was Mass at Notre Dame; wreaths were laid at 700 plaques dedicated to those who died at the Liberation (again not strictly relevant); a plaque inscribed with the text of the *appel* was unveiled at each of Paris's twenty town halls. Later in the evening, the *mairie* organised a show entitled simply "Hommage", staged on the Seine between Pont-Neuf and the pont du Carrousel. Two hundred boats carried symbolic tableaux relating to de Gaulle and Gaullian themes. The day of celebration was warmly welcomed by Parisians, 100 000 of whom turned out to attend.

It was important to the organisers that the fiftieth anniversary of 18 June be a truly nation wide occasion, and events were organised throughout France. More than 3500 towns and villages across France decided to organise some sort of ceremony to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the *appel*.[60] So Paris was not the exclusive site of

---

[57] In *Lettre de la Nation*, 18 June 1990.
[58] 'Histoire et Mémoire', in *Commentaire*, winter 1990-1991.
[59] It was launched on the 11 June.
[60] Bruno Goyet, 'Etude des commémorations en France dans les années 1980' (unpublished DEA thesis, Institut d'Etudes Politiques, Paris, 1991), p.67.

commemoration, even if it was inevitably the focal point. That role was symbolised by the torches which were brought to the Arc de Triomphe from all corners of France, where they had been lit in local ceremonies. The headline in *Le Monde* of 19 June was prosaic but emphatic: "La France quasi unanime rend hommage à l'homme du 18 juin".

The Allied landings in France

Rémy Desquesnes, writing about the series of fiftieth anniversaries celebrated in 1994, maintained that, as far as official commemoration was concerned, it was a heavily edited version of history that was propagated. He protested about the one-sided nature of the narrative that prevailed. "Pourquoi", he asked, "ne conserver que certains éléments de notre passé et refuser tout ce qui ne flatte pas notre amour propre?"[61] He was vindicated by certain aspects of the fiftieth anniversary of the Normandy landings, although there was a limit to how much credit French leaders could take from an Allied operation on their territory. Indeed, it is because most of the credit must go to the "Anglo-Saxons" that de Gaulle had always been less than enthusiastic about D-Day commemorations.

To mark the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary, there was a proliferation of press articles which revisited the events in question. In most of these the epic tone was to the fore. Of course, heroism was very much in evidence on the beaches of Normandy, but there was a natural tendency for the French to claim more than their fair share. Often the Resistance was added wholesale to the mixture, giving the impression that the Germans had a mass uprising within France to contend with as well as the landings on the coast. Henri Amouroux's account in *Le Figaro* described a Resistance movement primed and

[61] In *Contemporary French Civilisation*, vol.19, n°2 (1995), p.149.

ready to spring up and destroy the enemy in a burst of activity: "'Il fait chaud à Suez'. 'Le chamois a bondi'. En quelques heures, les messages de Radio-Londres provoquent la levée en masse des résistants."[62]

The official French interpretation had always been that Resistance, D-day and Liberation were part of a trinity, and were not to be seen as independent elements. The logo of the *Mission du cinquantenaire*, set up to coordinate the commemorative projects, was a montage of three symbols: a beret, a military helmet, and an untamed horse. These symbols were held to represent the three elements mentioned above, and they were brought together in the logo in the colours of the French flag. Philippe Mestre, the minister for ex-servicemen, explained that the choice of design was intended to underline the interdependent nature of the three notions. "Rien n'est séparable", he affirmed.[63]

The same effect was achieved by the practice of paying homage to the Free French alongside the Allied liberators during D-day commemorations. No one said so bluntly, of course, but the aim was surely, in part, to provide some kind of counterbalance to the alternative narrative, the one that told of an occupied territory being freed by an invading military force. At Ouistreham, which was liberated by Free French units integrated into the British army, the 1994 commemorative ceremony was graced by an astonishing galaxy of dignitaries. The prime minister, several members of the government, two ex-prime ministers (Pierre Mauroy and Pierre Messmer), as well as the presidents of both houses of parliament, all came to hear Mitterrand praise the Resistance fighters who "représentent la France au premier rang". The emphasis, as

[62] 11 June 1994.
[63] Interview in *Le Figaro*, 26 April 1994.

always whenever the Resistance is evoked, was on the spirit of unity that enabled the disparate parts to come together at the decisive moment.[64]

During this time of anniversaries France's political leaders, and the "monde combattant", were conspicuously keen to stress the importance of the "débarquement en Provence", codenamed *Operation Anvil*, then *Dragoon*. The first of these landings in Provence took place on 15 August 1944. The 1994 commemorative ceremonies were organised jointly by the *Mission du cinquantenaire*, the "Provence '44" association and the local authorities. The heavy commemorative emphasis was by no means a new departure: in the period since the end of the war there had been a perception among the French that the significance of the operation in Provence had been played down by the British and Americans, who had consistently promoted D-day as the sole military operation worth remembering. One cannot dismiss this purely as paranoia. In 1964 even *Le Monde* had carried an article in which it was claimed that British and American historians had been suspiciously consensual in denouncing Operation Anvil-Dragoon as an error, when "en fait, le succès du débarquement en Provence est évident".[65]

The French desire to "prove themselves" with regard to the Allies was evidently still alive in 1994. On 1 June 1994, François Léotard gave an address to mark the opening of an exposition entitled "Ensemble ils ont libéré la France". He drew attention to the efficiency of the mission on the Provençal coast, and pointed out that Toulon was liberated only eight days after D-day, not the twenty days foreseen by the Allied command; and that the liberation of Marseilles was accomplished in fourteen days, instead of forty. He followed up with a rather dubious comparison between France and the United Kingdom. In spite of the fact that the latter had already fought – for a time practically alone - for five years, and in doing so had sustained a huge number of

[64] *Le Monde*, 8 June 1994.
[65] 11 August.

casualties, François Léotard saw fit to recall that "lorsque les hostilités s'arrêtent, les troupes françaises de notre armée reconstituée seront, en Europe, plus nombreuses que celles du Royaume-Uni".[66] Earlier that year, Paul Thibaud had defended the French military's preparations at the start of the war. In an article for *Esprit*, he compared the French army's role favourably to that of the British: "Pour ce qui est de s'armer, les Français ont été moins défaillants que la Grande-Bretagne qui avait, en juin 1940, quatre divisions sur le continent contre quarante en août 1914".[67]

Whereas the Normandy landings were essentially an Anglo-North American venture which happened to take place on French soil, the landings in Provence were conducted by France and her empire, with Allied support. It was a French army, under the direct authority of French generals, which was to liberate Marseilles and Toulon. In the interests of national unity and morale it was essential that the distasteful memory of rapid defeat and inglorious collaboration be sweetened by the memory of victorious combat. As usual de Gaulle and his generals understood perfectly the implications for the future dignity of the nation, and strove to ensure that France would have some share of the glory. He wrote in his *Mémoires* that

> il s'agissait que notre armée, reconstituée en Afrique, rentrât dans la métropole, contribuât avec nos forces clandestines à la libération du pays, prît part à l'invasion du Reich et s'assurât en chemin des gages voulus pour que le règlement final ne pût s'accomplir sans nous.[68]

This became the standard commemorative discourse. Speaking at a ceremony to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Toulon, François Léotard echoed de Gaulle when he said that "la victoire de Toulon est la victoire des armées de la France et du

[66] *Il y a 50 ans, la libération. Allocutions de François Léotard, Ministre de la Défense* (Paris: Ministère de la Défense, 1994).
[67] *Esprit*, n°198 (January-April 1994).

peuple tout entier. Décisive pour la campagne militaire, cette victoire contient aussi la promesse de l'amalgame entre la France libre et la France combattante".[69]

Like that of liberation and resistance, the memory of the Provence landings was all about redemption and above all unity. Yet unlike those of Liberation and Resistance, the heroic version has gone largely unchallenged: the regular army and the rebels of the interior were united in a decisive victory that proved once and for all that France was restored to its former glory. The subtext is almost spiritual: this was not merely a successful military operation, but a eucharistic rite leading up to a defining moment of national communion. There were, in the words of François Léotard, two victories: "celle de la libération, et celle de l'unité".[70]

The reality was more fraught. From de Gaulle's point of view, the victory on the Provençal coast was intended to show fractious sections of the *maquis* just who was in charge, rather than to embrace them as equals. By the same token the intention was to underline this authority before the population as a whole, and to demonstrate at home and abroad that the French Empire was not dead and buried.

Another crucial aspect of these landings was the role played by France's overseas territories. In remembering the Provence landings the *union française*, which had had precious few occasions to celebrate its history in the anti-colonial climate of the previous forty years, could glory for once in a positive role. In fact the role it played was more than positive, it was absolutely crucial: according to the commemorative rhetoric, it not only enabled the French to commemorate a *débarquement* of their own, it also captured the essence of Frenchness in its most idealistic and laudable form; that is to say, as an ensemble of universal values that can mobilise anyone, regardless of origin, who is willing to fight to defend them. It is for this reason that, when Operation

[68] Quoted in *Le Monde* 12 August 1964.
[69] Speech on 28 August 1994, in *Allocutions de François Léotard.*

Anvil is remembered, the accent tends to be placed on the theme of unity in diversity, on the fact that the French genius was not confined to a specific territory, and that *this very fact* contributed to the eventual victory.

During the 1994 commemorations the Defense Minister François Léotard was keen to stress that united diversity. At Fréjus on 1 September he commemorated the "troupes noires" who had participated in the Provence campaign. On the 10 September, in Marseilles, he paid homage to "l'armée d'Afrique", those men who, "dans un brassage exceptionnel d'origines et de religions, ont défendu le même idéal".[71] An article devoted to the landings in Provence in *Paris-Match* was typical in that it again stressed the rich diversity of the invading force, made up of "plus de 200 000 hommes, métropolitains, pieds-noirs, marocains, algériens, malagaches, polynésiens et les étrangers de la légion".[72]

Covering the fiftieth anniversary for *Le Monde*, Marc Ferro recalled the words of Gaston Monnerville, who was to become president of the Senate under the Fifth Republic: "sans son empire, la France ne serait qu'un pays libéré. Grâce à son empire, la France est un pays vainqueur."[73] Monnerville had placed the Provence landings within a broad historical context, as yet another example of the empire coming to the aid of the fatherland: "Comme elle l'avait fait en 1870, puis en 1914, la France a mobilisé (. . .) ses soldats de l'outre-mer".[74] This was a particularly durable commemorative *leitmotiv*. Half a century after Monnerville, in 1994, François Léotard echoed his words, saying that "ce sont ces soldats de tous les continents qui ont permis, avec d'autres, que notre pays ne soit pas seulement libéré, mais vainqueur".[75] Prime minister Edouard Balladur took up

---

[70] Speech on 28 August 1994, in *Allocations de François Léotard.*
[71] *Allocutions de François Léotard.*
[72] 25 August 1994.
[73] 15 August 1994.
[74] *Le Monde*, 14-15 August 1994.
[75] Speech at Fréjus, 1 September 1994. *Allocutions de François Léotard.*

exactly the same themes when he spoke at a ceremony on the beach at Dramont on 15 August.[76] This demonstrates how crucial the colonies, whose troops were known officially as "soldats de la Grande France", were to the face-saving operation in which the French were engaged. In colonial terms, only "la métropole" was occupied, although some of the African territories were collaborationist initially. But without Africa and the Free French, de Gaulle would have found it much more difficult to salvage some pride and prestige from the wreckage of World War Two. It is this above all that the French celebrate when they commemorate the landings in Provence.

The 1994 celebrations of this event centred mainly on president Mitterrand and the leaders of the former colonies in Africa. The grand naval review which took place on 14 August was watched by fifteen African heads of state alongside the French president. Yet the celebration of France's partnership with its former territories obscured one of the troubling consequences of the Provence landings: they helped to convince many of France's leaders that France's status as a great power was inextricably linked to its status as a colonial power. The tribulations brought on by the military collapse and subsequent occupation had seriously undermined their nation's claim to greatness. Resistance, along with the military campaigns led from Africa, allowed France's leaders to claim that the nation had regained its "rank". In these circumstances, undergoing a process of de-colonisation would, it was thought, have been grist to the mill of France's detractors. It would have negated the glory of resistance and liberation by forcing France into a minor role in world affairs.

As a result, the logic of de-colonisation, broadly accepted by Britain, gained less ground in France. The warning signs were there for all to see, however. As the war was ending in Europe, it was beginning for France in Africa. At Sétif, in Algeria, 29 Europeans were murdered by Muslim insurgents in May 1945. The reprisals were

[76] *Le Monde*, 17 August 1994.

bloody: between six and eight thousand people died in the fighting that followed. Once again, behind the glorious feats of arms there lies a more sombre reality that is difficult to incorporate into the official commemorative discourse. Not surprisingly, it was invariably omitted.

Paradoxically, the Franco-African character of the Provence landings, which had always seduced French political leaders, can also explain why ordinary French people showed little appetite for commemorating it. In Normandy, in June, the heads of state and government of virtually all of what we now regard as the Western World were present, including, crucially, the United States. Its fiftieth anniversary commemorations had therefore mobilised opinion formers – principally from politics and the media – from all over the world. Public opinion in France could not fail to take notice. In Provence, in August, the United States sent its ambassador, Britain sent Prince Andrew, and the world's media ignored the occasion. Timing had never helped the Provence commemoration. It fell in the middle of the August holiday period, and only ten days before the liberation of Paris. The net result, comparing the attitude of the political class to that of the general public, was an enthusiasm deficit: "En dépit des moyens mis en œuvre," said Rémy Desquesnes, "la commémoration de l'opération *Dragoon* (. . .) était loin d'avoir l'éclat des cérémonies en Manche".[77]

The liberation of Paris

Unlike the Provence landings, commemorations of the liberation of Paris have invariably been greeted with enthusiasm by the public. The memory of the few days preceding and following 25 August, the cult of the insurrection and its martyrs, have

[77] Rémy Desquesnes in *Contemporary French Civilisation*, vol.19, n°2 (1995).

been jealously guarded. This is only natural, for these few moments of history are priceless commodities: chapters of the Second World War to which the French contribution was both crucial and positive. True, the liberation of Paris could never be described as central to the military outcome of the war, but for France's pride in itself, these events, and their place in the national memory, are of the utmost importance.

The importance of the liberation of Paris, like that of resistance in general, may indeed have been mainly symbolic, but one cannot afford to be too dismissive, for history has shown that symbols often triumph over hard fact. "La vie, l'histoire des nations sont bâties (. . .) sur la mémoire et sur les symboles", said Edouard Balladur in 1993, at another commemorative ceremony.[78] Even more so when the hard fact leaves gaps and throws up contradictions, as it does for Paris's liberation.

De Gaulle, characteristically, understood the value of symbolism, and the freeing of the capital of the Republic was certainly symbolic. He also foresaw the future role that the liberation of Paris, alongside, notably, his own call to arms four years earlier, as well as the exploits of the Resistance and the Provence landings, would play in the collective healing process, even though he later admitted that the whole adventure was really just "a bluff that came off".[79] There had to be the possibility of constructing a narrative that ended with the French uniting in resistance to the occupying force, thus sweeping away (or perhaps under the carpet) the divisions that existed during, and even before, the Occupation. Little wonder, then, that de Gaulle and Leclerc insisted so vehemently that the French 2nd Armoured Division be diverted in order to enter Paris first, in spite of the capital's relative insignificance from a *strategic* point of view. As *Le Figaro* acknowledged, "without de Gaulle, France would have been liberated by the

[78] Speech at commemorative ceremony of 16 July 1993 (*Le Monde*, 18-19 July 1993).
[79] *Sunday Times*, 7 January 1996.

Allies anyway, [but] Paris would not have been liberated by its people and the 2nd Armoured Division."[80]

In his *Mémoires de Guerre* de Gaulle wrote that "Parmi les points de la terre que le Destin a choisi pour y rendre ses arrêts, Paris fut en tout temps particulièrement symbolique".[81] In France, almost every incident that counted in the nation's history had taken place in Paris. The *point d'orgue* marking the end of the humiliation of German Occupation was never going to be anywhere else. Hitler, in his own ruthless way, knew his history. He ordered Von Cholitz to leave the city in ruins if he left it at all, for "in history, the loss of Paris has always signified the loss of France."[82]

One of the characteristics of commemorations is their deliberate lack of originality. They take up the forms, themes and discourses of previous commemorations, in order that the values celebrated may be presented as permanent, and in order that legitimacy for the present may be derived from the connection with the past. De Gaulle returned to the theme of Paris's status as role model for the nation in 1964: "Paris (. . .) a, depuis tant de siècles, la charge capitale d'animer, d'illustrer, de signer ce que fait la France".[83] In 1994 Jacques Chirac was able to represent his town's attributes as "eternal" and deep-rooted. Comparing Paris "today" with Paris in 1944, he claimed that "Paris ressemble encore à Paris de la Libération, un Paris toujours frondeur, généreux et prêt à s'enflammer pour une cause qui lui paraît juste".[84]

Because of its symbolic and emotive charge, the legend of the liberation had remained largely intact into the Mitterrand years. That legend had, after all, been formally inscribed on the walls of the Hôtel de Ville. De Gaulle's inscription tells of a

[80] Quoted in *Financial Times* press review, 11 June 1994.
[81] Quoted by Jacques Chirac, writing in *Le Monde*, 25 August 1994.
[82] Mentioned in *Le Monde*, 25 August 1994; special section, 'Paris libérée'.
[83] Speech at commemorative ceremony of 1964. Quoted in *Le Monde*, 27 August 1964.
[84] *Paris-Match*, 1 September 1994.

"capitale fidèle à elle-même et à la France", an "exemple pour la nation toute entière", which "s'est libérée par son propre effort, puis, unie à l'avant garde de l'armée française venue à son secours a, le 25 août, réduit l'Allemand dans ses derniers retranchements et l'a fait capituler."[85]

And the enduring images of liberation maintained the epic tone. In December 1983 a survey asked French people to select the image that best defined the liberation of Paris. 47% of those asked chose "le général de Gaulle descendant les Champs-Elysées". Far behind came "un soldat americain salué par la foule", with 16%, followed by "un resistant armé avec un brassard", on 15%. The negative aspects had manifestly been pushed to the back of their minds: the memory of "une femme tondue" was selected by only 8%.[86]

When it came to the fiftieth anniversary, Paris paid homage to one liberator: Paris itself. In the run-up to the commemorations, a section of the Gaullist right had complained that there had been too much deference to "the Anglo-Saxons" in Normandy in June. Gaullists would have more scope to influence the Paris anniversary than they had had in Normandy: the *Mission du Cinquantenaire* had delegated some of its powers to a *Comité d'honneur des célébrations du Cinquantième anniversaire de la libération de Paris*, chaired by none other than Jacques Chirac, RPR mayor of Paris. The *mairie* allocated a budget of twenty million francs. And the grand open-air spectacle scheduled for 26 August was entrusted to the Charles de Gaulle Institute, whose priorities were not difficult to discern.

The commemoration in Paris, then, was sure to be different in tone from the one which had taken place in Normandy in June: there were to be no telegenic U.S. veterans parading down the Champs-Elysées with their "Big Bands", and no medals were to be

[85] Speech of 24 March 1945.
[86] *L'Histoire* n°67 (May 1984).

awarded to them; no wreaths were to be laid at American monuments. The hundreds of plaques dedicated to loyal Parisians "tombés pour la patrie" during street battles with the occupying forces were cleaned up or restored one by one.[87] In the words of Rémy Desquesnes, "la commémoration consistait d'abord à organiser officiellement l'oubli de la participation des armées étrangères libératrices et à imposer une mémoire officielle, ici, la mémoire gaulliste".[88] Desquesnes also suggested that objective history had come under systematic attack. He pointed out that the "precious" archives of the *Oberbefehlshaber West*, which ran the western occupied territories, had been moved from Paris to the U.S. National Archives in Washington. General Leclerc had allowed the American army to requisition these papers just after the liberation demonstrating, according to Desquesnes, "qui (. . .) s'estimait le maître de la situation".[89]

Nevertheless, in August 1994 the organisers decided to put the emphasis on the *Frenchness* of the occasion, and they demanded that the media do likewise.[90] The mainstream, non-specialist press took up the baton willingly on this occasion. Its example was not followed by specialist historical publications, who generally saw it as their duty to provide an alternative narrative. For instance, *L'Histoire* magazine brought out a special edition for the liberation which promised to "faire le récit le plus juste, sans légende et sans amnésie".[91]

Paris-Match, on the other hand, was representative of ordinary, non-specialist opinion; there was no mandate to disturb consensus, no attempt to delve beneath the

---

[87] So many commemorative plaques had been erected after the war that the minister of the Interior felt the need to set formal conditions. As from the 12 April 1946 the owner of the land or building had to give formal consent, and the wording of the inscription had to be "noble et succinte". Subsequently, the decree of 29 November 1968 gave the prefect power to sanction or refuse any plaque or memorial in his department. Decentralisation brought further a further modification in 1982: the mayor could now make the decision. More details in Barcellini and Wieviorka, *Passant, souviens-toi.*

[88] Rémy Desquesnes in *Contemporary French Civilisation*, vol.19, n°2 (1995), p.182.

[89] Rémy Desquesnes in *Contemporary French Civilisation*, vol.19, n°2 (1995), p.186.

[90] Rémy Desquesnes in *Contemporary French Civilisation*, vol.19, n°2 (1995), p.182.

[91] N°179 (July-August 1994).

surface. In the likes of *Paris-Match* some of the popular myth is usually left undisturbed. Its August edition featured a photograph taken during the battles in Paris. The caption ran, "Ces combattants sans uniforme ont pour rôle historique de restaurer, grâce à leur *unification*, scellée par la mission de Jean Moulin, la *légitimité de la France* incarnée par de Gaulle".[92]

Even a brief caption like this one is revelatory of a nation's preoccupations. The favourite themes are taken up again: firstly there is the "rôle historique" of the resisters, which, crucially, is not primarily that of ensuring a military victory, but of "restoring the legitimacy" of a certain France, that personified by de Gaulle. The paradox here is a perplexing one. In acknowledging the restoration of this particular France, one is implicitly recognising the existence of another one. This "other" may well be illegitimate, unwelcome and treacherous, but it exists nonetheless, and its existence is inscribed in the very discourse that would efface it.

In order that the real France may be restored, there was a condition to be fulfilled: the combatants had to be unified. The retrospective interpretation always gave to believe that, once that unity had been achieved by Jean Moulin, victory was a foregone conclusion, and that the creation of the CNR and the liberation of Paris were part of the same glorious movement. In reality, the unification of Parisians against the occupier only took place *after* victory seemed assured, and not vice versa. The legend had reversed the order.

Rémy Desquesnes was not the only historian to question the "Franco-centric" bias of the 1990 commemorations (see above, p.55). Writing in *Le Monde*, André Kaspi acknowledged that "les mythes ont la vie dure", and attempted to dismantle some of them.[93] He explained, notably, why "Paris doit sa libération aux Américains autant

[92] 18 August 1994; my italics.
[93] 'La bataille et le mythe', 25 August 1994.

qu'aux Français": The Second Armoured Division depended on the Americans for equipment and provisions, and Leclerc was under the command of general Gerow of the Fifth U.S. Armed Corps. In addition, he recalled, it was the American general Barton's Fourth Division that fought the battle in Eastern Paris. *Le Monde* was consistently critical of officialdom's willingness to peddle flattering myths. Editorialist Thomas Ferenczi backed up Kaspi a few days later, denouncing the exclusion of the allies from Paris during the anniversary period.[94]

Deference to the facts was, it seemed, a privilege reserved for outside observers. The organisers of the commemorative events reserved the right to be selective in what they celebrated, and the public did not appear to begrudge them that right. As *Le Monde* put it, "les Français sont persuadés, en partie grâce au général de Gaulle, qu'ils ont gagné la guerre par leurs propres moyens 'avec l'aide de leurs alliés'. La vérité historique est moins héroïque."[95] But then, the pure historical truth is always less heroic; that is why it is not always compatible with official, collective forms of remembrance, particularly when they constitute a crucial chapter in a national narrative.

As with the other war anniversaries, that of the liberation of Paris gave rise to a veritable mobilisation of communicators, responsible for the process of transmission of memory so vital to public commemoration. There was a massive poster campaign, to ensure that Parisians could not fail to notice that something was going on. The public television station *France 3* co-operated with the municipal authorities of Paris to produce a film and an exhibition for the occasion. The exhibition, staged at the Hôtel de Ville, was entitled "Parisiens debout", and brought together photographs by the likes of Capa, Cartier-Bresson and Doisneau.[96] Since the start of June another exhibition had been running at the *Hôtel national des invalides*. It was entitled, "Ensemble ils ont

[94] *Le Monde*, 28-29 August 1994.
[95] 5 April 1994.

libéré la France", and dealt with the different stages of liberation of the national territory.

The day of 25 August started with a Mass at Notre Dame in the presence of Mgr Lehmann, president of the German "conférence épiscopale". (Charges of Franco-centric bias did not apply to the clergy, it seemed.) During the day there were ceremonies at *Invalides*, at the Leclerc monument at Porte d'Orléans, and at Montparnasse station, where the German general von Cholitz had surrendered. In the evening there was a projection on the façade of the Hôtel de Ville of all the names of the 1500 people who died liberating Paris, while an actress recited a Victor Hugo poem. This was followed by a *son et lumière* display recreating the atmosphere of August 1944. Finally, there was a huge *bal populaire* at place de la Concorde, which was attended by 300 000 people.

The following day, the festival continued with a parade on the Champs-Elysées, the theme being "Libération, j'écris ton nom" (a quotation from a Paul Elouard poem). Featuring 6000 young "figurants", it was intended to re-enact de Gaulle's triumphant *bain de foule* fifty years before. Whereas the previous evening's celebrations were regarded as a success, this project did not appear to capture the imagination of the people. According to Rémy Desquesnes, the parade, which cost ten million francs, took place before "un public peu nombreux et circonspect".[97]

As I have already suggested, the theme of national unity, and the danger of disunity, was ever present at the fiftieth anniversary of Paris's liberation. On 24 August, as part of the commemorative programme, the prime minister, Edouard Balladur, and the mayor of Paris, Jacques Chirac, attended the unveiling of a memorial to Marshall Leclerc, who led the first detachment of Allied troops into Paris. From Balladur and Chirac, members not of a political party but a Republican *rassemblement*, the RPR, one

[96] Rémy Desquesnes in *Contemporary French Civilisation*, vol.19, n°2 (1995), p.183.

would expect nothing less than full commitment to the sacred virtue. And Balladur's speech duly insisted on the need for national unity, which he described significantly as "plus nécessaire que jamais", and spoke of the danger of division. He quoted Marshall Leclerc on this subject: "Sachons tirer les leçons de l'histoire, notre pays ne peut pas se payer le luxe de divisions intestines".

On the evening of 25 August there was a high profile ceremony at the Hôtel de Ville, attended by the highest representatives of the Republic, including Mitterrand, Balladur and Chirac. François Mitterrand exhorted his audience, "Sachons préserver ce qui doit nous unir", while Jacques Chirac stressed the success attained by the "hommes unis et déterminés". The speeches consistently accentuated the fact that "la Résistance c'était la victoire du rassemblement, de l'unité, du courage et de l'espoir".[98] For the ceremony at the Hôtel de Ville, Chirac had made a point of inviting personalities representing all the different strands of the Resistance as guests of honour. These guests, in the words of France 2's correspondent, symbolised "le consensus qu'a voulu Jacques Chirac".[99] This united front also inspired the subtitle to the headline in *Le Figaro* of 26 August. The same newspaper, summing up the "allocutions" of the two days of official commemorations, chose the words, "l'union dans le souvenir: union, rassemblement, reconnaissance" It is a phrase which goes to the very heart of what is at stake during collective memorial experiences such as this one.

The mystical, spiritual nature of the *union sacrée* was also evoked by the speakers. This constitutes another step away from the practicalities of partisan politics, and indeed from everyday reality, which is a characteristic of this type of national commemoration. In commemorative discourse, words that denote concrete objects or

[97] Rémy Desquesnes in *Contemporary French Civilisation*, vol.19, n°2 (1995), p.185.
[98] Rémy Desquesnes in *Contemporary French Civilisation*, vol.19, n°2, (1995), p.184.
[99] 'Il y a 50 ans, la Libération', 25 August 1994.

clear ideas tend to disappear, to be replaced by words which resonate wonderfully, but are difficult to pin down to a definition. Chirac, quoting de Gaulle, described the Liberation as "un des miracles de la conscience nationale (. . .) qui, parfois, au long des siècles, viennent illuminer notre histoire".[100] Mitterrand talked of "cette mystérieuse et forte alliance qui nous a fait ce que nous sommes".[101]

The anniversary had not been totally devoid of party political tensions, but these were, for the most part, put to one side for the key moments. Communists were encouraged to participate in the organisation of the ceremonies as well as in the ceremonies themselves. High profile figures such as Henri Rol-Tanguy (commander-in-chief of the *Forces française de l'intérieur*) and Maurice-Kriegel-Valrimont (a leading communist member of the *Conseil national de Résistance*) were allocated a place on the "comité d'honneur du cinquantenaire".[102]

Where there were tensions surrounding the fiftieth anniversary they were not between communists and Gaullists. They were generally of a more personal nature. Some Gaullists had been unhappy that Mitterrand's public pronouncements at previous commemorative ceremonies had not made much of de Gaulle's role. This had certainly been the case in Normandy and in the run-up to the commemoration in Paris. Alain Peyrefitte complained, in *Le Figaro* of 25 August, that this was an serious affront, since national liberation and General de Gaulle were indissociable: "Le souvenir de la Libération, c'est aussi, en effet, le souvenir du Libérateur, dont M. Mitterrand s'est efforcé, en cet anniversaire, de ne pas prononcer le nom".[103] In the keynote speech he gave that evening, the president did finally allude directly to de Gaulle. Jean Kahn, who helped to prepare that speech, has explained that this was a deliberate insertion. It was

[100] *France 2*, 25 August 1994.
[101] *France 2*, 25 August 1994.
[102] Reported in *Le Monde*, 23 August 1994.
[103] *Le Figaro*, 25 August 1994.

felt that there would have been too much damaging criticism if the general had been omitted again from a presidential speech.[104] Unity, albeit begrudged and calculated, won the day on this occasion.

A dominant theme throughout French history has been the connection between external influence, best expressed by the French term *rayonnement,* and internal cohesion. As François Mitterrand said after his re-election in 1988, "c'est dans la cohésion sociale que réside la capacité de la France à faire rayonner (. . .) son génie".[105] In September 1994 François Mitterrand was asked by what he would want people to remember about his presidency. He immediately alluded to that vital partnership between internal harmony and France's world role: "mes deux septennats furent la période de *paix civique et sociale* la plus marquée du siècle (. . .) enfin la France a, sous mon mandat, tenu son rang, celui d'une des premières nations du monde".[106]

When such notions exist somewhere in the collective consciousness, they are exploited wherever possible for their galvanising potential, with the added bonus that each "exploitation" reinforces the very ideas that are mobilised in the first place. At a World War Two commemoration earlier that year, defence minister François Léotard had explained the partnership as "un rayonnement qui nous impose d'être forts si nous voulons être entendus".[107] The reasoning is that people tend to concentrate less on parochial disputes if their eyes are fixed on broader horizons; and also that they can be encouraged to unite in pride behind the gifts their collective genius has given, or can still give, to the world. A united nation is all the more able to make an impression on the world outside. The liberation of Paris was cherished because it enabled France, in the

[104] Interview of 10 March 1999.
[105] Speech of 8 May 1988, in François Mitterrand, *Discours: 1981-1995* (Paris: Europolis, 1995), p.267.
[106] *Le Figaro*, 8 September 1994
[107] Speech at Saint Marcel (Morbihan), 18 June 1994. *Allocutions de François Léotard.*

words of Jacques Chirac once more, to "retrouver son honneur et son rang dans le concert des nations".[108] Of course, this sort of rhetoric echoes faithfully de Gaulle himself. He had declared lyrically after the liberation of Paris that "Derrière le nuage si lourd de notre sang et nos larmes, voici que reparaît le soleil de notre grandeur". Here one encounters the now-familiar bilateral system, whereby external assertiveness enhances interior harmony; and here again one must come to terms with a worldview that has been passed from generation to generation in France, and has been proclaimed loudly enough for all to hear by the historical heavyweights like de Gaulle, Napoléon and Louis XIV. It is a worldview that conceives of a hierarchical "chain of being" in which France occupies an exalted position, from which she is unhappily displaced from time to time. As in classical tragedy, chaos and destruction then hold sway, working towards an inevitable conclusion in which there will be a mass of bodies backstage, but in which everyone and everything is restored to its rightful rank.

After war and occupation these ideas became simultaneously more crucial and more difficult to sustain. More crucial because, in the wake of such unhealthy division anything that favoured unity was welcome; more difficult to sustain because during the previous four years there had been precious little in France worth radiating to the world. However, episodes like the Liberation provided the opportunity to rehabilitate France's messianic role. It was celebrated not only as the return of the "real" France from the wilderness, but as a psychological turning point in the world wide confrontation between the forces of good and evil. In times of commemoration, speeches habitually recalled the joy with which the news was received by the deportees in the Eastern concentration camps. The capital of the nation was presented as the symbolic capital of Civilisation: both Paris and Civilisation had been in darkness for a number of years, but, now that the former was free, the latter too would make a glorious return to dominance

[108] *France 2*, 25 August 1994.

on the world stage. The presenter of *France 2*'s flagship programme, "Il y a 50 ans, la Libération", said by way of introduction that "on dit souvent que la Libération de Paris a été pour le monde entier le signal que quelque chose était en train de changer".[109] One is given the impression, listening to some accounts, that the Allied victory owed more to a collection of inspirational signs and symbols than to armed combat. Thus we were informed in the same television programme that, although not everyone participated in the insurrection, that hardly mattered because everyone heard the bells of victory ring out and thus the whole population was implicated in the victory! Jacques Chirac's speech on August 25 made reference to "l'émotion du monde entier, dont les yeux étaient rivés sur la France", when the news filtered through; François Mitterrand spoke of the "signification universelle" of the event.

The conception of Paris as a kind of grand metonym for the global conflict was to serve as a reminder that France ought never to let itself be engrossed in its own squabbles, since the rest of the world looked to her for guidance. In other words, the French had a duty to remain united, since in their unity they were better able to set an example to others.

[109] 25 August 1994.

CHAPTER THREE

LA GUERRE FRANCO-FRANCAISE

"Les mains les plus impures de la guerre étrangère sont plus pures que les mains les plus pures de la guerre civile."

- Péguy

We saw in the previous chapter that one of the elementary functions of commemoration - to instill a sense of unity on a national scale- was still relevant to our period. However, in order that commemoration of the Second World War may perform that function, it had been necessary to be selective about what was remembered, about what was deemed fit for commemoration. But the facts could not be ignored forever: alongside the glory of the liberation of Paris or the heroic martyrdom of Jean Moulin, there was an immensely complex Franco-French conflict to be dealt with. And even within otherwise glorious episodes, the tensions could never quite be forgotten. To make matters more complicated, the problems did not always originate in the war period. As Marc Ferro has said, "history is one of the main areas of civil war" in France.[1] Divergent modes of dealing with the past in collective memory and commemoration had the potential to provoke new tensions or accentuate pre-existing ones.

France is often said to have been continuously at war with itself. In 1985 the periodical *Vingtième Siècle* produced a special edition entirely devoted to "les guerres

[1] *The Use and Abuse of History*, pp.104, 105.

franco-françaises".[2] François Mitterrand has spoken of "la guerre civile permanente entre Français",[3] in which he included 1940-44. Henry Rousso has called the Vichy years "la faille la plus profonde qu'ait connue l'unité nationale".[4] According to Paul Thibaud, one of the reasons for the reluctance of the French to take up arms to defend themselves was that each Frenchman was afraid of his neighbour when he was armed. "Ils ne pouvaient guère envisager de prendre les armes, même de se mobiliser, sans que remontent les peurs réciproques".[5]

The fact is that, between 1940 and 1944, Frenchmen were engaged in violent struggle against fellow Frenchmen. Before 1943, perhaps, it was possible for both resisters and collaborators to delude themselves that, ultimately, they were both fighting for France. But in 1943, the year in which the *milice* was created, it became clear that there was indeed a kind of civil war going on. Over 2000 French people suspected of collaborating with the Germans were killed between 1943 and June 1944. Many more French men and women lost their lives, sometimes at the hands of their countrymen, for opposing that collaboration. Following the liberation, there was of course yet more Franco-French bloodshed, during the infamous period of *épuration*.[6]

But if the period is seen as another battle in the *guerre franco-française*, it is a battle which must be viewed in all its complexity. Without wishing to reduce other moments of conflict to mere binary opposition, it still made sense to be for or against the Revolution, for or against the Commune, for or against Dreyfus, for or against *l'Algérie française*, and so on. But it does not make full sense to ask if one was or is for or against collaboration with the Nazis. Very few people were wholeheartedly *for*

---

[2] January-March 1985. The expression is attributed to Stanley Hoffmann, one of the first historians to conceive of Vichy as a Franco-French problem as opposed to a Franco-German one.
[3] Quoted by Nathan Bracher in 'Mitterrand and the lessons of history', in *Contemporary French Civilisation*, vol.19, n°2 (1995).
[4] 'Vichy, le grand fossé', in *Vingtième siècle*, n°5 (January 1995).
[5] 'La République et ses héros', in *Esprit*, n°198, (January-April 1994).
[6] *La France des années noires*, p.33.

collaboration. They felt they had little choice. Responses to the situation that arose were multiple, and, to complicate the picture even further, there were many subsidiary issues to be confronted, which elicited any number of different responses. In occupied France, the internal fractures were not only ideological, but social, cultural, sometimes even accidental. In comparison, the great traumas of the Revolution, the Commune or the Dreyfus Affair appear blessedly straightforward. The fractures were serious, but clean. So, in spite of Gaullian and communist attempts to set up oppositions in accordance with their ideology ("the real France versus the traitors", and "the people versus a self-seeking bourgeois élite" respectively) it is impossible to view the Second World War in terms of a simple opposition.

Resistance

In many cases, internal divisions were only in evidence under the surface of the official commemorative discourse of a unified "national narrative". The myth of a valiant, consensual, unified resistance movement had not been left completely undisturbed before and during our period. For three or four decades after the Liberation the status of the Resistance had been guarded by an "establishment" of "anciens", which was able to promote its values and memory, and was thorough and energetic in countering perceived slurs on its actions during World War Two. An extraordinarily high proportion of *résistants* and deportees went into politics after the Liberation. Of the 1 112 deputies elected under the Fourth Republic, 709 were in either of these two categories.[7] This "establishment" still considered in 1981 that its influence and prestige justified a call to the French electorate to vote for the only candidate (François

[7] Jean Charlot in *Résistance et Mémoire*, ed. by Emile Malet.

Mitterrand, as it happens) whom they deemed "désireux de prolonger les grandes orientations du Conseil national de la Résistance."[8] During the 1981 election campaign the candidates had hotly disputed the right to claim to be the inheritor of the positive legacies of the war. Henry Rousso described the situation vividly: "Gauche et droite présidentielles bataillaient ferme à coups de francisques, de légions d'honneur ou de chars Leclerc. La campagne du second tour se terminait sur le rappel, tambour battant, des valeurs et du souvenir, apparemment vivaces, de la Résistance".[9]

But since that time, due to a combination of the natural ravages of time and a new-found taste for slaying sacred cows, the stranglehold of the Resistance fraternity over the collective conscience has loosened considerably. By the 1980s it no longer seemed perfectly natural that the heroic exploits of the *maquisards* represent fully "the French experience" during the War. In 1982 Henry Rousso stated baldly (and perhaps prematurely) that "A l'image d'une France unanime dans la révolte contre l'occupant nazi a peu à peu succédé celle d'un pays tout aussi unanime dans la lâcheté et la délation".[10] For Rousso, the most prominent critic of contemporary attitudes, this was symptomatic of a creeping revisionism that sought to minimise the influence of the Resistance heritage, and replace it with a version of events that sat more comfortably alongside the nation's recent predilection for self-criticism. In 1993 Rousso observed that "hormis quelques célébrations isolées, le souvenir de la Résistance resurgit plus volontiers lors de polémiques".[11] Eric Conan and Daniel Lindenberg concurred, writing in 1994 that "depuis déjà de nombreuses années les politiques n'honoraient plus qu'épisodiquement le culte sacré de l'héritage résistant".[12] It is common for the French

[8] Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy*, p.196.
[9] Henry Rousso, 'La Résistance entre la légende et l'oubli', in *L'Histoire*, n°41 (January-June 1982).
[10] 'Où en est l'histoire de la Résistance?' in *L'Histoire*, n°41 (January-June 1982).
[11] *Les Collections du Nouvel Observateur*, n°16 (May 1993).
[12] 'Pourquoi y a-t-il une affaire Jean Moulin?', in *Esprit*, January-April 1994.

to be accused of over-emphasising the importance of the Resistance, but on the basis of official anniversaries this did not appear to be so. Although it was certainly honoured at other times and in other ways, the Resistance had no national commemoration to call its own. Over the years there were in fact a number of proposals for a "journée nationale de la Résistance". So far, however, none of these has come to fruition.[13]

Revelation was taking precedence over veneration, and the Resistance legend in its traditional form was coming under implacable scrutiny. This induced a kind of panic from time to time in those who feared that their version of the truth might not survive intact when no one was left to bear witness to it. Against an increasingly assertive and sceptical "scientific" discourse, which sought to unearth the facts and lay them out for examination, most of those with first hand experience of resistance maintained a "commemorative" discourse, dedicated to keeping the memory alive. One of the recurring themes of *France d'abord*, the newspaper for former resisters, was the need to "defend the honour" of the movement against perceived slurs.

De Gaulle had nationalised the different strands of the armed struggle under the banner of "la France combattante", and his article of faith was that "les Français ne menaient qu'un seul combat pour une seule patrie".[14] However, there had always been an intrinsic tension: for the disparate strands of the Resistance, participation in "le jeu du rassemblement" implied a loss of integrity. In the words of Robert Frank, unity also meant "de perdre leur âme, de masquer ce que fit la spécificité de leur combat, de gommer les déchirures nationales d'alors et de faire croire que la France entière avait été derrière eux pendant toute la période de l'Occupation".[15] While on one level, resistance

[13] As recently as November 1998 *le Patriote résistant* (FNDIRP) reported that certain associations hoped for a commemoration on 27 May, anniversary of the creation of the CNR.
[14] Quoted in *Le Monde* 12 August 1964.
[15] 'La mémoire empoisonnée', in *La France des années noires*, p.489.

was a patriotic act in defence of French sovereignty, like Verdun, on the other it was a political act in support of one ideology against another. The measures of each motive varied according to the branch of the Resistance one belonged to. There were as many permutations of patriotism, class war, allegiance to a trusted leader and personal rancour as there were *réseaux*. To simply equate the Resistance with "France" and its adversaries with "the enemy" was to lose sight of the multi-layered reality.

By the 1980s this national synthesis was widely seen as unwieldy and artificial. Resistance was reckoned by some to amount to nothing less than a Franco-French war, more significant in the final analysis than that between French and Germans. As Jean Moulin's biographer Daniel Cordier said, "la Résistance (. . .) ne fut jamais une cause nationale".[16] Thus during our period more attention was given to sub-groups or specific themes. This was true of specialist history, but there was an unprecedented overspill into other vectors of memory: associations of "anciens", the media, and eventually the state. The domination of the monolithic "France combattante" was giving way to the disparate movements and the tensions between them, the role of women in the Resistance, or the activities of Jewish and non-French volunteers (see chapter five). Regional identities had always been strong within the "France combattante". These were strengthened and often given expression in ceremonies, monuments and museums. The first local Resistance museum and documentation centre was opened in 1986, at Champigny-sur-Marne.[17] Many other towns followed suit.

To most socialists and social democrats, and to the post-1968 generation, the notion of armed defence of the *patrie* did not have quite the same hold on the imagination as it did for the Gaullist right and the older generations (and also the sovereignist left). In February 1989 general Fricaud-Chagnaud, chairman of the *Comité*

[16] Interview in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 22-28 April 1999.
[17] *Le Monde*, 6 January 1986.

du souvenir et des manifestations nationales,[18] wrote to the Elysée to request more financial and moral support for the *bluets de France* fund-raising collection. This annual event, the equivalent of the British poppy campaign, had been doing badly for a number of years. General Fricaud-Chagnaud put this down to competition from other causes that had a greater impact on the public conscience. Later in the same year French television companies upset ex-servicemen by failing to broadcast the 8 May commemorations. This led to complaints from the ex-serviceman's ministry, as did the lack of media interest in the Armistice Day ceremonies in November.[19]

Like that of the Resistance fraternity, the influence of *la France combattante* as a whole had once been considerable. Up until the 1970s and 1980s ex-servicemen still constituted a large and powerful lobby. Jean Laurain has gone as far as to say that a significant number of ex-servicemen shifted their allegiance to François Mitterrand for the 1981 presidential election purely because he was committed to restoring the 8 May commemoration, and that their defection may well have tipped the balance in Mitterrand's favour.[20] His analysis would be extremely difficult to test empirically, but if correct it would imply that a presidential election in 1981 was won partly because of a World War Two commemoration!

From liberation until the 1970s, communists and Gaullists had been the major political forces in France. They perpetuated the tension that had existed during the war between the Free French in exile and the interior resistance. The struggle for pre-eminence between Gaullist and Communist versions of the Resistance narrative has

[18] Letter to president Mitterrand, dated 27 February 1989; Jean Kahn's archives. The CSMN was a division of the *Office national des Anciens Combattants et Victimes de Guerre.*
[19] Letter of 31 October 1989 from the *directeur de cabinet* at the ex-serviceman's ministry, for the attention of Jean Kahn (Jean Kahn's archives).
[20] Debate at the conference 'Changer la vie: les années Mitterrand 1981-1984', organised by the *Fondation nationale des sciences politiques* and the *Institut François Mitterrand*, Paris, 14-16 January 1999.

been well documented. Commemorations and monuments were used as weapons in that struggle. Serge Barcellini has described the tug-of-war between the *Mémorial de la France combattante*, inaugurated by de Gaulle on 18 June 1960, and the *clairière des fusillés*, both at Mont Valérien.[21] The *mémorial* was favoured as a place of remembrance by the Free French, the *clairière* by the non-Gaullist, communist-dominated interior resistance. Until 1984, during Deportation Day ceremonies, more time was spent at the former than at the latter. However, in 1984 the itinerary was altered so that only half an hour was spent at the memorial, and nearly an hour at the clearing. These details are trivial but have a symbolic value for those concerned.

The 1980s and 1990s, while departing from the Gaullist/communist dichotomy, saw a number of controversies which undermined the "national narrative" of a unified resistance. Foremost among these were the "Manouchian affair" of June 1985, revealing attacks on communist and left-wing *résistants* by more right-wing factions, and the "Marenches affair" of September 1986, when Gestapo archives bearing evidence of treachery within the Resistance were brought to light; similarly, as a consequence of Klaus Barbie's posthumous testimony, resistance heroes Raymond and Lucie Aubrac were accused of complicity in the betrayal of Jean Moulin. Their children were moved to write to president Mitterrand in October 1991 asking him to "mettre fin au processus de diffamations" against their mother and father.[22] The controversy was to rumble on, however, for a number of years.

The race to reveal the "truth" about the Resistance was becoming rather frantic. France, or vocal elements within it, was apparently eager to destroy its icons. Few were more sacred than Jean Moulin. Daniel Cordier had taken it upon himself to defend Jean

[21] *Vingtième Siècle*, n°45.
[22] Letter of 15 October 1991. Jean Kahn's archives.

Moulin's memory in a biography of which the first volume appeared in 1989.[23] His version of events comforted the "guerre franco-française" school of thought. Cordier was adamant that Moulin "n'est pas un héros d'union nationale, mais l'un des chefs du parti minoritaire qui a gagné".[24]

Cordier had also revived the vendetta between Moulin and Henri Fresnay, by drawing attention to the latter's alleged antisemitic and xenophobic tendencies, and by answering some of the charges previously levelled at Moulin by Fresnay. In November 1989 former members of Fresnay's *Combat* movement held a bellicose meeting at which Cordier was taken to task. Such was the tension that even the Elysée became alarmed. After speaking to one of the participants at the meeting, Elysée counsellor Jean Kahn warned a colleague that Fresnay's comrades were "prêts à déterrer la hache de guerre pour faire son affaire à Cordier, et, à travers lui, à Jean Moulin".[25]

The high water mark of this alternative form of revisionism was arguably reached in 1993, when Thierry Wolton wrote a book in which Jean Moulin was "revealed" to have been a Soviet spy![26] Wolton styled himself a "journaliste d'investigation historique", and that job description typified the spirit of the age: the nation's recent past was seen as something that had to be exposed, the nation's heroes had to be seen to have a dark side. Paul Thibaud claimed that Thierry Wolton's book was cynically timed to chime in with that mood. Wolton's hypothesis, wrote Thibaud,

---

[23] *Jean Moulin. L'inconnu du Panthéon* (Paris: J-C Lattès, 1989).
[24] Conan and Lindenberg in *Esprit* n°198 (January-April 1994).
[25] Note of 1 December 1989 for the attention of Christian Sautter. Jean Kahn's archives.
[26] *Le grand recrutement.* In 1998 Moulin was the centre of attention once again. This time Jacques Baynac claimed, in *Les Secrets de l'affaire Jean Moulin*, that Moulin had been ready to desert de Gaulle and align himself with Giraud and the Americans.

> a eu de l'écho parce qu'elle flatte l'esprit du temps. Elle le flatte en général parce qu'il faut choquer. Elle le flatte en particulier parce qu'elle est en conformité avec la manière devenue normale de traiter en France la période de la guerre (. . .) le public n'attend pas l'héroïsme mais la honte.[27]

It was another sign of the times that Thibaud's article appeared in an issue of *Esprit* entitled "Que reste-t-il de la Résistance?"[28]

Representatives of the state could do little else but attempt to placate the rival factions and shore up consensual aspects. François Mitterrand was understandably reluctant to take sides in the quarrel between the pro-Fresnay and pro-Moulin factions. He paid homage to Fresnay, founder of the *Combat* movement, in a ceremony at the Invalides in September 1988. Then, on 17 June 1993, at the montagne Sainte-Geneviève in Paris, Mitterrand commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the first meeting of the *Conseil national de la Résistance*, set up by Moulin. Mitterrand's speech contained a warning which identified a threat to the memory of Resistance heroes like Moulin. Jean Kahn, who prepared the text of this speech for the president, confirmed that the following passage was inserted as a reaction to the controversy that had resurfaced in the form of Thierry Wolton's incendiary book:[29]

> Qui peut affirmer en des temps comme les nôtres, que la crypte du Panthéon soit un abri sûr? Pour l'honneur de la France résistante et combattante, vous à qui je m'adresse et dont je reconnais tant de visages qui s'illustrent dans les jours dangereux, restons vigilants.[30]

---

[27] The article was entitled 'La République et ses héros'.
[28] N°198 (January-April 1994).
[29] Mentioned during interviews of 3 and 10 March 1999. There was to be more polemical debate in 1998 when Jacques Baynac accused Jean Moulin of being a Soviet agent.
[30] Text of speech kindly provided by Jean Kahn at the *Institut François Mitterrand.* Mitterrand's speeches over the commemorative period were replete with this sort of exhortation. Another example would be the fiftieth anniversary of the "médaille de la Résistance", on 13 October 1993, when Mitterrand said: "Rappelez-vous que nous sommes chargés, vous et moi, les uns et les autres d'une lourde responsabilité,

In the same speech Mitterrand recognised that the pivotal moments of a people's history are always open to retrospective abuse: "Il est facile, après coup, trop facile, d'isoler tel ou tel épisode pour l'amplifier ou le gommer, d'interpréter à contre-sens le comportement des uns et des autres."[31] There is a discernible note of alarm in these words. This was a feature of the language of what we might call the Resistance "establishment" during the 1980s and 1990s. There was a feeling that the Resistance legacy was being contested unjustifiably, partly because it was the fashion to do so, partly because, as Daniel Cordier has suggested,[32] French people had never been able to identify fully with a movement they had failed to support at the time. After all Pétain was, for most of the occupation period, more popular than the Resistance.[33]

The theme was taken up again the following year, when another Moulin-related anniversary imposed itself on the commemorative agenda. Celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the CNR's manifesto, on 15 March 1994, François Mitterrand gave another warning against the dangers of the current fashion. He claimed that "ils sont trop oubliés, ce programme et cette institution", and called on survivors of the event to "transmettre intact" its ideals.[34]

Revisions to the Resistance legend were often made in good faith. However, there was a real fear that they would be used to "over-relativise" the conflict, to give to believe that each side was as bad as the other. There was also a risk that, if the cynical, relativistic stance was taken to extremes, it would represent a defeat for the ideals defended by the Resistance, and by extension the Republic, and a denial of the "lesson learned" from World War Two: that democracy must be defended, if necessary by force.

---

celle de transmettre à nos enfants, à nos petits enfants, à tous ceux qui viendront ensuite, un fragment essentiel de la mémoire de la France". Text supplied by Jean Kahn.

[31] As above (Jean Kahn's archives).

[32] Interview in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 22-28 April 1999.

[33] Affirmed by "toutes les enquêtes", according to Paul Thibaud, 'La République et ses héros', in *Esprit* n°198 (January-April 1994).

[34] *Le Monde*, 17 March 1994.

It was understandable, therefore, that people whose political ideals were founded on those that were regained in 1944, should have erected a monolithic Resistance myth as fortification against its nemesis - the *guerre franco-française* narrative, with its concomitant levelling of the moral high ground. And it is understandable that they should have been alarmed at the erosion of the myth, even when the agents of erosion were acting in good faith.

Henri Amouroux was well known for his extremely relativistic stance on Vichy and the Resistance. During the commemorative period of 1994 he declared in an interview with *Le Quotidien de Paris* that "les atrocités sont à porter au débit de la Résistance comme à celui de la collaboration".[35] He also wrote in *Le Figaro-Magazine* of the torture and sadistic cruelty inflicted by each side on its prisoners.[36] This was precisely the strategy employed by Jacques Trémolet de Villiers, Paul Touvier's defence lawyer, during Touvier's trial. He portrayed the period as a civil war in which the overwhelming preoccupation of each side was to take control: ethical and political decisions were incidental, and both sides were willing to harm innocent people to achieve their objectives. During the Touvier trial, then, de Villiers made great play of Resistance atrocities, such as the murder of the Jourdan family, in Voiron. Some of the Jourdan males belonged to the militia; in consequence every family member, from the baby of two years to the eighty two-year-old grandmother, was killed by the Resistance.[37] Was this a step towards the whole truth, or an insidious attempt to apportion blame indiscriminately?

---

[35] Interview of 2 June 1994.
[36] 29 July 1994.
[37] Alain Jakubowicz, *Touvier: histoire du procès* (Paris: Editions Julliard, 1995), p.91.

18 June 1940

In the previous chapter we saw that the fiftieth anniversary of de Gaulle's BBC broadcast was commemorated in relative harmony, and how this was due in part to the relative moderation of French politics at the time. That said, consensus is rarely absolute, and even for the 18 June anniversary, chinks in the armour of national unanimity were apparent if one was prepared to look closely enough. Behind the scenes the partisan jostling for position started long before the commemorations themselves. Pierre Lefranc, in the same article that celebrated the nation's rallying to de Gaulle, went on to complain that state funding for the commemorative projects had been insufficient, especially when compared to "d'autres anniversaires" (by which he meant the bicentennial of the Revolution).[38] Lefranc did later admit that "on a eu tout ce qu'on a demandé" in terms of financial backing from the government, although he pointed out that the demand for funding had been deliberately modest.[39]

Further behind the scenes, some former *Français libres* wanted to have a special batch of decorations created for the occasion. They suggested that the awards of *Légion d'Honneur* and *Ordre national du Mérite* be upgraded, but exclusively for members of the resistance who had been so honoured before 1980.[40] The date was significant, because there was a feeling among non-Gaullist resisters that they had been neglected by the honours system prior to Mitterrand's victory in 1981. Indeed, a large number of former left-wing resistance fighters were only decorated after 1981. Had the idea put forward by the Gaullists been retained, these people would have been excluded from the new round of honours. In the event the plan did not come to fruition, but the anecdote

[38] *Le Monde*, 1 February 1990.
[39] Interview of 11 May 1999.
[40] N° 256 of the *Revue de la France libre*, mentioned by Jean-Mathieu Boris in a letter to Jean-Louis Bianco (of Elysée staff) on 30 January 1989. Jean Kahn's archives.

illustrates the type of maneouvring that occurred, as the different groups attempted to make their presence felt.

Of the same ilk was the pressure applied by the Paris municipality, headed by Jacques Chirac, in order that that year's *prix national de la Résistance* be presented in June, thereby happily coinciding with the anniversary of de Gaulle's BBC broadcast. Here the objective was obvious: to render "resistance" and "de Gaulle" indissociable in the public consciousness. However, this, too, was not to be, since it was decided that responsibility for the timing of the prizegiving lay with the prefect of each French department.[41] Also, the actions of the Gaullist mayor of Plessis-Robinson (Hauts-de-Seine) upset communists. He was accused of indulging in a "misérable opération politicienne" when he approved the changing of a street name, from *rue Jacques Duclos*, in honour of the former PCF presidential candidate, *to rue Charles de Gaulle*. On a more rudimentary note, in Seine-Saint-Denis a monument dedicated to the general was vandalised on the 18 June.

The Allied landings in France

In the Normandy region, with its historic beaches, its war cemeteries, and its countless monuments, there was (and is) a sense of proprietorship of the D-day heritage, and with it a sense of responsibility for its memory. Yet at the same time these events have national and international significance, since what happened in June 1944 affected most of the world. It is not surprising that this could cause tension between the different interested parties, whose aims and methods did not necessarily coincide. During the Mitterrand years France's regions became more assertive than they had been before, and

[41] Alluded to in a note of 9 April 1940 from Christian Sautter, for the attention of Jean Kahn and Christian Nique. Jean Kahn's archives.

this was recognised by the process of decentralisation begun in 1984. The change in the balance of power was not a particularly smooth one, and this was discernible in the anniversary years of 1984 and 1994.

Fortieth anniversaries do not have the same appeal as fiftieth anniversaries, but in the case of the Normandy landings the 1984 anniversaries were the biggest to date. Raymond Triboulet, chairman of the *Comité du débarquement* since its inception in 1945, promised that "les célébrations du 40^{e} anniversaire seront les plus grandes et les plus belles jamais faites".[42] Given the lack of enthusiasm of previous French governments for the Anglo-Saxon flavour of the Normandy landings, this was not mere empty rhetoric on Triboulet's part.

Initially a division was made between the national commemorations, overseen by the government, and those organised by the *Comité du débarquement.* Ceremonies organised unilaterally by Allied nations were added to the programme, as were events organised by local authorities. The lines of demarcation between the different groups corresponded here to a "bataille de mémoire" in which differences of approach, tone, interpretation and sometimes factual information came to a head. In the eyes of Serge Barcellini, the anniversary can be seen as a "tool", employed for a different purpose by each "agent". For the *Comité*, then, the memorial tool was used to promote "une pédagogie gaullienne de l'honneur national"; for the government it served to advance "une politique mitterandienne"; while the local authorities had in mind "une politique économico-touristique régionale".[43]

[42] Quoted by Serge Barcellini, 'Diplomatie et commémoration. Les commémorations du 6 juin 1984: une bataille de mémoire' in *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* n°186 (1997).
[43] The aims of the different actors do of course overlap at times. The statutes of the *Comité* state that one of its objectives is the "développement du tourisme dans les zones du débarquement"; another is the "entretien des relations franco-alliées". However, the aims as given in the founding statutes and the real priorities are not necessarily coincident.

The co-existence of several *acteurs de mémoire*, each with a distinct set of priorities, begs some important questions: where is the French collective memory in all of this? Is one group the legitimate representative of that idea, to the exclusion of the other two? Do we find it by drawing a line between the three and taking the point of intersection? Can the parts form an integral whole? Is collective memory represented at all at official commemorations?

A closer look at the "bataille de mémoire" of 1984 provides some answers. One of the interesting features of the fortieth anniversary was that, for only the second time since 1945, the national government decided to impose its own commemorative programme, rather than accept that proposed by Triboulet's committee. Although Mitterrand granted considerable autonomy to the regions, he also expanded the state's department of war commemoration, which at the time went under the title of *Direction des statuts et de l'information historique*. It was this department that was asked to "conduire une réflexion", and come up with a programme.[44]

The programme was formed around three guiding principles. Firstly, that the main ceremony should be international in flavour, and should take place on Utah Beach, where the first landing had been made by US troops. Secondly, it was decided that there should also be an exclusively French ceremony at Ouistreham, where the only French commando unit had landed. This, according to Serge Barcellini, was intended to compensate for the non-French nature of the other events, and at the same time to reverse "une hiérarchie gaullienne" which had systematically privileged the memory of French SAS troops over that of Kieffer's commandoes. Thirdly, in order to avoid open conflict with Triboulet, which would have damaged France's image, it was agreed that part of the programme planned by the *Comité du débarquement* should be incorporated

[44] Barcellini, 'Diplomatie et commémoration', p.126.

into the national programme. Thus its ceremonies at Bayeux, Colleville, Bény-sur-Mer and Sainte-Mère-Eglise were included.

When Jean Laurain, minister for ex-servicemen, informed Raymond Triboulet of the arrangements, the latter was not satisfied. In January he wrote to Laurain, lamenting the fact that, "pour la première fois depuis 1945, le rôle et la position juridique du Comité du débarquement semblent faire problème dans certains milieux administratifs". But he did not consider that the "excellent" Jean Laurain was to blame. Rather, he found fault with "certains jeunes fonctionnaires", who did not recognise "l'esprit de la loi et la valeur de la tradition établie".[45]

So in the end conflict was not avoided. The government decided to separate the ceremonies organised by the *Comité* from those organised by the state.[46] The *Comité* was thus allowed to go ahead with its own programme, as long as it did not interfere with the national commemoration.[47] Its response was to issue a motion of protest, voted unanimously by its members (including all 65 mayors of the coastal municipalities). Included in the motion was a call for the government to "rétablir l'unité de la commémoration" which had traditionally been respected. However, this was to no avail, and the state continued with its preparations regardless.[48]

---

[45] 'Diplomatie et commémoration', p.127. The reference to the "position juridique" stems from the fact that the decision to override Triboulet's *Comité* was justified with reference to the law of 1947 which gave the government the right to organise commemorations of 6 June, and which made no mention of the *Comité*. However, as Triboulet pointed out, the *Comité* had been considered "par tous les gouvernements successifs comme l'organe d'exécution de cette loi".

[46] In 1969 there had been a previous dispute between Triboulet and the national government, which led to a "partition", and to Triboulet boycotting one of the ceremonies. In 'Diplomatie et commémoration', p.128.

[47] 'Diplomatie et commémoration', p.128.

[48] 'Diplomatie et commémoration', p.129.

For the 1994 commemorations there were no less than five different groups involved, complementing and contradicting one another to varying degrees.[49] By a decree of 10 September 1992, the government set up a temporary *Mission du cinquantenaire*. It was a large scale operation, supported by the ministries of defence, culture and ex-servicemen. Philippe Mestre, the ex-servicemen's minister, presided over the *Mission*. Several departmental and municipal authorities also lent their support, as did *Radio-France* and *France-Télévision*. Its remit was one of "coordination" and "animation". The *Mission* was also responsible for the official commemorations of the Provence landings, the liberation of Paris, and the end of the war in Europe.

In order to officialise those events and ceremonies that were deemed appropriate, a system of *labelisation* was put in place. A committee consisting of historians and delegates from the ministries of defence and ex-servicemen decided which projects were to receive official approval. The favoured projects then had the right to carry the official logo of the *Mission*, three faces seen in profile, with a flag bearing the words "Résistances", "débarquements" and "libération". With the endorsement of the state, these projects would consequently be more attractive to the public and to potential sponsors. The *Mission du cinquantenaire* was given an international dimension, reflecting the global character of the original events: an International Commission, with around sixty representatives of the belligerent nations as well as the relevant French regions and localities, complemented the *Mission* itself.

The region of Basse-Normandie set up an *Association Débarquement et Bataille de Normandie 1944*, known by the acronym ADBN 44. It brought together at a regional level representatives from different strata of government, and from other interested parties: the French State, the three *conseils généraux* of Basse-Normandie, the

[49] I am indebted to Rémy Desquesnes and his article, '1994: échos des commémorations en France', in *Contemporary French Civilisation*, vol.19, n°2 (1995) for many of the details of the ceremonies in

municipalities, the *Comité du débarquement*, the *Comité régional du Tourisme*, the museums, hotels, restaurant owners, bus companies, and other interested parties were all represented.

In order to pay homage to the Allied soldiers who had fought on its beaches, the region decided to strike a special commemorative medal, to be awarded to all those who took part, should they so desire. The president of the regional assembly, René Garrec, made a number of trips to the Allied nations to award medals to those who were too infirm to make the trip to France. The medals, and the award ceremonies, were generally appreciated as a solemn and moving tribute.

As I have pointed out before, the collective consciousness does not sustain itself by magic; it can be acted upon by those who have the means to do so. Commemoration is first and foremost a golden opportunity to make a lasting impression on that consciousness. ADBN 44 expended much time, energy and imagination promoting its activities: it paid for advertisements in newspapers all over the world; it bought space at the World Travel Market in London, at which it reconstructed a Norman beach. Local newspapers were mobilised in order to inform the people of Normandy of what was happening and why. In particular, they stressed the importance of welcoming and, if necessary, tolerating, the upheaval caused by the influx of Anglo-Saxons. As the poster campaign put it, "En juin 1944, on leur a dit *Thank you*, en juin 1994 on leur dit *Welcome*". Since, in France, it is always desirable to keep the Parisians "on side", ADBN 44 also ran a poster campaign in the metro, which invited the inhabitants of the capital to associate themselves with the D-day commemorations.

The *conseils généraux* of the region's three departments got together in 1992 to form an organisation called *Espace historique de la Bataille de Normandie*, whose

---

Normandy in June 1994.

mission was to valorize the sites relevant to the landings and subsequent battles.[50] In total the three *conseils* contributed seventy million francs to this project. They hoped that, in time, this would prove to be an investment rather than a donation; in other words, they hoped that the influx of "memorial tourists", in 1994 and afterwards, would eventually generate a profit.

Subsequently the department of the Manche decided that it needed its own committee, and in January 1993 it set up *Liberté 44* in order to co-ordinate local activities. There was only one D-Day site – Utah beach – on the departmental territory; according to Rémy Desquesnes, this induced a sort of paranoia among members of the *conseil général* that they would be treated as "second class citizens" in the commemorative community.[51] Even more than other commemorators, *Liberté 44* saw its priority as passing on the requisite memory and lessons to children. Its first public activity, in June 1993 on Utah beach, was to organise a vast gathering of children, who scraped the word "liberty" in the sand. A year later, in 1994, it organised one of the most impressive ceremonies: 4410 children, some of them from North America, Great Britain and Germany, came together at Saint James' American cemetery. Dressed in white, each child laid a flower on one of the 4410 graves of the soldiers of Patton's army.

Already in existence, of course, was Raymond Triboulet's *Comité du débarquement*, which had looked after commemorative ceremonies since 1945. It was based in Bayeux, and its remit was to maintain the historic sites and organise the annual ceremonies. Over the years the *Comité* had erected and maintained numerous plaques and monuments on the various sites, including the successful museum at Arromanches (inaugurated in 1952) and that situated at Pegasus Bridge. For the fiftieth anniversary,

[50] Four beaches (Sword, Juno, Gold and Omaha) are in Calvados, and one (Utah) in Manche. In the Orne there are no beaches, but several battle sites.

then, the *Comité* had a particularly prominent role in the organisation of the ceremonies of 5 June.

Finally, to complicate an already complicated picture, the municipal councils of the larger towns, such as Cherbourg, Caen, and Saint-Lô, put in place their own structures for commemoration of their own liberations.

In principle, these disparate associations were to complement one another, since, broadly speaking, they were all working towards the same goal. Yet the different organisations, inevitably, had differing interpretations and priorities. Also, each was keen to guard, and if possible extend, its sphere of action and influence. The *comité du débarquement*, for instance, felt that its experience and fidelity over fifty years conferred a legitimacy that was not shared by *ADBN 44*, created in 1993. *Libération* of 31 May 1994 spoke of a "war" between these two vectors of memory, and told of the difficult relationship between the respective chairmen, Raymond Triboulet and Paul Queney. May 1994 saw a squabble between the two organisations over the medals (mentioned above, p.82) struck by *ADBN 44* to mark the fiftieth anniversary. The *comité du débarquement* complained that these medals were illegal, since a regional assembly did not have the authority to make or distribute war medals. The *comité*, of course, had its own medals, and considered these to be the only legitimate ones.[52]

There was also tension between Triboulet's committee and the Elysée. Jean Kahn, who advised the president on commemorative matters at this time, found that the task of planning the presidential programme was rendered more difficult by some of the actions of the *comité du débarquement*. In October 1993 he informed the president that

---

[51] In *Contemporary French Civilisation*, vol.19, n°2 (1995), p.154.
[52] *Libération*, 2 June 1994.

"l'agitation de M. Triboulet" had been complicating matters, although this had calmed down "recently".[53]

François Mitterrand did not share the Gaullist conviction that resistance, the Normandy landings and liberation formed a single "trinity". In contrast with his Gaullist minister for ex-servicemen who still believed that "rien n'est séparable", Mitterrand was quite prepared to leave homage to the Resistance aside and celebrate the landings for what they were: an Allied operation on French soil. His keynote speech at Ohama Beach on 6 June 1994 was fulsome in its praise of the Allies, and made only one reference to the French Resistance. In truth, there was little ambivalence in the attitude of the French commemorators, commentators and public: it was one of gratitude towards the Allied troops, portrayed as accomplished and courageous liberators. As Rémy Desquesnes concluded

> il n'y a eu en Basse-Normandie, lors du cinquantenaire, ni ambiguité, ni confusion dans l'esprit des habitants (. . .) ce sont des soldats anglais, canadiens et américains qui ont surgi de la mer sous le feu de l'ennemi et qui ont donné leur vie pour notre liberté.[54]

This can be seen as an attempt to compensate for years of relative reticence towards the Allies, inspired by de Gaulle. Under de Gaulle particularly, commemoration of an episode that cast the Americans in the role of heroes was seen as extremely problematic. On the one hand, the landings launched the military operation that would free the country from German occupation, and in that sense had positive associations. On the other hand, the *débarquement* could not seriously be held up as an example of

[53] "Note à l'attention du président de la République" dated 19 October 1993. From Jean Kahn's archives.
[54] Desquesnes in *Contemporary French Civilisation*, vol.19, n°2 (1995).

French heroism, when only a few thousand French troops participated. Celebrations were low-key, and the Resistance was honoured as much as the Allies.

There were to be more affronts to de Gaulle. Gaullists were particularly upset that Mitterrand did not once mention de Gaulle by name during the various speeches he gave over the 1994 commemorative period. As well as that straightforward snub, there were more surreptitious moves afoot: since 1984 the centre of gravity of the June commemorations had been shifting from Bayeux to Caen, and other places in Normandy less closely associated with the general. Bayeux was where the triumphant de Gaulle had established popular legitimacy with his historic first address to the nation on French soil and his proclamation of the Fourth Republic, on the 14 June 1944. De Gaulle had also inaugurated monuments here in 1946 and 1952. The town also boasts a "place du général de Gaulle", a commemorative plaque on the sub-prefecture building, and a Charles de Gaulle museum. In his speech on the latter occasion de Gaulle had described the *débarquement* as a "grand événement national", since it had enabled France to re-establish its legitimacy. In the Gaullist credo, 14 June was held to be as significant as 6 June. The restoration of national dignity went hand-in-hand with the Allied landings. As Serge Barcellini remarked, "dans la pédagogie de l'honneur national, Bayeux donne un véritable sens à Utah Beach".

Bayeux had been described in *le Monde* of 6 June 1964 as "le quartier général des cérémonies commémoratives". Although the whole occasion was much more low-key in 1964 - neither de Gaulle nor his prime minister were present - the only "antenne d'accueil franco-allié" that was set up was based in Bayeux. In a direct role reversal, Bayeux featured in only one of the six commemorative ceremonies which took place on the 5 June 1994, and even then it was a small scale event, the opening of the "Eisenhower roundabout". The main dignitaries were not in attendance. The following

day, Bayeux was the venue for one national and one international event, but, considering there were fourteen official ceremonies that day, this was no great honour.

Bayeux was also the site of the headquarters of the *Comité du débarquement*. This body, which had organised the commemorations since 1945 in a Gaullian, Franco-centric spirit, was sidelined (in the committee's own estimation) in 1984 and again in 1994. This contributed to the movement from Bayeux to Caen as the nerve-centre of D-day commemoration.

Under François Mitterrand there was little prospect that, as in 1964, Caen would be left on the periphery as a rather melancoly "ville martyre". On 7 June 1964 the minster for ex-servicemen Jean Sainteny had presided over a ceremony during which one of the 322 victims of the Allied bombardments was buried, and during which the mayor of the town talked of "un jour de recueillement douloureux dans le souvenir d'un bilan atroce".[55] Twenty years later, French attitudes were no longer tinged with rancour, and it was not deemed appropriate to dwell on the damage done by the Anglo-Saxons in liberating France. Accordingly, a new symbolic role was being invented for Caen.

On 5 June 1984, the first stone had been laid for the "musée mémorial de la bataille de Normandie". There was no reference in any of the speeches to the martyrdom that had hitherto been the town's abiding memory of the war, although the fractured entrance to the memorial-museum complex would, when completed, symbolise the destruction of the town and others like it. The museum would become the pivot of a burgeoning "memorial-tourism" industry which, although taking its cue from the Second World War, endeavoured to make a positive, educative contribution to human rights, world peace, freedom and democracy. The crowning moment came on 6 June 1988, when president Mitterrand came in person to open the newly built museum,

[55] Serge Barcellini, 'Diplomatie et commémoration', p.137.

rechristened "Musée pour la paix".[56] Increased self-confidence and dynamism had been garnered from the process of decentralisation instigated by the socialist government: Caen was now the capital of a powerful regional authority, with newly acquired resources and the capacity to dispose of them as it saw fit.

There was no doubt that, by 1994, Caen had supplanted de Gaulle's Bayeux as the "natural" focus for commemorative activity (although *France-Télévision* did base its operations in Bayeux in June 1994). Gaullists were not slow to spot what was happening, and were quick to exploit any suspected cases of *lèse-majesté* by taking every opportunity to make commemorations of the Second World War commemorations of de Gaulle and his ideas. In an address on 6 June, Edouard Balladur underlined the role of the general in the outcome of the war: "si la France n'a pas été dans le camp des vaincus, c'est au général de Gaulle et à son courage que nous le devons"; and drew from this the classic Gaullian lesson: "il faut que notre pays ait les moyens de se défendre".[57] In a commemorative speech the same day he deemed it necessary that "la France soit forte, rassemblée et qu'elle fasse entendre sa voix".[58] He then appeared on television to say that the role of French people, such as the London Free French and the *maquisards*, must not be underestimated. He also pointed out that the first Allied soldier to be killed during the Normandy landings was a Frenchman.[59] At Puteaux on June 8 Charles Pasqua regretted that Mitterrand "n'ait pas trouvé l'occasion de rendre un hommage particulier au chef de la France libre". Another favourite Gaullist method of counter-attack was to mention Bayeux whenever possible. During his *TF1* appearance on 5 June Balladur told viewers what he would be doing on

[56] The main initiator of the memorial project was Jean-Marie Girault, senator and mayor.
[57] Interviewed on *TF1*, 5 June 1994.
[58] *Le Monde*, 7 June 1994.
[59] Evening news on *France 2*, 6 June 1994.

14 June: he would be at Bayeux for the anniversary of de Gaulle's speech.[60] Come the day, the Gaullist "family" were out in force, and Chirac and Balladur spoke of the need to "rassembler" and "défendre les intérêts supérieurs de la nation".[61]

The landings in Provence in August 1944 form part of the "national narrative" of wartime, but here too there was a hint of the "guerre franco-française". In this case the adversaries were the *anciens* of two divisions of the French army. In the words of Jean Kahn, these and other ex-servicemen's federations (of which there were twenty two in 1991),[62] "n'arrêtaient pas de se tirer dans les pattes".[63]

The 1st Army of France, commonly known as the "armée d'Afrique", had fought hard in Italy before landing in Provence and defeating the Germans there. The 2nd Armoured Division had taken part in the liberations of Paris and Strasbourg, which, from a military point of view, were rather meaningless victories. However the symbolic force of the liberation of Paris in particular meant that Leclerc and his men instantly became part of national folklore, to a much greater extent than the 1st Army. The fact that the former had been seen as "Gaullist" while the latter had been seen as "Giraudiste" exacerbated these tensions.

Not surprisingly when it came to commemorate each division had its priorities. For Leclerc's veterans these were obviously the liberations of Paris and Strasbourg and to some extent the Normandy landings, while for the former soldiers of the 1st Army the Provence landings were preferred. However these had never really captured the imagination of the French people. Moreover, for the all-important fiftieth anniversary

[60] Interviewed on *TF1*, 5 June 1994.
[61] *Le Monde*, 16 June 1994.
[62] According to a 1991 study of associations of "anciens combattants et victimes de guerre" commissioned by the ministry for ex-servicemen. Jean Kahn's archives.
[63] Interviews of March and April 1999.

the ex-serviceman's minister, Louis Mexandeaux, was preoccupied with events in Normandy, his home territory. Provence was "relégué au second plan".[64] Despite attempts by staff at the Elysée to provide a better balance, the "relegation" was never properly redressed. So behind the rhetoric of national unity which is invariably *de rigueur* on such occasions, one begins to discern a reality where each group is fighting to defend the memory of its own particular experience.

The liberation of Paris

As explained in the previous chapter, the liberation of Paris is one of the most powerful symbols of the rediscovered unity of the French people. It was, in the words of Jacques Chirac, "la victoire de la France sur ses propres déchirements, sur ses divisions, ses luttes intestines, ses trahisons".[65] As these words suggest, for unity to be so precious there must have been prior disunity, both within the nation as a whole and the Resistance as a movement. The theme of disunity does not feature prominently in commemorative discourse, but it is implicit in every evocation of unity.

The rhetoric of national communion also obscures the fact that the liberation of Paris, or at least de Gaulle's triumphant arrival in the liberated capital, had little to do with the fight against Hitler or Pétain. The Germans would have been defeated eventually in any case, and Vichy's representatives had fled in the first few days of the insurrection. In fact de Gaulle needed to organise a triumphant entry in order to assert his authority over those who fought on his side. For many of the communist and left-wing resistance fighters were ready to proceed to what they saw as the next stage of the struggle - a fight for political control within France. The risk of a new kind of civil war

[64] Note from Jean Kahn to Hubert Védrine on 28 June 1994. Jean Kahn's archives.
[65] Writing in *Le Monde*, 25 August 1994.

was a real one. That it didn't happen was largely due to de Gaulle's presence, but also his wisdom in refusing to take support for granted, and in taking seriously the threat of communist-inspired insurrection. Wherever possible, then, he strove to reinforce his own legitimacy. His declaration at Bayeux, the diversion of French troops to liberate Paris, his parade down the Champs-Elysée, his speech at the Hôtel de Ville, the Provence landings, his tour round France: they all served to underline, to France and to the world, that he was in control of a political entity - the French Republic - that was viable once more.

Commemorations of the liberation of Paris are among the most festive of French war anniversaries. Yet the air of celebration does not completely block out a more pessimistic reading, which has it that the Liberation marked the defeat of one faction in the latest instalment of an ongoing civil war. Otherwise why the bloody reprisals of the *épuration*, started as soon as liberation had been gained, during which as many as 10,000 Frenchmen and women were killed by their countrymen? It has been said many times since, that the *épuration* had nothing to do with just punishment and everything to do with the victors taking their revengé on the vanquished, and with settling personal scores. No doubt this is largely true, and not unusual in itself; except that it supports the interpretation of the liberation of Paris, and of France as a whole, as a decisive civil war victory rather than a glorious and united rising against an external enemy.

France Soir of 25 August 1994 carried an eloquent photograph of a sign displayed by some Parisian cafe owners just after liberation. It said, in imperfect English: "During occupation by German army, the owner of this café has refused to deal with the Germans. Any bar in which you don't see this poster has collaborated or made some profits with the Jerries". The picture is left to speak for itself in the newspaper, but it invites comment, since it speaks volumes about the ambiguities of the conflict, both at

the time and fifty years on. First of all it is written in English to appeal to soldiers of an Allied army that found itself in a city freed, according to de Gaulle, "par son propre effort". There is an obvious contradiction here. Then there is the reference to the Franco-French conflict, with the non-collaborationists exacting commercial revenge on those who made money from the Germans. One is left with the ironical impression, however, that collaborationists and self-proclaimed non-collaborationists were ultimately united in a spirit of opportunism that led both to maximise the chances that came their way.

However, the problem of disunity was generally overcome by an "all right on the night" argument, that also owed much to Christian notions of reconciliation and redemption: the sins and divisions of the previous four years were healed by the act of mass uprising, consecrated by the sacrifice in the streets of Paris of a respectable quota of the combatants. The Christian framework is also useful in that it allows for eleventh hour confessions or conversions (provided that these are sincere). François Mitterrand himself endorsed this idea by using it to defend his own political odyssey. He said that it was better to start off badly and finish well than vice versa, and described himself as a "jeune homme de droite qui a bien tourné".

In August 1994, then, the account of events in *Paris-Match* did not consider that the lateness of so many of the conversions was important:

> Même si parmi les résistants, qui semblent alors surgir de partout, certains sont des ralliés de la onzième heure, les 20 000 fusillés et les 65 000 déportés, dont 35 000 ne sont jamais revenus, témoignent de l'engagement et du courage de ceux qui étaient prêts à payer de leur vie pour la France.

The sins of the sinners are washed away by the blood of their brethren; the collective soul is cleansed, and faith renewed.

But it is one thing to concede that there were "some" eleventh hour conversions; it is quite another to enter into the detail of exactly how many. It comes as something of a surprise, then, to hear an FFI volunteer recount on French television that at the start of the uprising on 19 August the insurrectionists numbered around thirty volunteers (although the police prefecture had been taken on the 15 August).[66] It is unlikely that the official and popular versions have ever overtly denied this; but the emphasis has certainly been placed elsewhere, on the triumphant final phase and on the fifteen hundred French martyrs. The net result is that when the details are insisted upon they seem rather harsh, and come as a shock to the system.

One of the key aspects of the insurrection in Paris was the leading role of the police. Since 1944, the insurrection had been balm to the uneasy conscience of the Parisian police, which had hardly covered itself in glory in the previous four years. Not surprisingly, then, it had grown to the stature of a defining myth over the years. To this day each police officer in Paris has the right to wear the "fourragère" badge on his uniform in memory of the great event.

However, the state's representatives did not allocate much of their time to commemoration of the start of the police revolt. On 19 August Mitterrand, Chirac, interior minister Charles Pasqua and ex-servicemen's minister Philippe Mestre attended a ceremony at the prefecture, but they only stayed for half an hour. Mitterrand unveiled a commemorative sculpture, but gave no address. Prime minister Edouard Balladur did not attend.[67]

[66] 'Paris est à nous', *France 3*, 23 August 1994.
[67] Reported in *Le Monde*, 21-22 August 1994.

The sanitised version came under attack from some quarters, though not, of course, at official ceremonies. The special edition of *l'Histoire*[68] was relentless in its destruction of comfort mythology. It evoked the "guerre civile" that was "loin d'être achevée" at the liberation of Paris; it also featured an article on the Parisian police's artful change of allegiance, with the rather blunt heading "la police parisienne change de camp".[69] This article, by Jean-Marc Berlière, offered some interesting examples of history being edited as it was being made: towards the end of the German occupation the "battle for memory" was as bitter as any physical battle, and arguably more important. The 150 policemen who had been killed were to became symbols of the force's heroic sacrifice, by dint of the plaques that were erected after the victory. Jean-Marc Berlière described this in terms of military tactics, as "un investissement systématique et précoce du territoire de la mémoire". These plaques were of course renovated for the fiftieth anniversary in 1994.

Berlière also revealed that, on 26 August 1944, a notice appeared in Paris, signed by the prefect Luizot, to the effect that "la police de Paris, qui s'est fièrement battue, n'oubliera jamais le concours aussi efficace que valoureux que les FFI lui ont apporté du 19 au 25 août pour la défense de la préfecture de police". The day after the Liberation, then, the roles were already reversed according to this version of events. Instead of the police finally joining with the Free French, it is the latter who are thanked patronisingly for their "help" in the final battle, as if the police had been fighting alone for years!

Yet even the police themselves had begun to feel uncomfortable at the distortion of the truth, and in May 1992 a remarkable project was initiated to teach police men and women about the war years in a more equitable manner. Organised by the *Centre national d'études et de formation de la police nationale*, the courses promoted fact at the

[68] n°179 (July-August 1994).
[69] p.18.

expense of myth: the *stagiaires* would have been surprised to learn, for example, that, out of 22 000 officers, the three police Resistance groups - *Front national police et gendarmerie*, *Police et Patrie* and *Honneur de la Police* - boasted, at most, 800 members.

Deportation

In 1995, with the fiftieth anniversaries of the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps imminent, a dossier was provided for the Elysée by Robert Sheppard, a former *Français libre* and deportee. It included a description of the organisational framework of former deportees' associations. Sheppard started his dossier by alluding to the fragmented nature of this framework: "Des Associations, Fédérations, Amicales, tant en France qu'en Europe, ont un peu scindé, partagé, parfois - hélas - politisé, la structure générale du système concentrationnaire nazi qui ne formait qu'un tout, pour *tous* les déportés". Sheppard added that "notre idée est que c'est *la France* par son président (. . .) qui commémore et rend hommage."[70] In theory, there was only one commemorator, *la France*. In practice, of course, things had never been so straightforward. That said, disunity was less problematic in the 1990s than it had been in previous decades. This was due in no small part to the "threat" posed by a more assertive Jewish memory of deportation.

Hopes for a completely united front among deportees had been dashed as early as 1945, when the anti-communist part of the movement refused to cooperate with the FNDIRP (*Fédération nationale des déportés, internés, résistants et patriotes*), which, it was claimed, had an extreme-left bias. The dissidents called themselves the *Fédération*

[70] Jean Kahn's archives; my italics.

nationale des déportés et internés de la Résistance, dropping the *patriote* tag favoured by the communists.[71]

In the early 1980s there was a quarrel in which the FNDIRP and the FNDIR were once more on opposite sides. Among the FNDIRP's membership were a number of communists who had been interned in France by Daladier after the Germano-Soviet pact, and then deported to Buchenwald. Just before the camp was liberated there had been an insurrection by the prisoners, which was more or less significant according to the version of events one choses to believe. After the war, however, the former Buchenwald internees had been considered as non-combatants, and thus were deemed ineligible for the prized title of "combattant volontaire de la Résistance". Official designations were extremely important, both for status and pension rights. However with the victory of the left in 1981 some of them felt that the time had come to revise their status, and started manoeuvring for position. This brought protests from the right-wing FNDIR, who considered themselves "genuine" resistance combatants. The government stalled on the issue and it still had not been resolved in 1990, when it surfaced again. And by the end of the Mitterrand era the status of the Buchenwald "brigades" had not been upgraded.[72]

The extreme right

On the whole, the leadership and supporters of the *Front National* were placed in a difficult situation during commemorations of second world war victories. On one hand the national military glory and sacrifice that they prized were to the fore, as was the defeat of an old enemy and the reoccupation of the national territory. On the other hand,

[71] The FNDIR is affiliated with the UNADIF and the ADIR.
[72] Notes taken from Jean Kahn's archives, dating from 1982 to 1990.

this was also the eventual demise of a régime - that of Vichy - whose ideology inspired the Lepenist movement. That defeat was also the triumph of the *bêtes noires* of the extreme right, namely de Gaulle and the communists. The result was generally an awkward silence during times of war commemoration. Critics were marginalised to the extent that, in so far as they were noticed at all, they were regarded as embittered fanatics.

In the right-wing newspaper *Présent*,[73] misgivings were more freely expressed. In May 1994 Jean Madiran, in his "considérations différentes sur le débarquement", referred to the "terrorisme" of the liberating forces, which, he alleged, killed civilians unnecessarily.[74] Benoît Lorrain drew attention to the irony he perceived in the release of balloons into the sky above Caen, "ce ciel d'où, cinquante ans plus tôt, sont tombées des tonnes de bombes alliées, détruisant une grande partie de la ville et faisant des centaines de blessés parmi la population civile".

While only a tiny minority would come close to concurring with Jean Madiran and company, the debate was less innocuous than Rémy Desquesnes implied in his account of the anniversary period.[75] According to Desquesnes, only "quelques survivants âgés passionnément attachés à leur vieille ville" were interested in reviving the controversy. In fact it extended beyond a few disgruntled Norman pensioners. Three thousand protest posters appeared in the towns of Normandy. These posters, showing part of a town destroyed by bombs, bore the bitter caption: "Lâches, la France n'oubliera pas".[76] This is a reminder that, in France, it was not always easy to decide who the enemy was, and that as a result the potential for division was always there behind a united front. This potential haunted France's political landscape, and solicited all the

[73] 8 June 1994.
[74] *Présent*, 5 May 1994.
[75] Desquesnes in *Contemporary French Civilisation*, vol.19, n°2 (1995), p.160.
[76] Desquesnes in *Contemporary French Civilisation*, vol.19, n°2 (1995), p.162.

appeals for unity, solidarity and *rassemblement* that were heard so often during commemorations. For Desquesnes, then, the most blameworthy aspect of the bombardment controversy was precisely that the critics were reopening the divisions of the past. Consciously or unconsciously, they were reprising one of the favourite themes of Vichy and German propaganda: the alleged scorn of the Allied and Free French forces for the well-being of French civilians.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SEARCH FOR "LA VRAIE FRANCE"

"Mon sentiment d'appartenir à un grand peuple (grand par l'idée qu'il se faisait du monde et de lui, et de lui dans le monde, selon un code de valeurs qui ne reposait ni sur le nombre, ni sur la force, ni sur l'argent) avait subi quelques entailles. J'ai vécu 1940: inutile d'en dire plus"

- François Mitterrand, *L'Abeille et l'Architecte*[1]

Did Vichy represent France?

D. Nicolaidis has observed that, in the course of history, "il arrive que surviennent des événements déviants qui engagent la Nation en tant que telle dans une voie incompatible avec l'image qu'elle a d'elle-même".[2] France has often known the kind of incompatibility Nicolaidis spoke of. In itself, this is not so remarkable. The problem with the Second World War was that the French initially tried to compensate for that incompatibility between self-image and actual behaviour by settling on a retrospective interpretation of the facts that fell into line with the self-image. Thus the "national narrative" mode of commemorative discourse alluded to in chapter two was, understandably, more prevalent than that which highlighted negative aspects.

Historically the French Republic has taken great pride in its role as, on the one hand, a strong nation-state capable of defending its interests, and on the other, the proclaimer and upholder of universal human rights. So the disastrous rout of 1940, and

[1] Quoted by Robert Frank, 'la mémoire empoisonnée', in *La France des années noires*, II, p.504.
[2] *Autrement*, n°144 (April 1994).

the crimes entailed by the policy of collaboration, represented the antithesis of all France purported to stand for, and could not easily be incorporated into the national narrative. It is not simply that the defeat was humiliating and that some of the acts committed were abhorrent - most peoples have had their moments of humiliation and cruelty - but that the discrepancy between the *real* and the *ideal* seemed too glaring to be assumed with equanimity. Between 1940 and 1944 French people were confused, weak and somewhat venal, rather than evil, with some exceptions at either end of the scale. It is not a terribly damning judgement. However, for a nation that had been encouraged to think of itself as great, the less sparkling truth was often unacceptable. But before and during our period of study, as the myths and taboos were pushed back, the French were forced to revise their opinion of themselves. Since this revision had to incorporate a number of harsh facts, it was in some respects a painful experience.

After liberation there was an understandable temptation to fudge the issues. Any stubborn facts that refused to fit the mould were dealt with by a simple procedure: they were simply excluded from "the real France". De Gaulle set the parameters of this selective view of "la France" in his speech after the liberation of Paris, in which he paid homage to "la France qui se bat, c'est-à-dire la seule France, la vraie France, la France éternelle". The reasoning is peculiar: in the interests of national unity, the nation is identified not with its people as they exist in reality, but with a lofty ideal which only a few of those people actually upheld. In this formulation the word "real" has the peculiarity of signifying not "real" but "ideal". The "real France", in the context of the Second World War, refers not to a geo-political entity and the people that inhabited it, but a set of ideals acted upon by a minority.

The "necessary myth" implanted following liberation could not have taken root so easily without this pre-existing conceptual framework, which readily took on board the

idea that collaborationists were not properly French, since they had clearly lost touch with the nation's soul, the quintessential French values. It is a philosophy that borrows heavily from the discourse and philosophy of religion. Renan was quoted as describing a nation as a "spiritual entity" (as well as a "plébiscite de tous les jours"), with an immortal soul. The soul of the nation, which is composed of the values, attitudes and memories that are held in common, was ultimately regarded as more important than any avatar present in the here-and-now.

Vichy was merely physical form, an "autorité *de fait*";[3] the essential France that it betrayed could never be lost, and was kept alive in London and in the *maquis*. In essence, then, "la France" never ceased to exist; it simply went into clandestinity for a few years. Did not de Gaulle say in June 1940 that "j'ai conscience de parler au nom de la France"? Did he not state explicitly on the 9 August 1944 that "la République (. . .) n'a jamais cessé d'exister"? Clearly, since it had ceased to exist for a time in reality, he could only have meant that its spirit had been kept alive in exile. Ultimately this way of thinking was another attempt at closing the wounds opened by the internecine aspect of the war years, the "guerre franco-française". In portraying the enemy as "illegitimate", in declaring that the Republic had existed throughout, one effectively demotes the conflict to the status of a putsch followed by the inevitable restoration of legitimate authority.

Anniversaries serve to focus attention on the event in question, and also on some of the peripheral issues. Often the attention is perfunctory, but at times it can give rise to real and impassioned debate. Thus the approach of the fiftieth anniversary of the "rafle du Vél' d'hiv'" provoked animated discussion about the responsibility of the French

[3] According to the wording of the 1993 decree establishing the new day of commemoration. See below, p.125 ff.

State for the *rafle* and other crimes committed in these years.[4] The starting point of what Mitterrand's supporters[5] saw as a "coup monté" was a petition asking that the president accept responsibility on behalf of the French state, for Vichy's misdeeds. Behind this petition lurked searching questions about the legitimacy or otherwise of Vichy, and at a deeper level about the very nature of France and Frenchness, and also about the workings of collective memory and identity.

The petition appeared in *Le Monde* of 17 June 1992. Its signatories included prominent intellectuals such as Jean Lacouture, Régis Debray, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Pierre Boulez, and Jacques Derrida. Collectively they styled themselves the "Vél d'hiv' '42 Committee", and demanded specifically that the president make a formal declaration admitting that the *Etat Français* of Vichy was culpable in the deportation of Jews to concentration camps. In the words of the petition, they urged the president to "reconnaître officiellement que l'Etat français de Vichy est responsable de persécutions et de crimes contre les juifs de France".

The resulting squabble ranged, on one side, those who argued that Pétain and the *Etat français* were voted into office legally, to popular acclaim, and that France therefore had a duty to acknowledge its responsibility. On the other side were those who argued that the Vichy régime was merely an illegitimate parenthesis interrupting fundamental republican continuity; that Vichy was, in the words of François Mitterrand,

---

[4] On 16 and 17 July 1942 over 13 000 Jewish men, women and children were arrested by the French police, on the orders of the Germans, and taken to the winter velodrome in the fifteenth arrondissement. From there most were deported to the Eastern concentration camps, via French transit camps.

[5] Including Serge Barcellini, former Elysée counsellor Jean Kahn, and socialist deputy (now senator) Michel Charasse, the latter of whom worked on the presidential decree of February 1993. (Interviews of 6 May 1999, March-April 1999, and 10 June 1999.) Serge Barcellini saw a direct relationship between the controversy of 1992, Chirac's declaration of 1995, and the Matteoli commission which is still working out how much the French state owes despoiled Jewish families.
On 10 June 1994 Jean Kahn sent a note to the president in which he said that he had "aucune sympathie pour les groupes qui ont monté l'affaire du Vél' d'hiv' il y a deux ans". (Jean Kahn's archives.)

"nouveau, différent, occasionnel".[6] His argument was no different from that employed by his predecessors: the *Etat francais* which had sanctioned these crimes was an aberrant régime, and the Republic itself had no "comptes à rendre".

> La République n'a rien à voir avec cela, et j'estime, moi, que la France non plus n'est pas responsable; que ce sont des minorités activistes, qui ont saisi l'occasion pour s'emparer du pouvoir, qui sont capables de ces crimes-là. Pas la République, pas la France![7]

He reiterated in November 1992 that "la nation française n'a pas été engagée dans la triste aventure" of Vichy.[8]

With these words Mitterrand gave his seal of approval to one of the articles of faith of de Gaulle and the Resistance: Vichy had nothing to do with *la vraie France*, *la France éternelle*, and therefore it simply did not count in the great scheme of things. The proclamation of the Provisional Government of 9 August 1944 had simply declared Vichy nul and void. Article One of this text states that "La forme du gouvernement français est et demeure la République. En droit, celle-ci n'a pas cessé d'exister". Article Two continues, "Sont, en conséquence, nuls et de nul effet tous les actes constitutionnels, législatifs ou réglementaires, ainsi que les arrêtés pris pour leur exécution, sous quelque dénomination que ce soit, promulgués sur le territoire continental postérieurement au 16 juin 1940".[9]

For de Gaulle, the crucial issue was freedom of action: Pétain may have had overwhelming popular support initially, but this in itself did not confer legitimacy, since the populace had very little real choice in the matter after the military defeat. On 19

---

[6] On *Radio J*, November 1992 (recounted in *Le Monde*, 5 February 1993).
[7] Television interview of 13 September 1994. Quoted by Nathan Bracher, 'Mitterrand and the lessons of history', in *Contemporary French Civilisation*, vol.19 n°2 (1995).
[8] On *Radio J*, November 1992 (recounted in *Le Monde*, 5 February 1993).
[9] Eric Conan and Henry Rousso, *Vichy: un passé qui ne passe pas* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), p.70.

June 1940, de Gaulle declared that Pétain's government had forfeited the right to speak and act in the name of the French people because it had fallen under "la servitude ennemie". Aided by René Cassin, he developed his conviction into a coherent formula, which soon emerged as the orthodoxy. It borrowed from that time-honoured, quintessentially French and Republican tradition, articulated by the likes of Renan and Fustel: the nation was not the blood, or the *volk*, but "le génie plus le contrat". A "certain idea", in other words, plus the institutions required to make that idea a reality. De Gaulle maintained that Vichy had made a mockery of the French *génie*, which was kept alive by the Free French; and the *contrat* could not be said properly to exist because of the conditions under which it emerged. This is a conception that lives on in the likes of René Rémond. This distinguished historian has said that Vichy did not express "les sentiments profonds" of the French people since the régime was "imposed" on them.[10]

Some constitutional experts have shored up the Gaullian position by identifying a number of procedural flaws by which the Vichy régime may be deemed illegitimate.[11] However, analysis of the constitutional permutations have the demerit of diverting attention from the central problems which, one feels, lie elsewhere. After François Mitterrand's refusal to accept responsibility Laurent Lemine criticised him for responding "en juriste à un problème politique et moral"; Georges Broussine called him a "juriste glacé".[12] The criticisms may be extended to cover all those who lost sight of the real issues in dissecting the constitution, whether or not they agreed with Mitterrand's position. The bare reality remained that Pétain and the régime he installed

[10] *Le Monde*, 2 October 1994.
[11] For example André Frossard in *Le Figaro* 17 July 1992. One of the more commonly invoked arguments is that the National Assembly did not in fact have the constitutional right to accord Pétain "le pouvoir constituant".
[12] *La Croix*, 18 July 1992; *Lettre de la Nation*, 23 July 1992.

were accepted by the French people and their representatives for long enough for it to commit some heinous acts.

That said, the work that has been done on the constitutional question can be valuable if kept in perspective. *Le Monde des Débats* of November 1992 used it as an inroad into the vexed question of Vichy's place in national history: "peut-on mettre entre parenthèses quatre ans d'histoire française?" For, from de Gaulle's pronouncement - that in spite of Vichy the Republic had never ceased to exist - until Jacques Chirac's counter-pronouncement fifty one years later, this was precisely what France's political representatives had done. In this respect the constitutional negation was important, because it permitted the more profound moral and political negation: how could a nation assume a part of its history that did not "properly" belong to it, and for which it was not "technically" responsible?

Some people accepted that Vichy had technical legitimacy, but maintained that the essence of the argument lay elsewhere. Raymond Aubrac's view was that the Vichy government

> était légal, mais on l'a très vite considéré comme illégitime: il ne répondait pas aux aspirations, aux fondements de ce qu'est la République française. A partir du moment où un gouvernement, même établi légalement, essaie d'effacer la République, il ne correspond plus à la culture, à la civilisation de notre pays.[13]

Again, it is a question of values, not of constitutional procedure.

The most unconditional dismissals of the petitionists' claims came from the far right, which decried what it saw as a systematic campaign to make French people ashamed of their common history. Paradoxically, the extreme right's basic position on

[13] Emile Malet, ed., p.90.

the legitimacy of the Vichy régime was similar to that of the signatories of the petition, although, needless to say, the conclusions drawn were radically different in each case. According to the former, Pétain was given the power to constitute a government by a democratic process. The French people could therefore be said to have given their backing to Pétain, and therefore to Vichy. For the right, it followed that those who obeyed the orders of this government did nothing wrong. As Maurice Papon is reported to have said, "There is no crisis of conscience when one is obeying orders".[14] In July 1992 the Lepenist newspaper *Présent*, dismissing calls for more "justice" and "mémoire" with regard to Vichy, recalled that "De 1944 à 1951, deux millions de Français ont été poursuivis pour avoir obéi à un gouvernement imposé par leurs députés en majorité socialistes".[15]

Indeed those on the opposite side, who, like de Gaulle and Mitterrand, saw Vichy merely as a product of exceptional circumstances, had a number of problems to overcome. Not least of these was the massive vote in favour of according Pétain the authority he asked for. The deputies of the Third Republic's National Assembly voted by a margin of 569 to 80 (with 17 abstentions) to adopt the following text, which is remarkably unambiguous:

> L'Assemblé nationale donne tous pouvoirs au gouvernement de la République, sous l'autorité et la signature du maréchal Pétain, à l'effet de promulguer, par un ou plusieurs actes, une nouvelle Constitution de l'Etat français. Cette Constitution devra garantir les droits du travail, de la famille et de la Patrie. Elle sera ratifiée par la Nation et appliquée par les Assemblés qu'elle aura créées.[16]

[14] Andrew Roberts, *Sunday Times*, 12 October 1997.
[15] Edition of 23-29 July.
[16] *National Hebdo*, 23-29 July 1992.

Reading this text, it is difficult to see how Pétain and his colleagues can be dismissed blithely as a bunch of adventurers who somehow managed to grab power and humiliate the nation when the "real France" wasn't paying attention. Not only was Pétain accorded the *pleins pouvoirs* by an overwhelming majority of representatives, but the ultra-conservative philosophy of the Vichy régime, based on work, family and fatherland (the *travail, famille, patrie* slogan is already present in the text) were approved at the same time. In the eyes of Pétain and his supporters, it was the Republic, and particularly the *Front populaire*, which was the imposter. They saw themselves as the upholders of real French values, and considered that these ideals had been betrayed by previous custodians. Their task, as they saw it, was to restore the unity and legitimacy of the nation. In a speech prepared by Pétain in 1943, which was in fact banned by the Germans, Pétain wrote that, "C'est le respect de la légitimité qui conditionne la stabilité d'un pays (. . .) Je ne veux pas que ma disparition ouvre une ère de désordre qui mettrait l'unité de la France en péril."[17]

Another stumbling block was the high degree of continuity between the Third Republic, the *Etat français* of Vichy and the Fourth Republic. Below the political leadership, French people remained French people. In particular, the administrative personnel of the three régimes remained largely unchanged. The Vichy police force, for instance, was the same as that which served under the Third and Fourth Republics. The force which occupied the prefecture in August 1944 was the same as that which had arrested tens of thousands of Jews so efficiently in previous years. Most of the deputies who had voted for "les pleins pouvoirs" were re-elected after the Liberation. And, in spite of de Gaulle's declaration that Vichy was "nul and void", some of its policies remained. National identity cards, family allowance, Mothers Day, the work of the

[17] Jean-Paul and Michèle Cointet, 'L'hypothèque de Vichy dans l'été de 1944 ou la querelle de légitimité', in *Historiens et géographes*, May-June 1995.

Youth and Sports department, the *Ordre des médecins* all lived on to testify to the existence of the régime that introduced them. In 1992 the "Vél' d'hiv' '42 committee" drew attention to this continuity to reinforce its demand for official acknowledgement. The Vichy administration "était servi par des administrateurs français, des magistrats français, des policiers français, qui ont accepté en masse de prêter serment à Petain, d'exécuter des ordres inhumains". The only reasonable course of action, according to the "Vél' d'hiv' '42 committee", was to accept that "de tout ce qui s'est fait au nom de la France, l'Etat français est aujourd'hui coupable".[18]

Richard Wertenschlag, chief rabbi of Lyon, aligned himself with the committee when he declared that every government, whether it likes it or not, is "l'héritier d'une histoire commune qu'il convient d'assumer, dans ses grandeurs comme dans ses démissions morales."[19] However, if taken to its logical conclusion, this attitude is a potential thorn in the side of heads of state. Indeed, one of the reasons for Mitterrand's reticence on the "Vél' d'hiv'" issue was that it would establish a precedent for other groups who felt they had been wronged by the French state at one time or another. Was Mitterrand also to be held accountable for the Terror of the 1790s, the bloody suppression of the Paris commune, or the Dreyfus affair, all of which were perpetrated "in the name of France"?

Yet in defending the traditional stance, one risked endorsing the *à la carte* approach to the past that had stored up so much trouble for Mitterrand, and for France more generally. Examples of that approach are legion. In the Opera House at Vichy, there is a commemorative plaque that pays tribute to those who voted against Pétain's being granted the *pleins pouvoirs*: "Dans cette salle, le 10 juillet 1940, quatre-vingts parlementaires ont par leur vote affirmé leur attachement à la République, leur amour de

[18] *Le Monde*, 16 July 1992.
[19] *L'Humanité*, 16 July 1992.

la liberté et leur foi dans la victoire. Ainsi s'acheva la Troisième République." There is no mention of the 569 representatives who voted otherwise. It was also the municipal authority of Vichy which erected signs after the Liberation proclaiming that "Vichy n'est pas le siège du gouvernement traitre à la patrie mais la REINE DES VILLES D'EAUX".[20]

In a similar vein is the plaque at the *gare de l'Est* which honours the memory of the French railway workers who brought deportees back to France. The inscription reads, "En hommage aux cheminots de France qui par leur ardeur au travail et leur dévouement rendirent possible le retour rapide dans leur patrie de centaines de milliers de Français". There is no answer to the question which immediately springs to mind: if the French railwaymen brought the deportees home, who took them there in the first place? Admittedly the above examples date from before our period, but they provide a valuable insight into the workings of a selective group memory, and into the standards against which the deeds and words of our period can be judged.

So in spite of the reasoned arguments for and against Vichy's legitimacy, what mattered in the end was blind faith in "la France" as an ideal. In August 1942, Mgr. Saliège, the bishop of Toulouse, wrote a pastoral letter in which he denounced the series of mass arrests of Jews that took place that summer. His letter was both courageous and effective. Yet Mgr. Saliège absolved France of all blame; indeed, he praised her all the more. France, far from being guilty, was one of the victims: "France, Patrie bien-aimée, France qui porte dans toutes les consciences de tous les enfants la tradition du respect de la personne humaine, France chevaleresque et généreuse, je n'en doute pas, tu n'es pas responsable de ces erreurs".[21]

---

[20] CNRS, ed., p.55; upper case in original.
[21] Denis Peschanski, *Vichy 1940-1944: Controle et exclusion* (Paris: Editions Complexe, 1997), p.185.

Michel Winock explained the phenomenon in these terms: "Il ne faut jamais confondre *la France*, qui est d'ordre ontologique, et *les Français*, qui n'en sont qu'une détermination particulière et souvent décevante".[22] The dichotomy between real and ideal remains. Pierre Bérégovoy explained this position to the audience at a CRIF dinner in 1992.[23] He admitted that "des crimes furent commis par des Français", but then continued in a familiar vein: "ces Français qui doivent rendre des comptes à la justice n'étaient pas la France. La France, ma France, la vôtre (. . .) ne s'appelait pas Henriot, Déat, Darquier ou Darland. Elle avait pour nom de Gaulle, Christian Pineau ou Daniel Mayer, Henri Frenay ou Jean Moulin." He was willing to concede that certain *individuals*, of French nationality, were guilty, but maintained that the *Etat français* was "illégal et illégitime", and that "la France" was not implicated.[24]

At this stage it was clear that representatives of the Republic were not prepared to cross the Rubicon by acknowledging, be it implicitly, the responsibility of the collective entity known as "France". Until Jacques Chirac broke the mould there was no clear-cut divergence between right and left on the matter. Vichy was to be denounced in the strongest terms, but Vichy was not to be confused with France or the French Republic. Bérégovoy's successor as prime minister, Edouard Balladur, found himself engaged in a familiar balancing act the following year. Delivering a speech at the first official national commemoration of the Vél' d'hiv' *rafle,* on the 16 July 1993, he roundly condemned Vichy's "affreuse complicité", but then went on to assure his audience that "la France demeurera aux yeux du monde la patrie des droits de l'homme".[25] Ironically it was France's status as a "terre d'asile" that had attracted so many Eastern Jews before

[22] Michel Winock, *Parlez-moi de la France* (Paris: Plon, 1995), p.25.
[23] *Conseil représentatif des institutions juives de France.*
[24] Reported in *Le Figaro*, 30 November 1992.
[25] Conan and Rousso, p.91.

the war. Their confidence in French principles was cruelly abused during the occupation.

The communists, too, liked to separate Vichy from their conception of France. *L'Humanité* of 16 July 1992 castigated Vichy severely for being far more zealous in rounding up Jews than the Nazis themselves expected. It then expressed gratitude to the "numerous others" who intervened to save Jewish lives. The "real" France is chosen from a number of working examples: "Il est heureux que d'autres, nombreux, aient montré le visage de la France, terre de tolérance et d'humanité, en faisant souvent le sacrifice de leur liberté et quelque fois de leur vie" to save potential victims.[26]

On the fiftieth anniversary of the *rafle*, the UDF deputy Léonce Deprez published an article in *La Croix*[27] which inadvertently bore witness to the gap between the ideal and the real, and the struggle between intention and action. The article was entitled "La France, lumière d'espérence", and took for its subject France's exemplary role in world affairs. Deprez insisted that "Il est nécessaire que la France reste une force motrice imposant sa présence et son rayonnement dans le monde en perturbation. Il est nécessaire qu'elle le fasse avec son panache, son poids et sa foi". Immediately next to this was an article on the Vél' d'hiv' commemoration entitled "1942, la honte".

Le peuple français

Just as sacred as the notion of "la vraie France" was that of "le peuple français". The latter term has the same resonance as the former. It, too, tends to be employed prescriptively and qualitatively, rather than descriptively and quantatively. "Le peuple français" does not designate real French men and woman, but an idealised image and a

[26] 16 July 1992.
[27] 16 July 1992.

set of unique attributes. The mindset is deeply rooted in democratic tradition. In any democracy, "the people" is sovereign (the word *democracy* derives from the Greek for *the strength of the people*). Right at the core of the democratic ideal, especially its French republican strain, is a belief that "le peuple" has a mystical, unquestionable status. When the monarchy gave up its claim to devolved divinity, it was supplanted by the people. So, in the words of Jacques Julliard, "le peuple est bien le *deus ex machina* de la politique moderne, à la fois agent historique et principe spirituel de la démocratie".[28] In a French post-war context this was overlayed with the influence of the PCF, whose Occupation narrative was based largely on a class model in which the workers were betrayed by a treacherous ruling class, and had to fight heroically for their freedom. This version was largely obsolete by the 1980s, but was once an orthodoxy, and necessarily left its mark on the collective conscience. Thus to condemn "le peuple" is to condemn one of the principles on which the nation was founded in 1789 and re-founded in 1944, and so to condemn France itself. Even when the majority of *individuals* are in the wrong, "le peuple" cannot be, since it is an ideal as opposed to an objective reality.

It is also an electoral maxim that "public opinion" is beyond reproach. Politically there would be nothing to gain and much to lose from a general attack on the conduct of ordinary French people during the Occupation. What is true for politics is true in a wider sense: telling people they are or were wicked does not make you popular. The people did not make the wrong choice: they were let down by their representatives, or the élites. De Gaulle said that "tous les gens biens étaient pour Vichy";[29] he would never have said the same of "le peuple".

[28] 'Le peuple', in *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, III, part 1, p.186.
[29] *L'Humanité*, 16 July 1992.

So while vehement criticism of the French authorities under occupation was commonplace by the Mitterrand era, it was still rare to hear these critical voices turned towards the ordinary French men and women who allowed these authorites to act. One of the effects of the Vél' d'hiv' fiftieth anniversary was to direct some inquisitive minds in this direction. The *Antenne 2* news programme of 16 July broadcast footage of a demonstration at the home of René Bousquet, chief of police of the Gironde under Vichy. Bousquet's case was unexceptional in that it could be accomodated within the traditional doctrine of "a few high-profile traitors betraying the people". But Resistance heroine Lucie Aubrac gave an interview outside Bousquet's house in which she denounced not the former police chief, but the ordinary French men and women who made the *rafles* of Jews possible. She made specific reference to the policemen, the men who drove the buses and trains, the various minor officials and administrators, as well as those who saw what was happening and did nothing.

Noël Copin, writing in *La Croix*,[30] also went further than most in that he, too, insisted that French society as a whole, and Christians in particluar, had to accept some responsibility for allowing a culture of antisemitism to take root: "l'Etat français n'aurait pas pu répondre aussi facilement aux exigences de l'occupant s'il n'avait existé dans la société française un antisémitisme latent dans lequel des chrétiens avaient une lourde responsabilité". Most unsparing of all was *France 3*, which, in its coverage of the 1993 Vél' d'hiv' anniversary insisted on the fact that Jews were rounded up by "des Français, et *seulement des Français*".[31]

This sort of discourse still had the capacity to shock, not because the facts had been freshly discovered or because they were especially contentious, but simply because it was rare to hear them evoked frankly. In 1989 *L'Express* had noted that people still

[30] 14 July 1992.
[31] Late evening news, 16 July 1993.

reacted with surprise when they learned that French policemen had organised the arrests that preceded deportations.[32] There is a certain validity to the argument that ordinary people would not necessarily have seen the effects or understood the implications of, say, the measures taken in 1940 and 1941 which excluded Jews from public life. A reduction in the number of Jewish judges or professors was unlikely to touch the daily lives of many people. However, in the case of *rafles*, internment camps and deportations, policemen, railway employees, bus drivers and others clearly knew that their actions were sure to harm the people they were dealing with, but this knowledge did not prevent them from continuing. It is known that only one policeman resigned in protest after the Vél' d'hiv' operation.

That said, most historians claimed that ordinary French people began to turn against the Vichy government in the summer of 1942, when the treatment of the Jews took a more blatantly cruel turn. Interviewed in *Le Nouvel Observateur* at the time of the fiftieth anniversary, André Kaspi spoke approvingly of "la thèse dominante (. . .) qu'il y a eu un tournant dans l'opinion en 1942", and maintained that "les Français ordinaires, sans-grade, obscurs (. . .) très souvent ont eu un comportement admirable".[33] Bruno Frappat made the familiar distinction between the authorities and the rest when he said that "la France, du moins en sa représentation officielle d'alors, fut un agent de la barbarie. Cela ne vaut pas accusation pour l'ensemble de la nation, ni pour *le peuple*, où il se trouva assez de gens pour sauver l'honneur du pays".[34]

According to Denis Peschanski, "*tous les historiens* s'accordent à souligner le choc qu'ont provoqué dans l'opinion les rafles ou le récit de celles-ci".[35] However, any proof of active popular opposition is generally vague or anecdotal; there is no evidence

[32] 14 July 1989.
[33] 16-22 July 1992.
[34] *Le Monde*, 17 July 1992; my italics.
[35] p.77; my italics.

of group protests of any description.[36] The most solid piece of documentary evidence is a police report telling of increased hostility to anti-Jewish measures. However, the *Office français d'information* deemed it necessary to suppress facts regarding arrests of Jews, in the face of public disquiet. On 26 August 1942 it decided to "interdire jusqu'à nouvel ordre toutes les informations sur les arrestations de Juifs en zone sud". Yet Peschanski went on to note that the historians he referred to also agreed that the population's shock was not generally translated into verbal or physical protest.[37] There was a "discreet" protest – never made public – from the Roman Catholic archbishops,[38] led by Mgr. Suhard, archbishop of Paris, and the Pastor Boegner had already written a letter of solidarity to the chief rabbi in 1941, but these can hardly be termed "popular".[39] Neither do the testimonies of victims provide much solace. Annette Krajcer, who was 12 years old when taken off to the velodrome, recalled that "Nous portions tous nos étoiles jaunes, mais les Parisiens ne voulaient pas nous voir".[40] In a television documentary broadcast in 1994, one eyewitness told of what he saw from a cafe facing the internment camp at Drancy, where deportees from the Vél' d'hiv' were held temporarily before being transferred to the East.[41] He spoke of French gendarmes striking Jewish children with their truncheons in order to make them get onto buses. These buses were of course driven by French employees, as were the trains which left from the nearby Drancy-Le Bourget station. There are even accounts that tell of Parisians applauding as the convoys of buses past, and of concierges betraying Jewish

[36] Peschanski, 1997, p.173.
[37] p.77.
[38] Assembled in Paris on 22 July 1942.
[39] The intevention of Mgr. Chappalie in 1943 was effective, however. The episcopal delegate to the government managed to prevent the application of a plan to denaturalise all Jews who had become French after 1927.
One must be not be too harsh in criticising the discretion of the Christian Churches. The Consistory, too, was generally discrete. It sent an official letter of protest to the government in February 1942, but it, too, decided not to make the protest public.
[40] *Le Figaro*, 15 July 1992, p.9.
[41] *Envoyé spécial:* 'Drancy, la Honte', *France 2*, 6 October 1994.

families living in "their" building. However, it is difficult to separate myth from fact, and there are also stories which give the oppposite impression. Reactions varied from place to place, and memories are often far from reliable. Little wonder that a settled version of events was proving elusive.

There was a similar contrast between received opinion and eyewitness views regarding the conduct of the police. While the police authorities' conduct was unpardonable, ordinary policemen had largely been given the benefit of the doubt. It was suggested that the police were extremely reluctant to carry out their task, and gave Jewish familes time to escape whenever they could. After such a claim had been made by Henri Amouroux on French radio in 1982,[42] an eye-witness wrote to *l'Humanité* to give a quite different account. He had been living opposite a hostel for immigrant workers at the time of the round-ups and witnessed an "opération coup de poing" in which no one was forewarned, and everyone taken.[43] One damning fact that must also be considered is that the policemen involved in the operation had the power of decision over each potential detainee. Though there were, of course, instructions, the French police on the ground had the final say in whether to make the arrest or not. The fact that so many women and so many children, even those born in France, were arrested has led Asher Coher to conclude in 1993 that most of them carried out their task "'loyalement' et même avec dureté".[44]

In the RPR's newsletter of July 1992 Georges Broussine criticised François Mitterrand for his "icy" attitude in refusing to implicate France, but maintained that "notre peuple" was, "activement ou passivement (. . .) dans le camp de la justice".[45] He

[42] *France Inter*, 13 July 1982.
[43] *L'Humanité*, 17 July 1982.
[44] Asher Cohen, *Persécutions et sauvetages: Juifs et Français sous l'Occupation et sous Vichy* (Paris: les Editions du Cerf, 1993), p.273.
[45] *Lettre de la Nation*, 23 July 1992.

does not explain what it means to be "passively" on the side of justice, nor how it is possible to verify this category, and this is probably the whole point: in constructing a collective memory, it is natural, perhaps even desirable, to err on the side of self-delusion. This is what gives collective memory a purpose and distinguishes it from history. Where there is any doubt, "le peuple" and "la France" are likely to be given the benefit of it.

This cast of mind is exemplified by the Vél' d'hiv' affair, but it also applies more generally. In 1993, a plaque was unveiled at the Hôtel du Parc in Vichy, where Pétain's government was based. The plaque gave details of the *rafles* that were conducted in the "zone libre" from August 1942 onwards. It is a gesture that would seem to be representative of a new climate of candour with regard to these episodes, yet the inscription qualifies this by exonerating "la population". It reads, "Dans leur ensemble la population française et les clergés protestants et catholiques se sont immédiatement opposés à ces mesures qui violaient les traditions et l'honneur de la France".[46]

Even those voices that one might have expected to be critical could be indulgent. Serge Klarsfeld, implacable pursuer of former collaborators, has praised the French people for protecting the greater part of the Jewish population. In Vichy, on Deportation Day in 1993 the mayor unveiled a plaque which commemorated the anti-Jewish *rafles* and laid the blame squarely on the *Etat français*. Yet the inscription paid homage to French people who opposed those measures. The plaque was sponsored by Klarsfeld's *Fils et Filles des Déportés Juifs de France*. This homage to ordinary French people is repeated on the numerous other plaques initiated by the FFDJF since its inception.[47]

[46] Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.466.
[47] Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.466.

Claude Lanzmann, director of the monumental film *Shoah*, said that, "si des Français ont livré des juifs, d'autres, infiniment plus nombreux qu'on ne le dit maintenant (. . .) les ont sauvés".[48] In fact the survival of two thirds of France's Jewish population was the result of a number of factors acting together, notably the division of France into free and occupied zones, the fact that many Jews were fully-integrated French citizens, and the activities of resistance groups. Personal acts of solidarity, commendable though they are, constitute only one unquantifiable factor among many.

Similar observations can be made regarding the French internment camps, a subject which fired the imagination of the media during the early 1990s. These years saw a number of investigations revealing details about former "camps". For the most part they presented themselves as taboo-breakers, denouncing the scandal of an official cover-up. *L'Evénement du jeudi* entitled one such article, which appeared in May 1992, "Les archives *interdites* des camps français" (my italics), and this was typical of the tone adopted. Here the populism was two-fold: ordinary people living at the time were presented, albeit vaguely, as victims because "the authorities" committed wrongful acts in their name; and they were presented as victims of an official "cover-up" in the years that followed, thus frustrating a supposed popular thirst for the truth. However, such research presented something of a contradiction, since it tended to blame official archives policy for hindering research, and thus keeping the public in a state of ignorance, while demonstrating that the people who live or lived in the vicinity of the former camps showed little interest in what went on.

For example, in June 1993 *France 3* devoted its *La Marche du siècle* programme to the French internment camps.[49] It featured the former transit camp at Rivesaltes, near Poitiers, which was in the "zone libre" controlled by the Vichy authority during the war.

[48] *Le Monde*, 17 July 1992.
[49] *La Marche du siècle*, 30 June 1993.

Approximately 11 000 people, half of them Jewish, were sent there before being moved on to other camps, where most of them were exterminated. Yet when the film was shot the buildings were in ruins, and the local people seemed unsure of their former use, and those interviewed seemed completely indifferent in any case. Similarly, the internment camp at Drancy was situated in the centre of a town of 35 000 inhabitants, and surrounded by flats with a view into the camp, but no one talked openly about what went on, and no one spoke out. This was a camp in which the conditions became so bad that in November 1941 the Germans felt obliged to take control and release the most vulnerable inmates.

The error was a common one with regard to the issues thrown up by war and occupation. At the time, the failure to speak out or act was not always due to repression. And those who decried the amnesiac instinct that took hold in the post-war decades often forgot that it was not autocratically imposed by the "powers that be" or by former collaborators, but was desired by the majority of ordinary French people, for whom the "devoir de mémoire", so compelling during our period, was by no means a priority. These French people were not, on the whole, filled with righteous anger or crusading zeal. The war had been too bewildering and exhausting for that. Scores were settled, certainly, during the *épuration*, but that had little to do with discovering the truth and implanting an authentic memory.

It would therefore be wrong to blame "the authorities" systematically for deficiencies of collective memory, and to depict a public always desperate to know the objective truth about its past, let down by an administration thinking only of dissimulation. Marc Ferro observed astutely that

> l'Etat et la politique ne sont pas les seuls à mettre l'histoire sous surveillance. La société s'en mêle aussi qui, pour sa part, censure et autocensure toute analyse qui révélerait ses interdits, ses lapsus, qui compromettrait l'image qu'une société entend donner d'elle-même.[50]

So although during our period it became almost obligatory to support any initiative that professes to serve the interests of the "memory" of the war, and to express a willingness to uncover the past in its entirety, that had not always been the case. And although public opinion had started to race ahead of official opinion, this had not always been the case either.

Collective responsibility

Clearly, the concept of collective responsibility is a troublesome one; and it becomes even more troublesome when it is passed down the generations. Is the group morally obliged to accept the blame for crimes committed in its name? Should the next generation of this group be expected to do the same? Former German president Richard von Weizsäcker said, on the subject of his nation's Nazi past, that "la faute collective n'est pas quantifiable. Les coupables, ce sont les auteurs du génocide. Mais nous avons hérité de la responsabilité".[51] There is a parting of the ways here between legal and and moral responsibility. The law tries individuals, but, plainly, the majority of individuals living in France from 1940 until 1944 were guilty of no serious crime. However, the process of identifying with a group has always implied sharing in its glories and being ashamed at its failings, whether or not one is personally involved. It is that sense of implication that von Weizsäcker was thinking of; it can be heriditary, unlike culpability

[50] Marc Ferro, *L'Histoire sous surveillance* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1985).
[51] Quoted in *Le Figaro*, 9 April 1994.

in the strict legal sense. In fact the Germans were prepared to accept both types of responsibility after the war: the German Federal Republic proclaimed itself the constitutional inheritor of the German State, thereby assuming legal responsibility for crimes committed under previous régimes, including Hitler's Third Reich.[52] And a whole national identity was founded on the acceptance of moral guilt by association.

In 1993 an issue of *Esprit*[53] was given over to a discussion of history and memory, and the writer of the introduction seemed at times quite bewildered by the complexity of this problem, wondering how one could deal with all its facets at once. Is it possible, he asked, to instill "un souvenir collectif de l'errance collective, rendre hommage à l'héroïsme et au martyre vrais, blâmer la passivité ordinaire, tout en assumant la continuité d'une histoire et un héritage que nous n'avons pas voulu tel"?

It is hardly surprising, then, that in evoking Vichy, there had always been a temptation to try to side step collective responsibility. Not only was there a tendency to separate Vichy from "la vraie France", as we saw in the first part of this chapter; there was also a tendency to ascribe the more flagrant acts of antisemitic persecution to the Germans alone. This phenomenon was most noticeable in the inscriptions on plaques and other monuments erected since the Liberation. Yet many of these were renewed or updated as part of the fiftieth anniversary commemorations that fell during our period. In some cases new plaques or monuments were put up where there had been nothing. The changes that were made suggest that collective forms of remembrance were beginning to admit the notion of French responsibility for some of the misdeeds of the Occupation. And the more candid inscriptions on plaques and monuments prefigured the defining moment that came in 1995 when Jacques Chirac declared that "la France" had to accept its share of the responsibility for what had happened. The mindset which

[52] *Courrier International*, 13 November 1997.
[53] July 1993.

saw "la France" as an untouchable ideal was being challenged by new forms of remembrance.

On the occasion of the Vél' d'hiv' fiftieth anniversary, some Jewish groups staged a mock trial of the Vichy régime in front of the Palais de Justice. One witness recalled that on the gravestone of a two-year-old Jewish child who died in a transit camp there were inscribed the words: "victime du régime hitlérien"; the witness refused to leave this uncontested, saying that "c'est faux, c'est une victime du gouvernement de Vichy".[54] Similarly, the petition published in *Le Monde* of 17 June 1992 noted that

> dans les discours et sur les rares plaques commémoratives, les juifs de France déportés et assassinés dans les camps nazis apparaissent le plus souvent comme les victimes de la seule barbarie de l'occupant allemand, même lorsqu'ils ont été poursuivis, raflés et livrés par l'Etat français parce que juifs.[55]

The signatories ought to have realised that this had started to change, albeit unevenly. The original memorial plaque on the former site of the Vél d'hiv', unveiled in 1951, recorded that the victims "furent parqués en ce lieu *sur l'ordre de l'occupant nazi*", and gave to believe that the raids were "l'œuvre de la barbarie hitlérienne".[56] When the plaque was renewed in 1986, the text underwent a significant modification, which no longer gave Vichy the benefit of any doubt. The Jews were rounded up *par la police du gouvernement de Vichy*, sur ordre des occupants nazis".[57] It was also in 1986 that the "Place des Martyrs Juifs du Velodrôme d'hiver" was so baptised, by municipal decree. The second monument at the Vél' d'hiv', erected in accordance with the decree

---

[54] *France-Soir*, 17 July 1992.
[55] Conan and Rousso, p.50.
[56] *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 16-22 July 1992. The plaque was put up by the LICA (*Ligue internationale contre l'antisémitisme*, now the LICRA with an *R* for *racisme*) in the late 1940s. The president of LICA at the time was Jean-Pierre Bloch.
[57] My italics in both cases.

of 1993,[58] was fairly specific in its apportioning of blame: it paid homage to "les victimes des persécutions racistes et antisémites et des crimes contre l'humanité commis sous l'autorité de fait dite 'gouvernement de l'Etat français'".[59]

The original plaque at the Japy gymnasium in the eleventh arrondissement of Paris, where thousands of Jews were interned after the raids of 1941 and 1942, was put up in 1964. It did not mention the fact that the victims were Jewish, was vague about numbers ("des milliers"), and failed to name the perpetrators. It was replaced in 1994 by an inscription which recorded that the victims were chosen "par le seul fait d'être juifs", gives the precise number of victims (3 710), and accuses "la police de Vichy et l'occupant nazi".[60] Curiously, though, the "histoire de Paris" information post a few yards away persevered with the vague approach. It said that the Jews were "victimes des persécutions nazies", failing to mention any French involvement.

At the lycée Jean-Zay at Orléans, the original commemorative plaque described Zay as "victime de la barbarie nazie". On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of his murder, in 1994, another was added in a ceremony presided by François Mitterrand. It bore the words "assassiné par la Milice du gouvernement de Vichy". Similarly, the inscription on the memorial to Victor Basch was modified to include the phrase "victime de la haine raciale", on the insistance of the CRIF and the LICRA.[61]

Also, in the showpiece "mémorial pour la paix" in Caen, opened in 1988, there are seven different *espaces*, each divided into several themes. In *espace 2* of the museum, devoted to "La France des années noires", the visitor is taken through a sombre underground chamber, and retraces the stages that led to deportation and genocide. There is no attempt to disimulate the harsh reality of collaboration, particularly with

[58] Officially unveiled in July 1994.
[59] Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.485.
[60] Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.477.
[61] Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.26.

regard to antisemitism. The guidebook that visitors are given states clearly that "En France, les mesures antisémites se succèdent, certaines sur ordre de l'occupant mais d'autres aussi à l'initiative du gouvernement de Vichy."

Needless to say, the picture was more complex than one is sometimes led to believe. Not all new inscriptions departed from the traditional formulae. Shelomo Selinger's monument at Drancy, which dates from 1986, maintained that the Jews interned there were "victimes de la barbarie nazie", despite the fact that many of them would have been taken there by the French authorities. Similarly, the extent to which the identity of the perpetrators was obfuscated in older inscriptions has sometimes been exaggerated. We are dealing with general trends; there was never a hard and fast rule against alluding directly to French malefactors. In the Ain department, there are fifteen plaques which designate the *Milice*, most of which have been in place since immediately after the war.[62] The one dedicated to the memory of Victor Basch and his wife, erected in 1945, records that the couple were "sauvagement assassinés par la Milice".[63]

Yet the fact remains that, whenever memorial inscriptions were updated, they *tended* to become less indulgent, above all when the victims were Jewish and the malefactors French. There is certainly no evidence of a change in the opposite sense. And the Vichy government, and not just the extremists of the *Milice*, was more often called to account. While the centrepiece sculpture at Drancy did not make direct reference to Vichy, the presidential decree of 1993 provided for a plaque that did. It was positioned in front of the "wagon-témoin" which also served as a mini-museum. In contrast, the inscription on the original plaque that was put up at the site of the internment camp at Drancy after the repatriation of the deportees was, to use Henry

[62] Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.24.
[63] Barcellini and Wieviorka, pp.347, 348. Victor Basch was president of the *ligue des droits de l'homme.*

Bulawko's expression, "anodyne" in character, and this at the insistance of the management of the HLM estate that owned the land.[64] The inscription, on the wall of the HLM building, records that the victims "ont été intérnés par l'occupant hitlérien".

A new day of commemoration

The Vél' d'hiv' commemoration stood out as a focal point for tension between differing conceptions of France and the Republic, and for differing notions of collective responsibility. It could not but be implicated in the move towards a more self-critical collective memory, one which admitted the possibility that "la France" had been in the wrong. The indulgent view of France as an inspiring ideal rather than a patchy reality was once acceptable to a nation in need of a sustaining myth, but there was now dissatisfaction with this position and its implications. That dissatisfaction was articulated most strongly by the left-leaning media and by Jewish groups, but the fact that it eventually produced a presidential decree suggests that public opinion was on board.

It was the Vél' d'hiv' affair that brought things to a head. Jean Dujardin, a Catholic priest, criticised the obdurate tendency to disassociate Vichy and France, and to judge and condemn Vichy "comme la faute d'un autre". Dujardin gave expression to what was becoming the new orthodoxy when he claimed that no society could live in true peace with itself "sur un passé refoulé et mensonger", and that reconciliation was only possible through "un rapport de vérité avec notre histoire".[65] A cartoon in *Le Monde* of the following day returned to the theme to ridicule the attitude of Mitterrand and his

[64] Henry Bulawko was, among other things, vice-president of the *Amicale des Anciens Deportés Juifs de France*). He was made a commander of the Legion of Honour in 1998 in recognition of his work in defence of the memory of antisemitic persecution. Interview of 19 April 1999.
[65] *Le Monde*, 17 July 1992.

supporters.[66] It showed a group of caricatural French figures saying to a forlorn-looking Jew, "Puisqu'on vous dit qu'on n'était pas de service ce jour-là!!"

Hervé de Charette, then UDF deputy and subsequently foreign minister, was one of the few mainstream, high-profile politicians to believe that the French state ought to be incriminated. His view was that, "pour être en règle avec notre passé, il eût (. . .) fallu (. . .) reconnaître (. . .) que les Etats, aussi, sont pêcheurs."[67]

In 1994 Jacques Attali, a former *conseiller d'état* to François Mitterrand, said on the subject of Vichy that "c'est la République qui est coupable et, au-delà, la France". He also declared that "de Gaulle a fait croire aux Français qu'ils étaient résistants alors qu'ils étaient collabos."[68] The outraged response to his remarks illustrated the delicacy of Mitterrand's position in 1992: Mitterrand's reticence drew criticism, but it might have been even more dangerous to tell his critics what they wanted to hear. Jacques Baumel, a *compagnon de la Libération*, described Attali's remarks as "odious", and an insult both to history and to those who had fought and died. He maintained the Gaullian position that although France had "baissé la tête" in 1940, "dans ses profondeurs elle ne s'est pas vautrée dans la collaboration". This notion of France's "depths", like those which evoke the "real" or "essential" France, takes us into the realms of faith and belief, out of the reach of objective enquiry.[69]

The CRIF had been organising an annual ceremony at the site of the former winter velodrome in Paris since after the war. But in the 1980s the state began to pay official attention to the Jewish community's commemoration. A representative of the government, ex-servicemen's minister Jean Laurain, attended for the first time in 1982.

---

[66] 18 July 1992.
[67] *Le Figaro* 17 July 1992.
[68] On a *Radio J* programme about the Touvier trial, 20 March 1994.
[69] *Le Figaro-Magazine* 16 April 1994.

Prior to this, official assistance and participation had always been refused by the organisers. The fact that a president of the Republic was present for the first time in 1992 was a further acknowledgment from both "sides", the Jewish groups and the State, that the nation as a whole ought to be formally, and symbolically, involved. It was also an official expression of a collective desire to recognise that the nation's past was an extremely patchy affair, made up of darkness and of light. Essentially these were the same motives that had led to inscriptions on plaques being updated.

However, there was a problem in that France's official bodies were not prepared to move as quickly as some would have liked. This led to misunderstandings and tensions, some of which expanded into minor crises. As we have seen, in June 1992, Jewish associations, human rights groups and assorted public figures came together to form the "comité 'vél' d'hiv' '42". Their petition put François Mitterrand under pressure to make a public apology on behalf of France, which he refused to do. As a consequence of that refusal Mitterrand was jeered and heckled as he took his place among the audience. There were even some shouts of "Mitterrand à Vichy" from a section of the gathering. Militant Zionist youth movements were blamed for the disturbance. Eventually the jeers were drowned out by applause, and it was the applause that was prominent when Mitterrand left the ceremony. In between times, there was a notable contribution from Robert Badinter, then president of the *Conseil constitutionnel*. Visibly angered, he expressed disgust and outrage at the hecklers' actions before going on with his speech.

In order to clear up the apparent misunderstanding of his attitude towards Vichy, Mitterrand decided to decree a new national day of commemoration which would coincide with the 'Vél' d'hiv' anniversary. The decree was made public in February 1993. This was the first time in the history of the Republic that a national

commemoration had been established by presidential decree.[70] The official title of the new commemoration was "journée nationale commémorative des persécutions racistes et antisémites commises sous l'autorité de fait dite 'gouvernement de l'Etat français'". It followed the recently established pattern in that it recognised that certain categories of people were singled out for persecution, and it referred directly to the Vichy government. Roger Jouet, head of the *Délégation à la mémoire et à l'information historique*, confirmed this when he said that the significance of the new commemoration lay precisely in the fact that it recognised "la culpabilité de l'Etat français" in the persecutions.[71]

Also, for the first time ever a systematic policy of memorial inscription was ordered and financed by the state, to cover the whole of the national territory. Henceforth each department was to have at least one inscription bearing a reference to the racist and antisemitic persecutions carried out by the Vichy government. The monument for Paris, at the former site of the Vél' d'hiv, was inaugurated at the 1994 ceremony. It was attended by the three most prominent political figures in France, François Mitterrand, Edouard Balladur and Jacques Chirac.

That said, the semantics of the official title provided an interesting nuance. According to the second petition organised by the "Vél' d'hiv' '42 committee", which appeared on 19 July 1992, the objective had been to obtain a commemoration of the crimes and persecutions perpetrated "*par* l'Etat français de Vichy". Jean Le Garrec, the deputy who sponsored the initial legislation, had retained the preposition "*par*".[72] However, the actual wording of the decree, "commises *sous* l'Etat français de Vichy" leaves a measure of indulgent ambiguity. The crimes have still been committed, and

[70] Rendered possible by the presidential powers granted by the constitution of the Fifth Republic.
[71] In the foreword to *Les Chemins de la mémoire* n°31, July-September 1993.
[72] Some details from Barcellini in *Vingtième Siècle* n°45.

Vichy is still implicated, but the link between the two becomes more tenuous. Did the Vichy government actively contribute to the persecutions, or was it merely "in charge" at the time?

Similarly, the term "*autorité de fait*" takes us right back into the classic argument about Vichy's legitimacy, and about what was the "real France". The choice of vocabulary implies that Vichy, while it may have had "authority" for a while, was in no sense a legitimate government. Mitterrand had no intention of changing his stance on the relationship between the Vichy government and the Republic. He was keen to demonstrate that he was not indifferent to the persecutions suffered by Jews and others under Vichy, but in doing so he remained consistent in drawing a distinction between the Republic which paid homage and the "autorité de fait" which was complicit in the persecutions. According to Michel Charasse, who helped prepare the 1993 decree, the president had been "furious" that his refusal to implicate the Republic in any official apology had been used against him, as "proof" that he harboured Vichyist sympathies.[73]

Roger Jouet, while he approved the recognition of Vichy's culpability (see above, p.127), was quick to point out that "les crimes commis par certains Français pendant l'occupation n'impliquent nullement une quelconque responsabilité collective". The Gaullian philosophical distinction remained a shadowy presence: legitimacy was not conferred by power, even when accorded by an elected parliament, but by fidelity to certain fundamental "national" values. Even amongst the supporters of this innovative venture, the old mindset had a place. Clearly, changes in collective mentality take the form of evolution rather than revolution.

[73] Interview with Michel Charasse, 10 June 1999.

Temporarily at least, Mitterrand's decree appeared to placate those who had previously been critical. A statement from the CRIF said that "la décision prise par le président de la République a la valeur d'une condamnation des crimes de Vichy, ce que nous attendions depuis longtemps". Its president, Jean Kahn, said on television that "pour la première fois on a voulu institutionnaliser la mémoire, c'est un progrès considérable. (. . .) La mémoire doit servir à préserver notre pays d'un retour à des idéologies qui avait prévalu à l'époque (. . .) la vigilance doit être très grande."[74] The French communist party echoed the anti-racist, anti-exclusion discourse: "La mémoire de l'holocauste perpétué voilà cinquante ans permet d'agir maintenant (. . .) La chasse au racisme, à la xénophobie est devenue indissociable de la lutte contre les inégalités, les injustices, de la nécéssité de changer de politique."[75]

As ever with commemorations, the future was at stake as much as the past. The "Vél' d'hiv' committee" "rejoiced" at the decision, which "engage pour l'avenir toute la communauté nationale";[76] Louis Mexandeau, secretary of state for war veterans, took up a familiar theme - that of the transmission of memory from the living witnesses to the next generations: "Alors que les derniers témoins disparaissent, les persécutions racistes et antisémites se trouvent ancrées à jamais dans la mémoire de la France." Christian Pierret, campaign director for the *parti socialiste*, also stressed the educational value of the decision: "il est nécessaire pour les jeunes générations que l'on procède de manière pédagogique pour bien montrer ce que sont l'antisémitisme et le racisme qui sont loin d'avoir disparu aujourd'hui."[77] At the first decreed ceremony in 1993 (which the president did not attend), Edouard Balladur underlined once again the link between past, present and future that lends significance and sometimes poignancy to the act of

[74] Not to be confused with former Elysée counsellor Jean Kahn.
[75] *L'Humanité*, 5 February 1993.
[76] *Le Monde*, 9 February 1993.
[77] Barcellini in *Vingtième Siécle* n°45.

commemoration. "La mémoire de ces événements doit inspirer le regard que nous portons sur le monde actuel. La transmettre aux générations futures est notre devoir".[78]

There was some criticism from those who thought that Mitterrand had gone too far, and from those who thought he had not gone far enough. The Green Party considered that the initiative had come too late and was not unequivocal enough in its condemnation of Vichy. And while Jacques Chirac approved, the RPR's spokesman on human rights suspected that there was more than a hint of pre-electoral opportunism in the announcement.[79] His suspicions were later vindicated by Elysée counsellor Jean Kahn, who confirmed that the general elections of 1993 were indeed a factor in the timing and the form of the decree.[80]

Chirac's declaration

It was Jacques Chirac who shifted the official position most radically, during the ceremony marking the fifty third anniversary of the *rafle du Vél' d'hiv'*, on 16 July 1995. It will be observed that, strictly speaking, I am going beyond the Mitterrand years in mentioning this event. However, this liberty is justified by the fact that the new president's gesture was intended to be the final curtain call of the Vél' d'hiv' saga, and at the same time a fresh beginning to a new era in which France could be held to account for the actions of the Vichy government.[81] Thematically it belongs to this study, and is in fact a more appropriate cut-off point than, say, Mitterrand's last day in office. For

[78] Speech at ceremony of 16 July 1993 (*Le Monde*, 18-19 July 1993).
[79] Barcellini in *Vingtième Siècle* n°45.
[80] Personal correspondance from Jean Kahn, 14 May 1999: "des politiciens (. . .) ont cru habile de préparer (the decree) à la hâte en prévision des élections de 1993." However, Michel Charasse explained that, with general elections imminent, there would not have been time to put a law through parliament in the normal way. Normal parliamentary business was suspended in any case after the announcement of the elections.
[81] Chirac's declaration provided the context required for the Matteoli commission, which is currently working out how much the French state owes to French Jews despoiled during the Occupation.

Chirac was consciously drawing a line under the record of perceived equivocation and ambiguity that he inherited. In his speech he assumed unequivocally, on behalf of France, collective responsibility for the crimes of Vichy. To make the avowal of responsibility was a significant step, because of the implicit recognition that the *Etat français* of Vichy was a government that was accepted, if only for a while, by the French people, and that there was in this respect a certain continuity with the republic which took its place.

Perhaps more tellingly, he recognised that it was "*la France*" which "a commis l'irréparable", which "livrait ses protégés à leurs bourreaux".[82] And he was unambiguous when he said that "la folie criminelle de l'occupant a été secondée par des Français, secondée par l'Etat français". With these words he put paid to the idea that Vichy was some aberrant un-French entity which somehow managed to oust the "real" France for a time, and he officially banished the Gaullian dogma in which France, at least the "real" France, was more or less united in its resistance to foreign occupation despite the treachery of the bureaucratic élite.

Not only did Chirac incriminate the French nation, and "des Français", he pointed the finger at the ordinary people who physically carried out the *rafle*, by alluding to "les bus parisiens et les fourgons de la préfecture de police".[83] In doing so he flirted with transgession of the unwritten rule which states that politicians must not criticise "ordinary people" (see above, p.111 ff.). That said, it will be noted that only the *vehicles* are referred to directly. Even in breaking with tradition so resolutely, it would have been inappropriate to spell out that "French bus drivers took Jewish families away". Still, the pill was certainly bitter enough to require the familiar sweetener of allusion to the

[82] Conan and Rousso.
[83] *Le Monde*, 18 July 1995.

imminent insurrection: "cet été sera, pour beaucoup de nos concitoyens (. . .) le point de départ d'un vaste mouvement de résistance."

Jacques Chirac's speech was in part a reaction to the shift in the public mood which followed the Mitterrand-Vél' d'hiv' controversy, and his judgement was vindicated by an IFOP poll published on 27 July 1995.[84] 72% of those questioned agreed with the president's position. However, the difficulty of making generalisations about public opinion (and the crucial importance of the wording of the prompt) is illustrated by a poll conducted in 1994, which found that 57% of opinion disagreed with the statement that "cinquante ans après, la France d'aujourd'hui doit se sentir coupable de ce que le régime de Vichy a fait entre 1940 et 1944". Only 25% agreed.[85]

The immediate impact of Chirac's declaration was symbolic: the French nation had accepted that it could not deny all responsibility for what occured under the German occupation, in particular with regard to the Jews. But the declaration also had practical implications. French Jewish families who had been despoiled at this time now had a reasonable case for demanding some form of material compensation from the French state.[86]

---

[84] in *L'Evénement du jeudi.*

[85] In *Le Figaro Magazine*, 17 December 1994.

[86] In February 1997 Alain Juppé commissioned a report whose aims would be to establish the nature of the despoilment of Jews living in France during the Occupation and to make recommendations regarding any damages to be awarded. The "mission" was headed by Jean Mattéoli, a former Resistance deportee. His interim report of 8 January 1998 gave notice of the extent to which responsibilities had been officially recognised. Mattéoli wrote that his aim was to "étudier les conditions dans lesquelles les biens appartenant aux personnes considérées comme juives par l'occupant et les autorités de Vichy ont été confisqués, ou d'une manière générale, acquis par fraude, violence ou vol dans le cadre de la *politique antisémite qui a sévi en France* entre 1940 et 1944" (my italics).[86]
Here we find that the French government of Vichy is clearly designated as a guilty party, and also that the antisemitical nature of the crimes is not obscured. Nevertheless, the report makes it plain that the term "Juif" is only being used for convenience's sake. Under French law there was no basis for categorising any person or persons in such a way. The discriminatory legal definition employed by Vichy had been abolished at the Liberation. The report explains that "En toute rigueur, la Mission étudie les conditions de la spoliation non des Juifs de France, mais des personnes qui ont été considérées comme juives par l'occupant ou les autorités de Vichy". This brings us back to the theme of communities within the Republic. While the French authorities were now willing to be more specific than ever in identifying the real victims and malefactors of the Occupation, and to assume the financial consequences, they had to remain extremely circumspect when it came to placing people in categories defined by their race or religion.

Given the state of mainstream opinion in July 1995, criticism of Chirac's speech was generally muted. Perhaps the RPR bulletin *Lettre de la Nation* was most eloquent, if not in the way it intended. It praised Chirac for his "langage clair", which compared favourably with the Mitterrand's "finasseries", but then proceeded to neglect the incriminating part of the speech and concentrate on its more positive - but obviously less significant - aspects, such as the public indignation aroused by the arrests of 1942.

Although in the ministerial ranks of the RPR few voices were raised against him at the time, it was understood that some were upset by this implicit repudiation of the traditional Gaullian line.[87] It was indeed ironic that the first Gaullist president for two decades should be the first unequivocally to repudiate the myth on which much of the Gaullist edifice had been built. The extreme-right publication *Minute*, comparing the respective attitudes of Mitterrand and Chirac, remarked that the Socialist was much more Gaullist than the Gaullist in this respect.[88] Two of Chirac's former advisers, Marie-France Garaud and Pierre Juillet, regretted that, in accepting that Vichy acted in the name of France, he was "outlawing" de Gaulle and "legitimising" his condemnation for treason. However, whether by accident or design, Garaud and Juillet's argument failed to make the distinction between recognising the facts and condoning them. Implicitly, Chirac was acknowledging that de Gaulle was indeed an outlaw at first: the government that deemed him so had been voted in by the people's representatives, and there were no protests in support of the rebel general at the time. What indeed was to prevent Vichy claiming to speak and act "in the name of France"?[89]

Philippe Séguin, having kept his counsel for two years, went public with his dismay during the Maurice Papon trial of 1997. He was concerned that, in seeking to

[87] In private, prominent Gaullists such as Jean-Jacques de Bresson and Pierre Lefranc have also criticised Chirac's declaration.
[88] 19 July 1995.
[89] Marie-France Garaud and Pierre Juillet in *Le Monde*, 22 July 1995.

blame the Republic for the crimes commited by Vichy, certain groups were attacking the memory of Charles de Gaulle, indulging a perverse taste for "l'autoflagéllation", and playing into the hands of the *Front national* by promoting the "abaissement" of France. Like Garaud and Juillet, and many others before them, Séguin managed to confuse Nation and Republic, seeing an acceptance of blame on behalf of the former as calumny towards the latter. Yet outside of the extreme right no one seriously suggested that the Republic was to blame for the crimes of Vichy, even if the Third Republic did dissolve itself too meekly. In asking incredulously "comment peut-on prétendre que l'Etat de Vichy incarnait la République?" Garaud and Juillet were probably being disingenuous. They sought to reshape Chirac's declaration into a more vulnerable form, and then attack it.[90]

The parliamentary left - if socialist education minister Lionel Jospin and communist leader Robert Hue can be deemed representative of it - approved the declaration. (Also, after he became prime minister Lionel Jospin endorsed Chirac's declaration at the 'Vél' d'hiv' commemoration of 1997). Jean-Noël Jeanneney was one of the few centre-left intellectuals to voice criticism at the time. Like the Gaullists mentioned above, Jeanneney took exception to Chirac's presuming to accuse "la France".[91] Associations of former resisters, soldiers, prisoners of war and deportees[92] were also unhappy at the initiative, as they thought it might detract from established commemorations. However, critics had to be circumspect to avoid playing into the hands of the *Front national*. For over on the extreme right, Jean-Marie Le Pen was voicing his opinions bullishly. The FN leader was indignant that the new president had dared "salir la nation et sa mémoire" in such a way, and put it down to an "electoral

[90] *Le Monde*, 22 July 1995.
[91] *Le Monde*, 20 July 1995. He reiterated his criticisms to me in an interview of 12 March 1999.
[92] M. Voutey, vice-président of the FNDIRP, was certainly against Chirac's declaration (interview of 23 March 1999).

debt" payable to the Jewish community.[93] Chirac had upset the extreme right by attacking its ideologies in his declaration:

> Quand à nos portes, certains groupuscules, certaines publications, certains enseignements, certains partis politiques se révèlent porteurs d'une idéologie xénophobe, raciste, antisémite, alors cet esprit de vigilance qui vous anime, qui nous anime, doit se manifester avec la plus grande force.

There were concerns, too, that the National Front would seek to instill, and then exploit, a feeling that the Jewish community were attempting to maximise French collective guilt, partly in a spirit of vengeance,[94] partly in order to achieve political or financial goals.[95] According to the extreme right's argument, French Jews were able to obtain favourable treatment from politicians and state authorities because of France's guilt about Vichy, and a willingness to compensate for past misdeeds. It pointed to the behaviour of the state of Israel towards Palestinians, and the indulgent attitude of the United States, amongst others. The danger in a French context was that the appeal of this discourse may increase as a result of a perceived "hi-jacking" of history and memory by the Jewish community at the expense of the nation as a whole. In a survey conducted in 1993, 23%, a significant minority, of French people, expressed a fear that a culture based on the memory of the Holocaust could provoke a rebirth of antisemitism.[96]

---

[93] *Le Monde*, 20 July 1995. Others, such as Jean Kahn, have said the same off the record. Jean-Marie Le Pen's pet theory was that Chirac was "controlled" by influential Jewish groups. He is quoted in *Le Monde* of 2-3 March 1997 as saying that Chirac "respecte la promesse faite au Bnai Brith et à toutes les autres organisations juives: ne pas remettre en cause le partage du gâteau instauré à la Libération."

[94] Henry Bulawko admitted as much in the interview of 19 April 1999.

[95] The financial goal of restoration of wealth stolen by the Nazis and their accomplices was brought closer by the Matteoli commission, set up by Alain Juppé in February 1997.

[96] Louis-Harris, 1993; in D. Chagnollaud and P. Méchet, *Enquêtes Louis-Harris 1995* (Paris: Denoël, 1995).

However, while the danger of overkill remained real, the little evidence that exists suggests that, on the whole, people were likely to be more sympathetic towards Jews when the topic of Vichy was known and discussed. Louis-Harris asked the following question in 1966, 1978 and 1987: "D'une manière générale, quand on vous apprend qu'une personne que vous connaissez est juive, est-ce que cela suscite en vous plutôt de la sympathie, plutôt de l'antipathie ou est-ce que cela ne vous fait aucun effet particulier?" In 1966, when the words "Jewish" and "Vichy" were rarely placed side by side, only 4% of those polled expressed sympathy. In 1978, the figure was 10%, and in 1987, during the period of "obsession" with Vichy's crimes, it had risen to 15%. The corresponding figures for "antipathie" were 10%, 4% and 1% (on each occasion the vast majority went for "aucun effet particulier").[97] Obviously this evidence is only circumstantial, but there is a steady and coherent progression which suggests that there is a link between antisemitism and ignorance about the persecution that occured during the Occupation. There was certainly no real evidence to suggest that the more candid approach to Vichy's antisemitism provoked feelings of resentment towards French Jews amongst the French public.

[97] Louis-Harris for *l'Evénement du jeudi*, 15-21 October 1987.

CHAPTER FIVE

LES MEMOIRES DIFFICILES

As we moved into our period the idea of the nation as an indivisible entity was becoming less sacred in France. It was no longer the uncontested reference point for collective identity. European integration, the rise of a human rights-based ideology, and the affirmation of regional, ethnic, linguistic and religious differences within French society, contributed to the relative fragmentation of the national framework for memory. A society in which, in theory, only the state and the citizens occupied the public sphere, was giving way to a society in which different "communities" claimed a right to affirm their identity. Memories of experiences unique to each group were mobilised in order to legitimise these claims. When people talk of this "logique communautaire" with reference to war and occupation it is generally a veiled reference to French Jews, who, as has already become apparent, were by far the most dynamic formation in the "batailles de mémoire" of the 1980s and 1990s.

However, in order to fully understand recent developments, it is necessary to take a step back. The German occupation had meant one thing for all Jews living in France, whether or not they were deported: first and foremost it had meant exclusion from the nation. The woes that followed were a result of that exclusion. Instinctively, those who survived sought to reintegrate themselves within the national community as fully as possible. Under such circumstances, it would have been inappropriate to assert a specifically Jewish memory, which would only have accentuated a negative sense of common identity as a minority apparently fated to be singled out for persecution. Reintegration was achieved through discretion.

That said, the discretion was not always deliberate. After the war priorities were different. Even if people appreciated the importance of keeping memory alive, they simply did not have the time or the resources to do it justice. At first, the *travail social* took precedence over the *travail de mémoire*. There were returning deportees, as well as widows and orphans, to look after. Many of them spoke little or no French, which made the task more complicated, especially when dealing with the French administration. Many of the families had had their goods stolen or their houses taken from them.

Aside from the practical concerns, it was understandable that some of those who had undergone such trauma should seek some peace of mind in silence. The politician Simone Veil has recalled that some members of her family could not bear to talk or even hear talk of the concentration camps. Veil's mother-in-law, for instance, refused to watch television whenever the subject was dealt with.[1] Others wanted to speak out, but found themselves tongue-tied. What, in truth, could one say about something so unspeakably humiliating? As the *Nouvel Observateur* reported in 1992, "ils étaient écrasés par le chagrin, ils ne voulaient plus être des victimes, ils voulaient se fondre dans la masse des Français sans histoires".[2] Until becoming involved as a *partie civile* in the trial of Maurice Papon in October 1997, Eliane Alisvaks-Dommange had been incapable of revealing to her children that her own parents had been deported to Auschwitz and gassed, and that she, along with her two brothers, had only managed to avoid a similar fate by escaping from the transit camp at Drancy. For most of her life she had been at a loss as to how to approach the subject. As she told *l'Express* , "ce n'est pas: on prend une tasse de café, on s'assoit et on discute".[3]

[1] 'Une difficile réflexion', in *Pardès* n°16 (1992).
[2] 16-22 July.
[3] 2-8 October 1997.

This gave rise to a state of affairs where it was almost taboo to utter the word "Juif" in public; and all the more so when evoking the Second World War. In Resnais and Cayrol's film *Nuit et Brouillard*, made in 1955, the word is not uttered one single time.[4] This conferred a certain shock-value on one of the more infamous slogans of May 1968: "Nous sommes tous des Juifs allemands". It was the first time that the Holocaust had been referred to so specifically and so publicly since the Liberation. The protesters, as was their wont, considered that in shouting the word "Juif" they were breaking another taboo. Even at that, Vichy's role in Jewish persecution was not an issue, since the slogan only mentioned German Jews.

Revival of Jewish memory

The relative discretion of the Jewish community had required the suppression of justifiable feelings of indignation and sorrow, and the renouncement of the equally justifiable urge to tell the story "like it was". While Jewish families waited at the Hôtel Lutétia for the 3% who survived , plaques were being put up all over Paris in memory of every person who had fallen at the Liberation (including members of the police force that had helped to deport Jews).[5] Plainly, a national memory that was detailed in some respects, and vague in others could not hope to satisfy everyone. When the specifically Jewish experience was eventually rehabilitated this would be seen as a sort of poetic justice, a bloodless revenge against those who tried to downgrade the Jews in the hierarchy of remembrance.[6]

---

[4] *Libération*, 10 July 1997.
[5] *Le Monde*, 14 July 1982. A memorial plaque was unveiled at the Lutétia in 1985. It referred to "l'angoisse et la peine des familles des milliers de disparus qui attendirent vainement les leurs en ce lieu." (Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.406.)
[6] Henry Bulawko expressed these sentiments in an interview of 19 April 1999.

From the 1970s on, Jewish deportees and their representatives were increasingly unimpressed by calls for a national synthesis in commemorative matters. Activist Henry Bulawko even expressed disappointment that the presidential decree of 1993 (see p.125ff) made the Vél' d'hiv' anniversary a *national* affair. While on one hand he welcomed the increased exposure, Bulawko, amongst others, would have preferred it to remain a more intimate, Jewish commemoration.[7]

Jewish activists began to see the preoccupation with national unity as a smokescreen, either for jealousy of the Jewish community's success in arousing popular interest in its experience, or for a latent anti-semitism.[8] For them, persecution and genocide did not constitute a national experience. On the contrary, genocide scorned national frontiers. Rita Thalmann, a secular Jew who created the commission for "mémoire historique et droits de l'homme" within the LICRA, has argued that the war ought never to have been "nationalised" in the first place, since phenomena like resistance and deportation were far from being uniquely French experiences. Thalmann was critical of the French obsession with "indivisibility", and claimed that this obsession had been counter-productive with regard to memory of the war years. It had nourished a number of myths, such as a united and inclusive "France résistante" and the umbrella category "tous des victimes du nazisme", which were destined, sooner or later, to be painfully deconstructed. The old, post-revolution motto of the Paris Consistory, *patrie et religion*, seemed hopelessly out of step with the spirit of an age in which the nation sometimes appeared as an obsolete staging post between one's community and "the world". In 1992 the indefatigable memorial activist Serge Klarsfeld gave a lecture which summed up these developments. His paper was entitles "mémoire sans

[7] Interview of 19 April 1999.
[8] Interview of 19 April 1999.

frontières".[9] The recovery and promotion of a distinctly Jewish memory of the Holocaust was a truly *international* movement.

It was inevitable that, when the climate was favourable, a Jewish memory of war and occupation would begin to assert itself. In the 1970s a new generation of Jewish intellectuals was emerging, fired by a sense of injustice untempered by the fatalism of the generation that had lived through the horrors of the Shoah. For this generation, remembering the Holocaust was a crucial aspect of a wider quest for collective identity. Being Jewish was no longer about suffering in silence, but about breaking it. The new generation was not too traumatised to speak out, or wary about proclaiming its Jewishness. On the contrary, the new breed of Jewish intellectuals were determined to be noticed as *Jewish* intellectuals, and to make an indelible impression on Jewish and then French consciousness.

While national equivalents had existed since the Liberation, it was not until 1979 that a specifically Jewish association for the memory of deportees was created. The time lapse since the events themselves dictated a shift in focus from the deportees themselves to their descendants. Consequently the new movement, in which Beate and Serge Klarsfeld featured prominently, was called *Les Fils et Filles des déportés juifs de France*. Whereas the deportees' associations that were created after the war, though they did not exclude Jewish victims, emphasised resistance and political opposition to Vichy, the ethos of the FFDJF was quite different. It aimed to support the Klarsfelds and others in their mission to track down and bring to trial those alleged war criminals who remained at large, and sought, in general, to establish and broadcast what it considered to be the truth about antisemitic persecution.

[9] Malet, ed., 1993.

These Jewish memorial activists realised that collective memory was not a given, unchanging entity, but could be acted upon by motivated individuals and groups. It was no use waiting for the tide to turn magically: in the words of Rita Thalmann, French Jews "ont dû imposer leur mémoire".[10] They also appreciated the unstable nature of that collective memory, and sought to reinforce it wherever possible by leaving durable marks in the form of plaques, monuments and other "lieux de mémoire". But it was only gradually that the Jewish community became fully conscious of the importance of safeguarding the memory of what had happened, and had begun to give it a formal structure. As Henry Bulawko explained, in the beginning there was little theory and little coherence behind the work that was done in the field of memory and commemoration. People were gathering together and putting up plaques here and there, but these were instinctive gestures of mourning and respect for those who had died: the "dette envers les morts". As Bulawko put it, "on essaimait nos petits cailloux de la mémoire: un monument ici, un musée là pour que le souvenir reste permanent".[11] This was to become the basis for a more systematic *travail de mémoire*.

One of Serge Klarsfeld's key achievements was to compile the *Mémorial de la Déportation des Juifs de France*, a document which simply lists the names, dates of birth and occupations of every one of the 75,721 Jewish people deported from France, convoy by convoy. There is no attempt to comment or interpret: the facts are simply set down in black and white, and a victory is won in the "battle for memory". Klarsfeld expressed his proactive, voluntarist philosophy when he said that "le travail d'un seul, parfois, peut éveiller ou réveiller la mémoire de tous".[12] It was this principle that

[10] Interview of 3 June 1999. Thalmann regretted that the imposition had been necessary.
[11] In *Le Journal du dimanche*, 17 July 1994.
[12] *Le Monde*, 9 February 1997.

governed his work in the field of collective memory, and he proved it to be largely correct.

Klarsfeld was representative of a number of his fellow Jews who dedicated themselves to preserving the memory of genocide. Their work, as Klarsfeld's *Mémorial* suggests, was usually systematic, and precise, as well as being specific to Jews. Another example was Gérard Gobitz, a former deportee, who undertook a statistical study of Jewish deportation from the Southern zone. He started drawing up lists bearing the names of every Jewish deportee, and, after "finishing" an administrative department, transferred the names to physical memorials such as plaques and monuments.The monument for the department of the Haute-Garonne was inaugurated in January 1991 in the presence of Lionel Jospin and André Méric, ministers for education and ex-servicemen respectively. Thanks to Gobitz's research, the figure of 910 Jewish deportees, including forty two children, was set in stone. The fact that the Vichy government was involved was also recorded for posterity.[13]

At the same time it was recognised that a purely partisan Jewish memory would lack historical credibility. So in parallel with the developments outlined above there were attempts to put new research on a truly scientific footing. In 1979, the year of the creation of the *Fils et filles des déportés juifs de France*, the *Centre de documentation juive contemporaine* organised a conference in Paris on the theme of the Jewish experience of war and occupation. The scale and prestige of the event lent welcome respectability to Jewish history of the period.[14] Since then, French historiography of the Holocaust has been extremely healthy. The *prix de la Shoah*, awarded each year in recognition of historical excellence, is regarded as one of the most prestigious awards available to war historians.

---

[13] Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.470.
[14] Claude Lévy, 'La Résistance juive en France', in *Vingtième siècle* n°22 (April 1989).

Deportation

One of the consequences of this affirmation of a specifically Jewish memory was a change in the sense attributed to the emotive word "deportation". Where once deportation had been strongly associated with active opposition to the *Etat français*, the word was being increasingly used interchangeably with Jewishness. The account in *Le Monde* of the 1994 Deportation Day ceremony illustrates this semantic slide. The article contained a description of the deportation memorial on the Ile de la Cité, on which "flottaient des oriflammes rayés de bleu et blanc commes les uniformes des déportés, portant les noms des *camps de la solution finale*".[15] But by no means all the deportees were victims of Hitler's final solution, which was only applied to the Jews. For the correspondent, deportation was associated with its Jewish victims, to the exclusion of the other categories of deportee.

Just as the different forms of remembrance had been reluctant to identify the perpetrators precisely, they had been less than accommodating, too, of the precise identity of the victims. Yet after the war Jewish deportees had been subsumed within the totality of deportees and other "victimes du nazisme". Officially, Jewish deportees had no separate status, and no separate commemorative practice, despite accounting for more than half of all French deportees.[16] The departmental deportation monument for the Yonne, officially opened in 1949, exemplified the prevalent attitude in that it airbrushed out antisemitic deportation. In fact, the Yonne memorial left out everything other than the Resistance. Its inscription paid homage to the deportees as part of "le monde combattant".[17]

---

[15] *Le Monde*, 26 April 1994; my italics.
[16] The figures, as established by the secretary of state for ex-servicemen and the *comité d'histoire de la Seconde guerre mondiale*, were: 63 085 non-Jewish deportees, of whom 59% returned, 75 721 Jewish deportees; of whom 3% returned.
[17] As detailed by Barcellini and Wieviorka.

In retrospect this tends to be explained rather cynically: France was ashamed of the way the Jews had been treated, and was anxious to obfuscate the specific nature of their persecution - the fact that they were deported, with the complicity of the French authorities, simply because of their race. The cynical interpretation is justified to some extent, but it is not the full story. Many deportees and other "rentrants", Jewish and non-Jewish, had a very republican conception of collective identity. For them it was genuinely a matter of principle that all the victims of Nazism be honoured and remembered in the same way, regardless of whether their victimhood was a consequence of their politics, their race, their acts of resistance, or simply having been in the wrong place at the wrong time. A poster of 1945 depicted a prisoner of war, a deportee and an STO worker supporting each other, under the slogan, "Ils sont unis: ne les divisez pas!" The poster suggests that the calls for unity were not simply an excuse to avoid dealing with antisemitic persecution. In any case, the Jewish deportees who had survived and returned to France were shocked to find that the Vichyite methods of categorisation were still being applied. The authorities had decided to divide deportees into three categories: *deporté résistant*, *deporté politique* and, for the Jews, *deporté racial*. Jewish deportees had to struggle in order to have the third category annulled.[18]

During the tense post-war period it was feared that the important issues might be compromised if each "community" of deportees started to affirm its own unique history, and if there were a struggle for pre-eminence among the deportees. This fear was nourished by the division, in 1945, of the former deportees into rival federations, of which two were dominant. The *Fédération nationale des déportés et internés, résistants et patriotes* was dominated by communists (some of whom were Jewish). The

[18] One of the leading players at the time was Henry Bulawko, who explained some of these points in the interview of 19 April 1999.

Fédération nationale des déportés et internés résistants was more Gaullist in character.[19] These organisations were often at loggerheads in the years that followed.

So in the beginning there was little enthusiasm for any initiative that sought to make Jewish deportees a category apart. In February 1949 the French president Vincent Auriol unveiled a plaque on the synagogue at rue de la Victoire in Paris. The plaque bore the following inscription: "A la mémoire de nos frères combattants de la guerre et de la Libération, martyrs de la Résistance et de la Déportation, ainsi qu'à *toutes les victimes de la barbarie nazie*".[20] Jewish deportees were not remembered as a specific group, even on the wall of a synagogue![21] At the unveiling ceremony the head of the Paris Consistory, the rabbi Georges Wormser, said that "nous entendons honorer aujourd'hui, *sans distinction de confession ou d'appartenance, tous ceux qui sont tombés pour elle* (la patrie)".[22] Significantly, this *lieu de mémoire* was later largely disregarded in favour of less discrete places of remembrance such as the Holocaust memorial in the Marais or the memorial at the site of the Vél' d'hiv'.

When it was opened in 1957, the memorial to the unknown Jewish martyr was one of the only physical memorials to make specific reference to French Jews. It placed the "Juifs de France" within a global Jewish memory of the Holocaust rather than within a narrative of French deportation. When the project was announced in 1952 it aroused the suspicion of the FNDIR, which questioned the wisdom of "differentiation": "le secrétaire général croit que la différenciation qui sera ainsi faite parmi toutes les

[19] Affiliated to the FNDIR were the UNADIF (*Union nationale des associations de déportés et d'internés et famille* and the ADIR (*Association des déportées internées de la Résistance*). Also in existence were the FIAP (*Fédération internationale des anciens prisonniers politiques*) and the ANFROM (*Association nationale des familles de résistants et otages morts pour la France*).
[20] My italics.
[21] Barcellini in *Vingtième Siècle*, n°45.
[22] Annette Wieviorka, 1992, p.403. My italics.

victimes de la barbarie nazie ne desserve plus qu'elle ne serve, la mémoire de ceux qui tombèrent dans des conditions si atroces".[23]

The first national "Deportation Day" commemoration was held on 24 April 1954, but there was no reference made to the Jews as a distinct category. And the evolution of the Deportation Day ceremony since its inception speaks volumes about the way in which the issue has been represented in France.[24] The official bodies were involved in an ongoing damage limitation exercise, by which they came to recognise that collective memory was a complex and fragmented phenomenon, and tried to expand the notion of "national memory" in order to cope with that fragmentation.

Until 1984 the official ceremony had always been held at the "Mémorial de la France combattante" at Mont Valérien. Mont Valérien was the principal execution site for the Parisian region, and many a feat of Resistance martyrdom had been accomplished there.[25] It was at this location, in November 1945, that one of the first acts of deportation commemoration had taken place. Fifteen corpses were solemnly interred in a crypt built for the occasion. These remains were intended to symbolise "la France combattante". Two deportees were laid to rest there, but they had both been members of the Resistance. While there was a space at Mont Valérien for the text of de Gaulle's *appel du 18 juin*, there was no room for those who had been deported because of their race, religion or political background.

For the deportation day ceremonies a symbolic urn was carried to Mont Valérien via the UNADIF[26] headquarters, the "chapelle des déportés" at St. Roch's Roman Catholic church, the Ministry for ex-servicemen, and the tomb of the unknown soldier.

---

[23] FNDIR bulletin of November 1952, cited by Serge Barcellini in *Vingtième siècle*, n°45. The memorial was renovated and extended in 1993, in order to heighten its pedagogical impact; it now includes a library, archives, and exposition and conference rooms.
[24] There had been a ceremony on this day since 1952; it was made official in 1954.
[25] Most notably perhaps, Missak Manouchian and 22 comrades were shot there in 1944.
[26] *Union nationale des associations de déportés, internés et familles de disparus.*

As from 1957, the memorial to the *martyr juif inconnu* was also included in the pre-itinerary.[27]

In 1985, as a more explicit acknowledgement of the fact that deportation was a multifaceted experience, the Deportation Day ceremonies were broadened. At the request of Jewish former deportees,[28] a specifically Jewish memorial was included in the main itinerary. It was also decided that, on the Saturday before the alloted Sunday, each of the six groups that were recognised could hold a ceremony in a *lieu de mémoire* of its choice. So Jewish deportees were commemorated at Drancy, Christians at Saint Roch's Church, those belonging to the Gypsy community at Montreuil Bellay, and so forth. There was even a separate ceremony at Fréjus for prisoners held in Japanese camps. Six torches, one from each of the ceremonies, were then brought together at the *Mémorial du martyr juif inconnu* for a common ceremony, before crossing the Seine to the *Mémorial des martyrs de la déportation*. The third phase was held at the tomb of the unknown soldier at the Arc de Triomphe. The ceremonies were presided over by the minister for ex-servicemen.

The intention was to do justice to the two conflicting interpretations of deportation: the general and the specific. The deportation memorial on the Ile de la Cité deliberately ignored the background of the deportees. In contrast, the whole point of the memorial to the unknown Jewish martyr was to recall that the Jews were singled out precisely because they were Jews. Just as the unknown soldier at the Arc de Triomphe is anonymous except for his Frenchness, the unknown Jewish martyr is anonymous except for his Jewishness. This was underlined by Serge Barcellini, who headed the

[27] Details of this paragraph in Serge Barcellini's article 'sur deux journées nationales commémorant la déportation et les persécutions des "années noires"', in *Vingtième Siècle* n°45 (1995).
[28] Interview of 19 April 1994.

commemorative arm of the ex-servicemen's ministry during this period.[29] He explained that "le jumelage des deux mémoriaux permet à la fois de souligner le fait historique global que représente la déportation et la tragique spécificité de la Shoah à l'intérieur de ce fait historique".[30]

By the middle of the decade, then, the antisemitic aspect of deportation was officially taking its place within (or alongside) the national memory. This marked the beginning of the end of what Rita Thalmann has called "le mythe de l'unicité de la déportation".[31] Those who refused to recognise the new order were swiftly castigated by groups dedicated to preventing any backsliding. So it was that in 1986 the official communiqué issued by the FNDIRP[32] for Deportation Day was criticised by the "Agence télégraphique juive" for "banalisation" of the Shoah and for failing to allude directly to Jewish deportation. "Ce texte", said the counter-communiqué, "en ne mentionnant pas une seule fois le mot 'juif', occulte (. . .) la spécificité du martyr juif en oubliant de rappeler que les victimes juives ont été déportés non en tant qu'opposants politiques ou résistants, mais en tant que Juifs".[33]

While their origins still determined the political orientations of the FNDIRP and the FNDIR, the intensity of that rivalry was weakening. This was partly a consequence of the downturn in the fortunes of the communist party and to a lesser extent the Gaullists. But it was also a reaction to the "threat" posed by the exclusively Jewish memory of deportation, which was fast becoming the dominant one. The rival federations realised that unity was now imperative. In the 1980s they started producing

[29] The name of the service changed several times, but the most durable has been *Délégation à la mémoire et à l'information historique.*
[30] In *Vingtième Siècle,* n°45.
[31] Interview of 3 June 1999. 'Le mythe de l'unicité de la déportation' was the title of an article that Thalmann wrote for *Le Monde*, but which was not published.
[32] *Fédération nationale des déportés et internés de la Résistance.*
[33] Barcellini in *Vingtième Siècle*, n°45.

a common statement,[34] and laying a common wreath, for the annual Deportation Day. The "message commun" was intended to unify, but it was not signed by Jewish groups. These latter resented the fact that the communiqués made little or no reference to anti-semitic deportation and genocide. The signatories, for their part, were determined to uphold the principle by which the deportees were "tous des victimes du nazisme", and were unwilling to give the Jews a special separate status.

The non-Jewish associations also cooperated in the creation of the *Fondation pour la mémoire de la Déportation*, established in 1990 to prolong the memory of deportation beyond the lifespans of the *anciens*. Jewish groups were not interested in the *Fondation pour la mémoire de la Déportation*, because they were looking towards their own *Fondation de la Shoah*, also set up in 1990. It appeared that the long-standing division between Gaullists and communists had been dealt with, only to be replaced with another, between Jewish and non-Jewish deportees.

Commemorating Vichy's crimes

So there is not much evidence that these modifications to the forms of remembrance were effective in safeguarding a unified approach. By the 1990s there was little cooperation between the Jewish associations and the others. Increasingly, the Jews saw themselves not as French victims but as victims of France. While the former participated in the Deportation Day ceremonies, they considered that it was not really "their" commemoration.[35] The establishment of the official commemorative day in July

[34] That of 1999 was signed by: the *Association des Déportés et Internés de la Résistance*; the *Fédération Nationale des Déportés et Internés de la Résistance*; the *Fédération Nationale des Déportés et Internés, Résistants et Patriotes*; the *Union Nationale des Associations de Déportés, Internés et Familles de disparus*; and the *Union Nationale des Déportés, Internés et Victimes de Guerre.*

[35] Interview with Henry Bulawko, 19 April 1999. Bulawko regarded the FNDIR as "antisemitic". He had more respect for the FNDIRP, but said nonetheless that "je ne travaille plus avec eux". Rita Thalmann,

1993 reinforced these orientations. Although no one says such things directly, in talking to those involved one realises that non-Jewish associations suspected that the Jews wanted to make deportation and Judaism synonymous, in the hope of winning sympathy and influence; while the Jewish groups believed that the others - particularly the Resistance fraternity - were bitter because they no longer enjoyed the power and the hold over the public imagination they once had. All this was magnified by the media, so that when one particular memory was "on top" the others felt that they were being ignored completely. This created animosity between the "rival" groups, and increased the determination to have "our own" memory prevail over those rivals. Jewish memorial activist Henry Bulawko bore witness to the existence of this phenomenon when talking about the strength of the memory of the Jewish experience and the relative weakness of the "France combattante" narrative. He had no compunction about referring to "revenge" for the lack of consideration given to the specifically Jewish experience in earlier times.[36]

These misgivings were increased by the new day of commemoration established in 1993. After all, the petitionists of 1992 had called for "une journée nationale de commémoration des persécutions et des crimes perpétrés *contre les Juifs*". This exclusive reference did not appear in the decree, but it was obvious that the Jews were foremost in everyone's mind. To counter the risk of monopolisation, Jean Daniel proposed that the 16 July be "universalised", to become a day on which all minorities present in France "qui peuvent être un jour victimes de bourreaux" could come together.[37]

Jewish academic, LICRA activist and specialist on the memory of the war, did not leave the FNDIRP, but said that "j'ai dû avaler beaucoup de couleuvres" in remaining a member. (Interview of 3 June 1999.)

[36] Interview of 19 April 1999.

[37] *Nouvel Observateur* 8 July 1993, quoted by Barcellini.

The mainstream associations of deportees regarded the new commemoration as superfluous. The FNDIR regretted the innovation because "elle fait double emploi avec la Journée de la déportation"; the FNDIRP, for its part, reaffirmed that "la journée du dernier dimanche d'avril restera (. . .) le grand moment de la mémoire en hommage à toutes les victimes de la déportation".[38] In private, representatives of these groups were more vehement in their criticisms. Talking on a one-to-one basis, M. Voutey of the FNDIRP was much more forthright in his opposition to the new commemoration than the federation's official statements would suggest.[39] He also regretted that the "logique communautaire" seemed to be going from strength to strength. Publicly, however, they had to be moderate in order to avoid the trap of playing into the hands of the extreme right, which would stand to gain from any major confrontation. The Lepenist newpaper *Présent* had tried to stir things up by describing the decision to establish another commemoration as "un acte de guerre civile",[40] while Jean-Marie Le Pen opined that "il n'est pas utile de rouvrir les plaies".[41]

So Serge Klarsfeld was not entirely correct in his prediction that Mitterrand's decree would encourage national reconciliation, that it would "mettre fin à un malentendu entre la communauté juive et la communauté nationale".[42] Klarsfeld's conception of two communities, a "Jewish" one and a "national" one, was in itself controversial, but was representative of the philosophy of many Jewish and other minority groups, and many sections of the media.[43] Shelomo Selinger's centrepiece sculpture, unveiled at Drancy in 1986, typified the new approach in that it contained an

[38] Barcellini in *Vingtième Siècle*, n°45.
[39] Interview of 23 March 1999.
[40] 5 February 1993.
[41] *Le Monde*, 5 February 1993.
[42] Barcellini in *Vingtième Siècle*, n°45.
[43] On *France 3* on 16 July 1993 Jean Kahn, president of the CRIF (*conseil représentatif des institutions juives de France*), was introduced as a representative of "la communauté juive". The term was also used in an earlier news programme on the same channel.

inscription in Hebrew as well as in French. The language of the Republic was not seen as the only appropriate means of expression. The symbolism of the sculpture was borrowed from Jewish tradition: the three blocks of the monument formed the Hebrew letter "Schin", inscribed above the doorway of Jewish homes; the cube shape on the head of the central figure represented the "téfilin", the Jewish symbol of prayer; and the ten stylised figures composing the sculpture made up the number required for "minyan", or collective prayer.[44]

From a Republican perspective this gave rise to a dilemma. Should it consider that *communautarisme* was a reality within the Republic, and take the appropriate measures to recognise the communities? Or should it stick to pure Republican principles and refuse to recognise any community mediation between the state and its citizens? Initiatives such as the decree of February 1993 appeared to take the first direction, yet there was never any formal recognition of a communitarian philosophy. The term "Jewish community" was never used, and the Republic had to remain one and indivisible. Officially, the collective memory of the Republic, as expressed by commemorative practice, had been expanded, not sub-divided.

The significance of the decree of 4 February 1993 is that it broke with a long tradition, as old as the concept of the nation-state: for this national commemoration was no longer primarily in the service of an exemplary national identity. To quote Serge Barcellini, it transformed the notion of national commemoration "en rompant avec les commémorations identitaires".[45] Essentially what he is talking about is the *raison d'être* of commemoration in a nation-state like France. What is the priority? Is it simply to remind the nation's citizens of what unites them and enable them to forget past quarrels?

[44] Explained by Selinger on website of "Conservatoire Historique du camp de Drancy" (http://www.chez.com/campdrancy/).
[45] *Vingtième Siècle*, n°45.

Or is the priority to ensure that each group or community is able to commemorate its own unique, authentic experience?

One of the problems about adopting a specific, compartmentalised approach to collective memory is that it can become a never-ending process. One can identify the Jews as a specific persecuted minority in Vichy France, but, having done that, the next step would be to recognise that it was essentially the non-integrated Jews who were persecuted. Those who had lived in France for centuries, spoke French perfectly and had often moved up the social ladder could be put in a separate category from those who had arrived recently in France from Eastern Europe, spoke French as a second language or hardly at all, and struggled to make a living. While France had allowed these people to come and live on its territory, the process of Republican integration had not yet taken effect. The Eastern Jews were seen as outsiders by most French people, including French Jews. For the moment the Jewish community has not been keen to take specificity to this next stage, just as the French state and the mainstream deportees were initially unwilling to take specificity to its first stage.

The process by which a specifically Jewish memory gained recognition is inseparable from the process by which the French collective memory incorporated an element of self-criticism (detailed in chapter four). So complete was the recovery of the memory of the French-Jewish experience that by the end of our period it would have been difficult for younger generations to conceive of a time when it was undervalued. Indeed, of the three official national commemorations of World War Two officially recognised, two - the Deportation Day in April and the Vél' d'Hiv' anniversary in July - recalled in some way the anti-semitic nature of Vichy and Nazism. (The other was the 8 May commemoration of the final defeat of Nazi Germany.)

In an ideal world, the French collective conscience would have incorporated revelations of antisemitic persecution as a necessary adjustment to a previously distorted memory. The heroic aspects would have simply ceded some ground to the less heroic aspects; the monolithic national framework for remembrance would have admitted some community-based diversity. Former CRIF president Théo Klein claimed that the development of a specifically Jewish memory of wartime France need not efface any others,[46] but this is to overestimate the subtlety and adaptabilty of collective memory, and its capacity to take on board apparently contradictory elements. When the pendulum starts to swing it does not stop in the middle, but swings as far again in the opposite direction. The danger of this occurring with regard to Vichy began to alarm some people. In 1992 the rabbi David Farhi even found it necessary to remind people at a memorial ceremony that the Jews were not the only ones who had been deported. "Il ne faut pas oublier la communauté tsigane et les résistants français", he urged.[47] More recently Simone Veil, herself a survivor of antisemitic deportation, also warned that Resistance deportees must not be forgotten.[48] Who, in the 1950s or the 1960s, would have thought it possible that one day a rabbi would have to speak out on behalf of the French Resistance lest it be forgotten?

Claude Lanzmann, director of the documentary film *Shoah*, was also concerned enough about the trends outlined in this and the previous chapter to issue a call for balance in France. The irony was that people like Lanzmann, who had worked to make everyone aware of the reality of deportation and genocide, were seeing their roles reversed. Instead of endeavouring to qualify a positive mythology, they found themselves trying to prevent the implantation of a wholly negative one. Casting an

[46] On *Le Grand Débat*: 'Faut-il oublier Vichy?', *France-Culture*, 28 November 1994.
[47] Speech at Yom Hashoah ceremony on 30 April 1992 at the *Place des martyrs juifs du vélodrome d'hiver* (*Le Monde*, 3-4 May 1992).
[48] Mentioned by M. Perrot, president of UNADIF. Interview of 27 April 1999.

experienced eye on France's fiftieth anniversary commemoration of the Vél' d'hiv' arrests, Lanzmann perceived that the self-critical instinct had indeed gone too far. If France had not been entirely "résistante", he said, she had not been totally "collabo" either: "il est tout aussi faux de céder à l'autre terme du manichéisme, comme on semble le vouloir aujourd'hui à l'instant de célébrer le cinquantième anniversaire de la grande rafle".[49]

La Croix, more predictably perhaps, detected a tendency among the general public to detach Vichy from its wider context. It felt the need to remind people that "La destruction a son centre - c'est l'Allemagne nazie - et sa périphérie - les pays qu'elle occupe et donc la France", and regretted that, according to the version of events that seemed to prevail, "on est déporté par Vichy, gazé par Vichy".[50] These concerns were echoed by a number of specialists, including Renée Poznanski, in *Les Juifs en France pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale*, and Philippe Burrin in *La France à l'heure allemande*.[51] Denis Peschanski alluded to an "interprétation réductrice" which tended to "appauvrir singulièrement la compréhension de l'Etat français en le réduisant à sa seule politique antisémite".[52]

The French state's guardians of memory did not take to the new state of affairs with enthusiasm. At the Elysée, the increasingly community-orientated, self-critical reality had to be taken into account, but was eyed with suspicion. Privately Jean Kahn, who advised president Mitterrand on commemorative matters, has expressed resentment at the actions of what he saw as "fundamentalist" pressure groups, concerned only with advancing their own aims. Kahn was extremely critical of what he saw as a scurrilous

[49] *Le Monde*, 17 July 1992.
[50] 14-15 July 1992.
[51] Paris: Hachette, 1997; Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1995.
[52] 1997 p.12.

campaign to discredit Mitterrand personally.[53] Mitterrand loyalists felt that it was extremely unjust that Mitterrand should be pilloried where previous presidents were not troubled, particularly as he had been more respectful towards the Jewish memory of the war than had his predecessors. On the Vél' d'hiv' issue, Jean Kahn blamed the president's opponents, Jewish and non-Jewish, for deliberately putting Mitterrand in a difficult situation on a sensitive problem that was likely to turn even his own side against him.

Mitterrand himself was privately incensed at what he saw as a scurrilous campaign to discredit him by an over-influential hard core within the Jewish community. He realised that it would be counter-productive to give free range to his opinions in public, but, in 1999, Jean d'Ormesson claimed that the president had complained about the behaviour of an extremist "lobby juif".[54] Mitterrand had invited d'Ormesson to breakfast on the morning of Jacques Chirac's inauguration, on 17 May 1995. According to d'Ormesson, the conversation turned to Mitterrand's friendship with Vichy official René Bousquet. "Vous constatez là", said Mitterrand, "l'influence puissante et nocive du lobby juif en France".[55] Jean Daniel, who was convinced that Mitterrand was not an antisemite, nonetheless confirmed that he had heard him use the expression "lobby juif" and "lobby sioniste". The president, said Daniel, did not mean to refer to the whole of the French Jewish community, but only the more vocal, right-wing element within it - the element that Daniel characterised as a "groupe de pression qui manifeste une arrogance quasi (. . .) américaine".[56]

[53] Interviews of March and April 1999.
[54] In *Le Rapport Gabriel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999).
[55] Extract in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 26 August-1 September 1999.
[56] *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 26 August-1 September 1999.

As far as the Elysée was concerned, there was a line that the Republic could not cross in dealing with its communities, just as there was a line that Mitterrand refused to cross in dealing with Vichy. This was apparent in his reaction to the Vél' d'hiv' controversy in 1992. In January 1994 President Mitterrand was invited to attend a ceremony to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the CRIF. The invitation was declined on principle: Jean Kahn's advice on this occasion was that "le président ne devrait honorer (la cérémonie) ni de sa présence ni même d'un message", since this would compromise the secular foundations of the Republic.

Serge Barcellini has complained that the revamped Deportation Day ceremonies (details given above, p.148) soon proved to be "une réponse insuffisante à la montée de l'idéologie des droits de l'homme et à la poursuite de la course identitaire de la communauté juive".[57] Similarly, when Jacques Chirac officially assumed responsibility on behalf of the state for the crimes of Vichy he was criticised by Kofi Yamgnane, former minister for "integration" under Mitterrand, and chairman of the "Foundation for Republican Integration". The essence of Yamgnane's criticism was that Chirac had betrayed the values of the Republic by pandering to communitarism. In making the apology to a specific ethnic group within the French nation, Jacques Chirac had recognised the existence of a "communauté juive", thus implicitly undermining "le principe fondateur du modèle français d'intégration républicaine".[58] Jean Kahn called Chirac's declaration "malheureuse" for the same reason.[59] We seemed to have reached a philosophical impasse here: in seeking to denounce, among other sins, Vichy's malicious flouting of the republican tradition of civic – as opposed to ethnic - nationality, the new President was himself accused of flouting that republican tradition.

[57] *Vingtième Siècle*, n°45.
[58] *Le Monde*, 14 August 1995.
[59] Interviews of March-April 1999.

More problematic memories

The Jewish experience was foremost among a number of distinct memories that had been marginalised by the dominant "national narratives", but which were finding space to assert themselves in a changing commemorative context. Again, it is clear that collective memory is bound up with the way in which the collective entity organises itself and thinks about itself. A more realistic attitude to national prestige and to the "indivisibility" of the Republic meant that other "difficult" memories were able to come to the fore. France was starting to remember officially that the "la France combattante" was not the definitive French experience; indeed, that it made more sense to talk of the diverse experiences of "*les* France"; and that the complex and problematic nature of war and occupation had to be acknowledged and confronted. This translated into changes in commemorative discourse and practice, which were more or less significant according to the episode or the group in question.[60]

The Mitterrand years, then, were marked by a process of loosening of France's centralised state structure, which was thought to be too constricting, both for the regions and for France's ethnic, religious and linguistic minority groups. During the 1980s the new-found assertiveness of sub-national or supra-national groupings met with a willingness on the part of the state to allow that assertiveness to express itself. A "user-friendly" approach to the integration of minorities was one of the innovative features of socialist government. The theme of foreign participation in resistance to occupation and collaboration was seen as a perfect vehicle for the new approach. What better way to promote integration than by recalling the heroism of non-French Resistance fighters, and their crucial contribution to France's eventual liberation?

[60] For many of the details that follow I am indebted to Barcellini and Wieviorka's *Passant, souviens-toi* (Paris: Plon, 1995).

Even more so than for other aspects of war commemoration, young people were the target group here. Indeed the national monument to *Les Etrangers dans la Résistance* at Besançon started off as a pedagogical initiative.[61] In 1989 the ministries of Education and Culture, along with the *Fonds d'action sociale pour les travailleurs immigrés et leurs familles* (FAS) got together to sponsor a project for schools on the theme of foreign contributions to the French cultural heritage. Two schools in the twentieth arrondissement of Paris decided to create a wooden sculpture in honour of foreign *résistants*, and enlisted sculptor Jorge Soler to help them. The resulting sculpture was put on display at La Défense for an exposition entitled "Composition française", in 1992. It then went to the museum of Resistance in Besançon for its exposition on the theme of "les étrangers dans la Résistance". With the financial help of another socialist creation, the *fonds de la commande publique*, the wooden statue was then recast in stone and bronze. On 21 February 1993 a scale model of the proposed sculpture was presented to Kofi Yamgnane, secretary of state for Integration (a ministry created by Mitterrand), and M. Schwint, deputy mayor of Besançon. They were participating in a ceremony to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the execution of *Affiche rouge* foreign resisters.

The president, often accused of being evasive with regard to certain aspects of war and occupation, was keen to lend his personal support to the type of initiative dealt with here. In September 1993 he went to Besançon to unveil the completed monument to the foreign resistance fighters. In his speech he warned against the "tentation constante" of drawing a "xenophobic" distinction between French people who resisted and foreigners who resisted. This was a false distinction, he said, and one which Vichy had attempted to exploit at the time.

[61] Information in this paragraph taken from Barcellini and Wieviorka, pp. 282, 283.

The memory of the persecution suffered by travelling people in France was also reactivated in the 1980s. A key event was the appearance of Jacques Sigot's *Un camp pour les Tziganes et les autres. Montreuil-Bellay, 1940-1945*. It was first published in 1983 and re-issued in 1994. In 1988 a monument was erected at Montreuil-Bellay (Loiret), in a joint venture between the municipality and the state that was partly inspired by Sigot's book. Even on this inscription, though, figures were vague: it refers to the internment of "plusieurs milliers" persons. There was also uncertainty over their precise fate. Evidence of systematic deportation and genocide of gypsies living in France is not conclusive. The inscription said only that they were "victimes d'une détention arbitraire".[62]

In 1991 there were memorials erected at Poitiers (Vienne) and Jargeau (Loiret). In June 1991, a ceremony was held for the first time to commemorate an act of "génocide tsigane" (again the use of the term "genocide" is debatable) at Saint-Sixte (Lot-et-Garonne), in which a family of fourteen were massacred by the Germans. Following that innovation some gypsy associations started lobbying (so far unsuccessfully) for a memorial in Paris to gypsy internment and "genocide".[63]

Clearly, the climate of the Mitterrand years was favourable to a reappraisal of minority memories, which could claim to have been unjustly neglected beforehand. It was also a time during which there was considerable political capital to be gained from being considered a "victim" of the extremist politics of the time. This situation gave rise to excesses: we have seen that the gypsy community had begun to talk of "genocide", and that people had come to equate deportation with antisemitism. Homosexual activists, for their part, were attempting to have themselves included amongst the

[62] Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.323.
[63] Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.324.

deportees, even though there had been no policy of deportation of homosexuals because of their sexual orientation. (In the annexed territories the situation had been different, but these were treated in the same manner as the rest of Germany and Austria.) This gave rise to a minor incident on the periphery of the 1994 Deportation Day commemoration. A few hundred activists staged a demonstration designed to draw attention to the paradox of "la mémoire oubliée des déportés homosexuels".[64] According to the leaflets being distributed, they had previously been snubbed by other deportees associations. The UNADIF had written to them in uncompromising terms, saying that "la reconnaissance que vous recherchez ne passe pas par un travestissement des faits historiques (. . .) Il n'y a aucune raison pour faire quelque place que ce soit aux homosexuels dans la déportation". In *Le Déporté* (UNADIF-FNDIR) of April 1999, Jean Manson stated categorically that "il n'y a eu en France aucun homosexuel déporté en tant qu'homosexuel".

In the post-war period the French camps in which "undesirables" had been interned had not figured at all prominently in official or popular memory. These camps had been set up before the war, and included Spanish republicans, communists, Jews, gypsies, and politically suspicious foreigners. The familiar signs a of resurgent memory - publications, films, creation of *amicales*, memorial plaques, ceremonies, projects for museums - began to appear in the late 1970s, and were abundant by the middle of the 1980s. It was only in 1978 that the cemetery for the camp of Septfonds (Tarn-et-Garonne) had been opened. The plaque on the château de Vaudeurs (Yonne), where eighty one "éléments politiquement suspects" were interned, was put up by the ADIRP[65] in 1984. On the site of the former camp of Mauzac the memorial plaque was unveiled in

[64] *Le Monde*, 26 April 1994.
[65] *Association départmentale des internés, résistants et patriotes.*

1985. At the site of the camp of Agde, in the Hérault, the monument dates from 1989. The stela at the former camp at Sabou (Dordogne) was unveiled on 22 April 1990.[66]

In the "camp des Milles" (Bouches-du-Rhône) two distinct populations were interned successively, and this was to give rise to a minor "bataille de mémoire". From September 1939 until the spring of 1940 the camp's inmates were mostly enemy nationals, many of them Germans. From November 1940 the camp served as a transit camp for Jews. Between 12 August and 20 September 1942, notably, 2000 Jews were transfered to Drancy for deportation.[67]

The memory of the camp was resuscitated at the beginning of the 1980s, when a historian rediscovered the site along with some fresco paintings by internees, notably Max Ernst and Hans Bellmer. Two associations were formed: the *Comité de coordination pour la sauvegarde du camp des Milles* and the *Association européenne pour le souvenir du camp des Milles.* The latter association tended to concentrate on the initial period of the camp, while the former put the accent on the second period. This is borne out by the inscription on the commemorative plaque it put up, which referred only to the period August-September 1942: "Souvenons-nous, août-septembre 1942, des trains quittaient ce lieu en emportant vers les camps de la mort en Allemagne, livrés volontairement aux hitlériens par le gouvernement de Vichy, mille neuf cent vingt hommes, femmes, enfants juifs, réfugiés d'Europe centrale et des Français internés au camp des Milles".[68]

The French state felt it necessary to intervene to encourage the development of a global memory, thus subduing the rivalry between the two associations. In 1983 the site, an old tile factory, was placed on the state's inventory of historical monuments; in 1989

[66] Information in this paragraph taken from Barcellini and Wieviorka, pp.316-319.
[67] Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.320.
[68] Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.320.

the ex-servicemen's ministry took possession of the workshop in which the frescos were discovered, and undertook to restore them.[69] In April 1989 the minister, André Méric, decided to create a memorial-museum of internment. However, the project was bogged down in the type of rivalries with which we are now familiar. The site of Gurs was chosen then rejected in favour of Rivesaltes, and there was talk of president Mitterrand presiding at an opening ceremony on Deportation Day in 1995.[70] Eventually the proposed site was changed again - to Le Vernet - before the memorial campaign finally ran out of momentum.[71]

So while it seemed for a time that the memory of internment was about to make a spectacular comeback, this never quite materialised. In 1991 Serge Barcellini wrote that the previous year, 1990, had been the "coup d'envoi" of a revival, with, notably, projects for turning former camps into museums, as well as the proposed national museum.[72] So it must have seemed like a significant development at that time. Ultimately, however, there was no massive rehabilitation of the internees' experience as there had been of the Jewish experience.

Dealing with defeat

The collective memories of ethnic, religious or sexual minorities were not the only problematic ones. Certain experiences had been deprived of attention simply because they sat uneasily with the "national narrative" that had been propagated since liberation. Chronologically, the first anniversary of the Second World War had to be the declaration of war on Germany. Traditionally, however, this date, the 3 September

[69] Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.321.
[70] Document dated 3 April 1991, sent from Serge Barcellini to Jean Kahn. Jean Khan's archives.
[71] Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.321.
[72] Document dated 3 April 1991, sent from Serge Barcellini to Jean Kahn. Jean Khan's personal archives.

1939, had received little commemorative attention. Plaques recalling the order to mobilise, given on 2 September 1939, are rare. Where they exist they are generally within regimental barracks, and were put up by veterans associations.

The ex-servicemen's ministry organised two ceremonies for the fiftieth anniversary. Curiously, the first of these had only a tenuous link with the event in question. In March 1989 a plaque was put up on the wall of the former Orsay station. It recalled that, "Entre avril et août 1945, un grand nombre de rescapés des camps de prisonniers, des camps de concentration, des camps de travail forcé, tous victimes du nazisme, furent, à leur retour, accueillis dans la gare d'Orsay, le plus important centre français de rapatriement".

The ceremony and the inscription owed much to the minister for ex-servicemen André Méric, who had been preoccupied since the end of the war with the status of "victims of Nazism". Méric was convinced that no differentiation should be made between the different categories of victim, and was committed to ending the selective nature of collective remembrance. Instead, he wanted to democratise the "hierarchy of remembrance"[73] that had implanted itself. This all-inclusive plaque was to be a lasting monument to these convictions. In such a way is official memory, in theory impersonal and representative of a collective experience, influenced by the personal convictions of its executives. This is one of the enduring paradoxes of any collective entity.

As expected the wording of the inscription was unacceptable to some representatives of former deportees. They pointed out first of all that most surviving deportees had been received at the Hôtel Lutétia, not Orsay Station, on their return; and secondly that, from those who had worked under the *service du travail obligatoire* to prisoners of war, to political or resistance deportees, there was a significant difference

[73] Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.116.

in the cause and nature of their "victimhood".[74] Once again we encounter a familiar problem: should official, national commemoration impose this sort of amalgam, or is it better to draw distinctions according to the more complex historical reality?

The second ceremony, in September 1989, was a more grandiose version of the annual "rekindling of the flame" at the Arc de Triomphe. The ceremony was organised, as always, by the *Fédération nationale des anciens combattants, prisonniers de guerre* (FNCPG). It was traditionally a sombre and low-key affair, but in 1989 some concessions were made to the contemporary penchant for "memory-as-spectacle" as exemplified by that year's bicentenial of the French Revolution (see also chapter seven, p.234). Thus the ceremony at the Arc de Triophe featured thirty "figurants" dressed in military uniforms of 1939. An enlarged copy of the *affiche de mobilisation* was also placed in front of the Arc de Triomphe.

For obvious reasons the question of whether, and in what way, the disastrous rout of 1940 would be officially remembered was a vexed one. Former soldiers were keen that their battles be commemorated as fully as possible, since men had fought and died for France even if the end result was defeat. Since the war ended, in fact, veterans of the Battle of France, organised into two principal associations,[75] had been fighting for "rehabilitation", for a reinsertion into the wider narrative of "France's resistance to its enemies". Memorial plaques often made reference to the "résistance héroïque" of a

[74] Letter of 28 August 1989 from Georges Arjaliés, general secretary of the *Amicale des Résistants, patriotes, emprisonnés à Eysses* (affiliated to the FNDIRP) to André Méric. Jean Kahn's archives.
[75] Namely the *Association nationale des anciens combattants de la ligne Maginot* and the *Association nationale des anciens combattants Flandres-Dunkerque 40*. (Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.66.)

particular regiment.[76] As one would expect, the fiftieth anniversaries were seen as a perfect opportunity to advance the process of rehabilitation.

On the whole, the French state, outwith the ex-servicemen's ministry, was less enthusiastic. In September 1989 Elysée counsellor Jean Kahn advised François Mitterrand that "il faudra mettre un frein à la vague de commémorations que laisse craindre le cinquantième anniversaire de 1940". He feared that the demands for official backing or presence would be too onerous for the president to fulfill.[77] Also, in November of that year the ex-servicemen's ministry was to release a statement to the *conseil des ministres* and to the press, giving notice of its commemorative intentions for the following year. Initially, the passage that referred to the Battle of France took the epic tone: "La Bataille de France, avec ses défaites collectives et ses héroïsmes individuels, sera rappelé dans le cadre des commémorations nationales organisées sur les principaux champs de bataille". After discussion with the Elysée, the passage was redrafted to the shorter and more sober, "la Bataille de France: un hommage sera rendu aux 120 000 soldats tués sur le champ de bataille en mai et juin 1940".[78]

The principal ceremony took the form of a musical tribute featuring music by composers killed in combat. It was held at the Marigny theatre on 10 May 1990. The musical ceremony was followed by a *ravivage de la flamme* at the Arc de Triomphe. Both ceremonies were attended by ex-servicemen, dignitaries and "des jeunes", but not by president Mitterrand. Serge Barcellini, at the ex-servicemen's ministry, had suggested that "la présence de M. le Président de la République (. . .) pourrait être (. . .) symbolique (. . .) pour la capacité de la France à rendre hommage à ceux qui sont morts

[76] For instance the inscription on the monument at Toul (Meurthe-et-Moselle) reads: "le 227e RI du 17 au 22 juin 1940 opposa une résistance héroïque de Toul au bois de Chanot aux attaques de l'armée allemande". (Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.65.)
[77] Jean Kahn: archives, interviews.
[78] Jean Kahn's archives.

'en dehors de la victoire'". It was equally symbolic, then, that Mitterrand did not attend. He declared privately that "Je ne souhaite pas célébrer ces tristes jours que j'ai vécus".[79] Instead a message was sent from the president, to be read by ex-servicemen's minister André Méric. At the Elysée every effort was made to ensure that the defeat of 1940 would be seen in the wider context of war, occupation and liberation, rather than as a tragedy in itself. In the words of Jean Kahn, the defeat was to be "replacée dans la perspective des événements qui l'ont suivie: résistance française, victoires alliées, libération du territoire".[80] So while the president avoided the commemorative ceremony of 10 May, he did pay homage to those who fought in the battles of Pont du Veurdre and Port-Vendres, where French troops had fought heroically to hold back the German advance.

Another difference of opinion emerged when the effusive ex-servicemen's ministry, along with diverse veterans' associations, mooted the idea of a special stamp to commemorate the battles of 1940. Reaction from other branches of the state was negative. The minister for postal services was reluctant to back a proposal "qui feraient référence à une période douloureuse de notre histoire et risquerait d'être mal perçue par l'opinion publique".[81] Elysée adviser Jean Kahn agreed that "on ne peut songer à commémorer ni l'entrée en guerre de la France ni les guerres perdues".[82] The idea was not taken any further.

[79] Letter of 8 March 1990 from Serge Barcellini to Jean Kahn; note of 15 March 1990 from Jean Kahn to François Mitterrand. Jean Kahn's archives.
[80] Note of 30 October 1989 from Jean Kahn to François Mitterrand. Jean Kahn's archives.
[81] Note of 15 September 1989 from Marie-Ange Théobald, *chargé de mission* at the *Présidence de la République*, to François Mitterrand. Jean Kahn's archives.
[82] In note as above (15 September 1989, Marie-Ange Théobald to François Mitterrand).

Imprisonment and forced labour

Since the vast majority of French prisoners of war attained that status after a humiliating defeat, their experience was never going to enjoy a privileged position within the nation's collective memory. They had no recognised day of remembrance to call their own, and most monuments and plaques were confined to cemeteries, excepting the "Mémorial national de la captivité", erected in 1961 in Montauville (Meurthe-et-Moselle). There were no more than a handful of books on the prisoners' experience, compared to the thousands of studies of resistance or collaboration. Once again here we find that collective memory does not operate a system of proportional representation. There were 1 850 000 prisoners of war, compared to, at most, a few hundred thousand active resisters. But the resistance experience was much more dominant than that of the prisoners. It is true that imprisonment can be a rather monotonous affair, compared to the intrigue and drama sometimes involved in guerrilla warfare, and that those who were taken prisoner in 1940 had little impact on the outcome of the war. However, this does not fully explain the failure of popular consciousness to integrate the prisoners' experience.[83]

In fact former prisoners of war associations, principally the *Fédération nationale des prisonniers de guerre* (FNPG), flourished after the war. Because of their numbers, as well as the solidarity and reflection that came from long-term imprisonment, the former prisoners' strength and influence was an important force in post-war France. But that force was applied to the immediate problems of pensions, civil status of prisoners, the rights of widows, rather than to the "bataille de mémoire". Former prisoners were much more interested in rebuilding France than in dwelling on a frustrating period of captivity. Partly as a result of that captivity, indeed, there was a lot of pent-up energy

[83] In Britain and the United States prisoners of war had the status of heroes in popular lore, partly thanks to films like *The Great Escape*.

waiting to be expended. This explains in part the success of the process of the post-war reconstruction of France. To this day, the FNPG emphasises its social and humanitarian projects more strongly than any memorial initiatives. The information pack produced by the federation devotes a page-long chronology to "sa politique sociale" and only four lines to "sa mémoire".

We have seen elsewhere how the notion of "la France combattante" was essential to the post-war French mindset. Former prisoners of war, therefore, were keen to recall that before being prisoners they were soldiers. In 1963 the FNPG added the word *combattants* to its name, becoming the *Fédération Nationale des Combattants Prisonniers de Guerre*.[84] This fitted in with the federation's presentation of itself as an "emblème du monde combattant".[85]

Some prisoners of war escaped from the camps and established resistance movements. The memory of these heroes is faithfully preserved, although they are not household names for the layman. Foremost among these heroes is Antoine Mauduit, founder of "la Chaîne", a support network for escaped prisoners. François Mitterrand was involved in its organisation for a time. In August 1986 Mitterrand unveiled a plaque in memory of Mauduit at Montmaur castle, where "la Chaîne" was created in 1941.[86] The inscription described "la Chaîne" as "un des premiers maquis de combat". Again, the memory of the prisoners of war is linked to that of the Resistance, and therefore "la France combattante".

[84] Following the colonial wars in North Africa more prisoners were allowed to join the federation. The full name is now *la Fédération Nationale des Combattants Prisonniers de Guerre et Combattants d'Algérie, Tunisie, Maroc.*

[85] From press release kindly supplied by M. Girard of the FNPG.

[86] Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.127. The inscription reads, "Commandant Antoine Mauduit, 1902-1945; officier de la légion étrangère, créateur du mouvement "la Chaîne" 1941, un des premiers maquis de combat; co-fondateur du MNPGD; mort pour la France en déportation".

In order to further the war effort, Nazi Germany required French labour for its factories. Initially, a call for volunteers was issued. However, when this proved ineffectual, it was decided that work in German factories would be made obligatory. The first departures came in June 1942, and the process was accelerated by the laws promulgated by the Vichy administration on 4 September 1942, 16 February 1943 (which marked the official beginning of the *Service du Travail Obligatoire*) and 1 February 1944. Between June 1942 and July 1944, 732,626 French men went to work in Germany under this scheme.

Subsequently, the former STO workers were not well placed in what Robert Frank has called the national "hiérarchie des souffrances".[87] Nonetheless, associations of *anciens* and families were created almost immediately after the war. On 12 September 1944, the *Entraide française pour les travailleurs déportés en Allemagne et leurs familles* was founded. This became the *Fédération nationale des déportés du travail* on 14 November 1945. The immediate priority was official status and pensions, but the memory of its "martyrs", that is to say those who died in Germany, was also among its principal concerns. The number of deaths was put at around 60 000, of whom 15 000 were executed by the Germans.[88]

The federation's first victory was quick and crucial: those who had died were deemed worthy of the title of "morts pour la France", and survivors were included within the category of deportees. Their names could, therefore, be put on the official war memorials, and their dependents' rights and allowances were more substantial. Partly to compensate for the lack of an STO corpse at the "France combattante" crypt at Mont-Valérien, the corpse of a "travailleur requis inconnu" was laid to rest at Père-Lachaise on 22 June 1947.

---

[87] Robert Frank, 'la mémoire empoisonnée', pp.492-493.
[88] Above from Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.437.

There was a major setback in 1951 when a law was passed creating a separate statute of "personnes contraintes au travail au pays ennemi" for the former STO workers. Thereafter, much of the energy of the FNDT was devoted to this particular "bataille de mémoire". The struggle to be considered officially as "deportees" was fought in parliament and in court. However, February 1978 saw another reverse, when a Paris appeal court ruled that the FNDT could no longer legally use the term "déporté" in its title. It was forced to change its name to "Fédération nationale des victimes et rescapés des camps nazis du travail forcé".[89]

When he was a presidential candidate in 1981 François Mitterrand had given to believe that he would support a change in the status of former STOs, but little was done until the early 1990s.[90] On 31 January 1992 the *Cour de Cassation* clarified the status of deportees in the following terms: "seuls les déportés résistants et les déportés politiques à l'exclusion des personnes contraintes au travail en pays ennemi pourront se prévaloir du titre de déporté". Then, in June 1993, a bill was proposed

> tendant à remplacer dans l'inutilité de la loi n° 51-538 du 14 mai 1951 les mots: 'Personnes contraintes au travail au pays ennemi, en territoire étranger occupé par l'ennemi ou en territoire français annexé par l'ennemi' par les mots 'Victimes de la déportation du travail'.[91]

However, the bill did not survive its journey through parliament, and the STO associations did not succeed in advancing their cause.

Throughout France there were a number of stelae and plaques dedicated to the "déportés du travail" who died in Germany. However, these had been erected by the FNDT rather than the state, whose attitude appeared to be somewhat ambivalent. Prior

[89] Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.443.
[90] According to Jean Kahn.
[91] Document distributed on 15 June 1993. Jean Kahn's archives.

to 1993, the STO workers had been notable by their absence from the panoply of commemorative plaques at the *gare de l'Est*. In the 1950s a plaque had been erected in honour of the "patriotes français" deported from the station. Another commemorated the "prisonniers de guerre et déportés politiques". Later the *fils et filles des déportés juifs de France* had put up a plaque in remembrance of Jewish deportees.

The STO workers were reintegrated to some extent by the inclusive plaque at the *musée d'Orsay*, dedicated to "all the victims of nazism", which was unveiled in 1989 (mentioned above, p.166). At the *gare de l'Est* another plaque, financed by the ex-servicemen's ministry, finally appeared in 1993. This time it was specific to the memory of the victims of the STO. In accordance with the more rigourous memory that was being implanted at this time, the inscription was quite detailed, and included the exact dates of the laws establishing the STO. Indeed the unveiling of the plaque coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the promulagation of the law of February 1943.

There were isolated acts of resistance to the forced labour policy. Again these are generally commemorated by plaques, some of which were put up or updated for fiftieth anniversaries. In October 1989 André Méric and Jacques Mellick[92] unveiled a commemorative plaque at *place Fontenay* in Paris where, on 25 February 1944, a Resistance commando unit had destroyed the files relating to the next batch of potential STO workers.[93] A similar plaque commemorating a similar incident was unveiled in Quimper (Finistère) on 16 January 1994.

So it was with differing degrees of success that the groups alluded to in this chapter attempted to reaffirm the importance of their unique experiences, and to make a lasting impact on the collective consciousness. French Jews certainly managed to make

[92] Ministers for ex-servicemen and "the sea", respectively. The latter Ministry occupied the buildings formerly occupied by the *commissariat général du travail obligatoire*.
[93] Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.445.

their memorial presence felt; other specific groups had a more mixed balance sheet. What is significant, however, is that so many different groups considered that that it was an opportune time for action. This is obviously due in part to the potential for increased exposure that anniversaries afford. But there was also a sense that the wider context was favourable to a reappraisal of the nation's past, to a broadening of the very concept of collective memory, and to a reworking of the relationship between specific group identities and national identity.

CHAPTER SIX

THE PAST APPLIED TO THE PRESENT

"The fashion in which we think changes like the fashion of our clothes, and . . . it is difficult, if not impossible, for most people to think otherwise than in the fashion of their own period".

George Bernard Shaw, preface to *Saint Joan*

Commemoration as education

We have seen that commemorations are interfaces between the past, present and future, permitting the transmission of values enshrined within memory. This process ensures a degree of continuity from generation to generation, and provides the psychological coherence and direction that all collective entities require. The multitude of bonds - political, moral, social, intellectual, physical - that tie the individual to the group are reinforced by the emotional gravitas of solemn ceremony and the "culte des morts", or equally by joyous celebrations of the common past. In France, this has been linked to a long tradition of "commemorative pedagogy", at least as old as the Republic itself. The Revolution had barely got under way when already the *fête révolutionnaire* was commemorating it. This form of celebration was called upon to become nothing less than "l'institutrice de la nation", inculcating the new national and republican values and forming the masses into citizens.[1] In Pierre Nora's *Lieux de Mémoire* there is a photograph of a group of Third Republic schoolchildren taking part in a ceremony at a

[1] Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass. And London: Harvard University Press, 1988).

cenotaph. The photograph carries a caption which confirms these ideas: "Le culte civique est en même temps leçon de morale. D'où l'importance de la participation des enfants".[2]

In the wars of the twentieth century the loss of life, often innocent civilian life, has been so horrifyingly massive that it would seem utterly absurd and demoralising if it did not serve a purpose as a "lesson" for the future. The human mind can cope with almost anything, but has a powerful aversion to any ordeal that appears completely futile, that could be construed to have happened "in vain". Nothing would be less acceptable than to leave even a suspicion that death on such a scale could be meaningless, or that we can learn nothing from it. One of the golden rules of war remembrance is that the dead must be seen to have died *for* something: freedom, human rights, honour, *la patrie*.[3] Thus one of the express aims of commemorating the past is to project the lessons learned and the values exemplified onto the present, and from there into the future. Organisers tend to be anxious that commemorative events be seen not merely as moments of mourning for the dead or as nostalgic reunions of *les anciens*. They must also be seen to be contributing something positive to the present.

While all commemorations have in common a mission to educate, to pass on a message, they are not simply school lessons writ large. The other side of the commemorative coin is emotion, or attachment. Commemoration is not history. The two can sometimes compliment one another, and commemoration can help to inspire historical enquiry but, because of the emotional commitment alluded to above, it can also be an obstacle to it. The memorial complex at Mont-Valérien provides a succinct example. Mont-Valérien had been the execution site used by the Nazis for *résistants*

[2] vol.I, p.197.

[3] Here I am paraphrasing Robert Frank, who said that "rien ne serait plus insoutenable que de laisser croire que des centaines de milliers jeunes gens se sont sacrifiés pour rien" (CNRS, p.373).

from the Parisian region. There was great uncertainty over the number of people who were shot there, but in November 1944 de Gaulle laid a wreath which paid homage to 4000 martyrs. On 2 November 1959 a commemorative stone was unveiled in the middle of the "clairière des fusillés". It put the number of executed resistance fighters at 4500. Yet the three most reliable *historical* studies that were carried out, in 1945, 1986 and 1989, concluded that there were, respectively, 939, 953 and 1039 victims.[4]

So we do not commemorate as a dispassionate academic exercise, but because the events remembered engage the group emotionally, however vague, ill-defined or uneven that emotion may be. It is the double thrust of these motors - pedagogy and emotion - that gives commemorations their force and their *raison d'être*. The practice of commemoration is a quintessentially *human* activity in that it occupies the no man's land between the rational and the irrational, between the scientific and the spiritual. It combines all the primitiveness of a cult of the dead with the humanistic ambition to master man's destiny by learning from his history.

These themes were touched on by all of the *acteurs de mémoire* that I spoke to during my research. Each one of them pointed out that people who had participated in or observed war and occupation in France were becoming rarer all the time, and that it was essential that a certain "message" and certain "values" be transmitted to those who had not lived through the events in question. (Incidentally most of these interviewees were optimistic that their message had been understood.)[5] And it is this demographic shift that explains the growing preoccupation with the pedagogical aspect of commemoration of the Second World War. At the time of the fortieth and fiftieth anniversaries

[4] Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.166. The studies referred to were carried out by Robert Dor (21 February 1945), Serge Klarsfeld (1986), and the *Délégation à la mémoire et à l'information historique* (1989).

celebrated during our period, *les anciens* were in a minority. By 1994, 70% of the population of France had not been born at the Liberation, far less been of an age to understand or participate.[6] Formerly, *les anciens* had often used commemorations to remind the nation of their numerical or moral strength. This, in turn, made it easier to exert pressure with regard to pensions and other rights. By the 1980s, this aspect had become less important. The last members of the war generation felt more keenly than before an obligation to ensure the transmission of memory before it was too late. There was a quite natural desire on the part of this generation to tell its own story in its own words. François Mitterrand's actions during his second *septennat*, notably his cooperation with Pierre Péan to reveal his right wing and Vichyite past, would certainly corroborate that interpretation. In most of the fifteen speeches Mitterrand gave at commemorative ceremonies between 17 June 1993 (the liberation of Corsica) and 9 May 1995 (the end of the war in Europe), there was some kind of reaffirmation of the necessity of passing on the memory of that period.[7] Especially resonant was his quotation of Pierre Brossolette's words at a ceremony marking the fiftieth anniversary of his death: "Ce que demandent nos morts, ce n'est pas de les plaindre, mais de les continuer".[8]

Although the lessons and values do not concern young people exclusively, it is they who are targeted most explicitly. In his contribution to a 1986 CNRS study on the subject François Marcot observed that, "Depuis quelques années (. . .) on constate que se développent des pratiques festives ayant pour but d'associer les jeunes aux

---

[5] Jean-Jaques de Bresson was a notable exception to the general optimism. He expressed concern that the values defended by de Gaulle, particularly during the war, were being eroded by social changes (Interview of 21 May 1999).

[6] This fact was mentioned by François Mitterrand in his speech of 22 March 1994 commemorating the heroic suicide of Pierre Brossolette.

[7] Texts of speeches kindly supplied (and commented) by Jean Kahn of the *Institut François Mitterrand.* (In fact, M. Kahn wrote or helped to write most of these speeches.)

[8] Speech of 22 March 1994.

manifestations"[9]. His observation is borne out by the evidence. In 1993 François Mitterrand issued his decree instituting a "journée nationale commémorative" of Vichy's crimes (details in chapters four and five). He had been expected to make some sort of official declaration, but chose the commemorative option because of its more durable "valeur pédagogique".[10] On 3 November 1993 the ex-servicemen's ministry released a communiqué announcing its plans for the forthcoming fiftieth anniversary commemorations. According to this communiqué, these commemorations would have "une double finalité". On the one hand they were to "honorer des faits d'armes". On the other hand they were to "instruire *les jeunes générations* (. . .) en les appelant à la vigilance à l'égard des comportements ou des idéologies qui ont été la cause de tant de crimes et de souffrances".[11]

Similarly, Jacques Chirac announced on the fiftieth anniversary of the Liberation of Paris that "je souhaite que les Parisiens mais aussi tous les Français, et *surtout les plus jeunes*, voient dans cette célébration un témoignage de courage, de persévérance et une leçon pour l'avenir".[12] Seven thousand young people participated in the show on the Champs-Elysées on 26 August. Entitled "Libération, j'écris ton nom", it was based on an extract from Charles de Gaulle's mémoires, and featured the music of Jean-Michel Jarre (presumably an attempt to "jazz up" the event for young people).

There was a strong pedagogical flavour to all the commemorations dealt with in this study. As part of the "année de Gaulle" of 1990,[13] the organisers harnessed an already successful formula for involving young people, the annual *concours national de la Résistance et de la Déportation*. For the 1989-1990 school year the theme of the

[9] p.36.
[10] *Le Monde*, 5 February 1993.
[11] From Jean Kahn's archives; my italics.
[12] *Paris-Match*, 1 September 1994; my italics.
[13] The one hundredth anniversary of his death, the fiftieth of the *appel du 18 juin*, and the twentieth of his death all fell in 1990.

concours was the life and times of de Gaulle. The numbers of pupils participating were, according to the Charles de Gaulle Institute, exceptionally high. Also in this year, the Ministry of Education cooperated with the Charles de Gaulle Institute on a series of educational projects aimed at furthering knowledge of the same subject. And, in each *académie*, the Charles de Gaulle Institute and the *Institut d'Histoire du Temps Présent* organised a system of contacts between *témoins* - essentially those who had fought on de Gaulle's side in the war - and school pupils wishing to learn about their experiences.[14]

Jean-Pascal Lévy-Trumet, coordinator of the 1994 commemorative project in Normandy, declared himself to be primarily concerned with "la transmission du souvenir aux jeunes générations".[15] Jean-Pierre Elkabbach, the president of France-Télévision, was very much aware of the need for an educational dimension to television's treatment of the 1994 anniversaries. Previewing his company's programmes he said that the aim was to "participer à l'enrichissement de la mémoire collective". He hoped especially that the various programmes would become "une collection de cassettes pour les générations futures".

There were many other pedagogical projects, too numerous to list fully. One of the most notable was the Franco-American University at Abbaye d'Ardenne, near Caen. It was inaugurated during the commemorative period of 1994, by Henry Kissinger. The purpose of this establishment was to provide facilities for young people from the USA and other countries to come to Europe in order to learn about the Second World War, and to propagate an internationalist message of peace and tolerance. Similarly, the state-of-the-art memorial complex in Caen had been conceived from the outset as a piece of

[14] Jean-Louis Matharan, 'Les enseignements des projets d'activité éducative et du concours de la Résistance', in Malet, ed., I, p.390.

pedagogical apparatus.[16] The hundreds of thousands of school children who visit are provided with a workbook to complete, adapted to their academic level, and there is a brochure produced each year giving details of the "activités pédagogiques" taking place that year.

On the eve of the momentous anniversary year of 1994 the *Education nationale* gave detailed instructions to its teaching staff on how to deal with the commemorative period. These instructions were accompanied by a call for prudence. An effort must be made to avoid imposing a cult of memory for its own sake: "Autant les jeunes sont touchés par l'evocation des destins individuels fauchés par la guerre, autant la célébration pour elle-même qui impose aux jeunes générations d'entrer dans le culte du souvenir par l'admiration contrainte, est artificielle et figée".[17] Teachers were asked to encourage reflection on what were now deemed to be the important themes – freedom, dignity, human rights, the "devoir de mémoire", vigilance, forgiveness.

The ex-servicemen's ministry attempted to provide a forum for all this pedagogical activity. Its monthly bulletin, *Les Chemins de la mémoire*, featured a section entitled "Mémoire et éducation" · which was devoted to exhibitions, presentations, discussions and other memorial projects organised in educational establishments throughout France. A brief glance at some of the commemorative events organised for the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Paris gives a flavour of what was offered. The municipal authorities took the step of distributing information on commemorations to all of its *collèges* and *lycées*; during the showpiece commemoration the message of the main public "spectacle" was directed primarily at those who were too young to have known the war. The *marche des libérateurs* that was organised on the 25

[15] *Le Monde*, 15 March 1994. The agency, "Travaux publics", had been chosen from a shortlist of four by minister of culture Jacques Toubon. The cost of the spectacle was thirty million francs, shared between the culture ministry and the *collectivités locales* of Basse-Normandie.
[16] The museum was opened by François Mitterrand on 6 June 1988.

August in Paris was intended quite simply to "transmettre aux jeunes générations le souvenir et l'Histoire".[18]

By this time, then, "pedagogy" had become a ready made justification for any initiative involving history or memory. By the same token it had become an effective platform from which to criticise initiatives one disagreed with. Speaking on *France-Culture* in 1994, Michel Winock's main objection to François Mitterrand's practice of laying a wreath at Pétain's tomb was that it constituted an "acte anti-pédagogique".[19] When one considers the number of potential lines of criticism open to him, Winock's words go some way towards conveying the extent to which the educational aspect of memory and commemoration was a preoccupation during our period. Moreover, the presenter of the radio programme in question, Patrice Gélinet, confirmed the tendency, and underlined the importance attributed to commemorative gestures, by claiming that Mitterrand's anti-pedagogical gesture "counted more than any book" in terms of the negative impression made on the collective appreciation of the war and occupation.

Memory as "devoir"

Not only was the educational dimension starting to predominate, its character was undergoing a significant change. Traditionally it had been assumed that young people should be given examples to follow. They should be told about heroic figures, such as de Gaulle, Jean Moulin, Lucie and Raymond Aubrac, Pierre Broussolette, that they would naturally want to imitate. The wartime heroes and heroines tended to be presented in a style that owed more to "boy's own" type story books than historical journals. Serge Barcellini has called this "la pédagogie gaullienne de l'honneur national"

[17] Desquesnes, p.177.
[18] *Le Figaro*, 24 August 1994.

(also referred to in chapter three, p.78).[20] But following the watershed period of the 1970s[21] there had been a steady stream of writers and journalists seeking to reveal the dark side of the national heroes to a people loath to appear docile and gullible. Consequently, the pedagogical impulse started to take on a negative aspect: it often seemed that, if there was a lesson to be passed on, it was "don't be like your elders", and that the value of any remembered event increased in direct proportion to its unpleasantness. One of the more original memorial-pedagogical projects of 1993 was the "tour de la France de la mémoire". Organised by the *Union des Etudiants juifs de France*, the tour took in the sites of the principal camps of Jewish internment and deportation, as well as other lugubrious *lieux de mémoire*.[22]

Memory, articulated in these terms, was no longer a matter of giving people heroes to live up to and heroic achievements to aspire to. It had become nothing less than a moral obligation, and almost a categorical imperative - the famous *devoir de mémoire*.[23] The ethics of the *devoir de mémoire*, in so far as it relates to the Second World War, do indeed have a distinctly Kantian flavour: the act of remembering has value *precisely because* it is dictated by conscience, *precisely because* it is difficult to accomplish. In the introduction to his book about a *rafle* of Jewish patients at a sanatorium, published in 1993, Jo Amiel explained that for many years circumstances had prevented "ce que je ressentais comme *une impérieuse obligation morale*". Until the 1990s he had been unable to carry out his "moral duty" of committing his memories to paper.[24]

---

[19] Participating in *Le Grand Débat*, 'Faut-il oublier Vichy?', *France-Culture*, 21 November 1994.
[20] In 'Diplomatie et commémoration'.
[21] Heralded by Ophuls' 1971 film *Le Chagrin et la pitié*, and Robert Paxton's *La France de Vichy*, published in France in 1973.
[22] Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.471.
[23] The term was introduced by Primo Levi in his writing on his experience of a Nazi concentration camp.
[24] *La rafle: un sana très ordinaire 1942-1944*; my italics.

Other nations, such as Germany, had already been through this process; in France, it came later, arguably reaching its peak towards the end of the Mitterrand era. The high water mark was 1992 to 1993, not 1994. That is to say, the "devoir" was more pressing with regard to the fiftieth anniversaries of the Vél' d'hiv', the first deportations, the creation of the *milice*, and the torture and murder of Jean Moulin, than it was with regard to the Normandy landings, the Provence landings, and the liberation of the national territory. Remembrance of these things was not such a pressing *devoir* precisely because it came more naturally. The prime minister Edouard Balladur was almost obliged to use the expression in his speech at the Vél' d'hiv' memorial, on 16 July 1993. Commemoration of Vichy's crimes was, he said, "un devoir de la morale, et un devoir de la mémoire".[25]

In May 1993, an audience of high school students was invited to take part in a television programme entitled "Paroles de résistants", thus exercising its "devoir de mémoire", even if, strictly speaking, young adults were not in a position to "remember" the 1940s. Again in 1993, a series of questions was set in parallel to samples of Americans, English and French nationals. One of them broached the issue of the importance or otherwise of knowing the facts about the Holocaust: "D'après vous, est-il important que tous les Français (or Americans or English where appropriate) soient informés et comprennent ce qui s'est passé avec l'Holocauste: est-ce essentiel, important, un peu important, ou pas important?" The French were much more numerous in considering that it was essential: 45% of French respondants gave "essentiel" as their answer; 43% gave "très important"; amongst both the English and American sample groups, the results were less emphatic: 33% and 39% respectively.[26] In other words, the French believed more wholeheartedly than their English or American counterparts that

[25] Televised on *France 3*, 16 July 1993.
[26] Louis-Harris for The American Jewish Committee, November 1993.

to remember that terrible episode was *necessary*, not something that was merely important or desirable.

The survey also suggested that all the pedagogical activity in France had achieved positive results from the point of view of factual knowledge of the period. The results demonstrated that, far from being benighted by silence and taboo, the French were consistently better informed than their British and American counterparts. When asked what was meant by "The Holocaust", 35% of French, 33% of British and 24% of American people were able to give a completely accurate answer. Asked more detailed questions, the French performed even more impressively. 45% knew that around six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust, compared to 41% in Britain and only 35% in the US; 90% knew that Auschwitz, Dachau and Treblinka were concentration camps, compared to 76% and 62%; 88% knew that Jews were forced to wear the yellow star, compared to 56% and 42%; 94% considered it "impossible" that the Holocaust never happened, compared to 84% in Britain and a disquieting 65% in the USA. One could of course argue that the French had had first hand experience of some of these things, such as the yellow star of David, and that they therefore had good reason to be familiar with the facts. Also, the questions did not focus specifically on France's role. Nevertheless, the results of this survey confirm that, in comparative terms, the lessons of the Holocaust were being passed on effectively in France.

It was in 1993, also, that the *baccalauréat* examiners caught on to the *zeitgeist*. The questions in the Philosophy paper often try to strike a balance between timeless questions and contemporary issues. It was fitting, then, that the paper set for June 1993, when there was animated discussion around Bousquet, Touvier, and the French

internment camps, not to mention *chouan* risings in the Vendée, should have included the question, "Pourquoi y a-t-il un *devoir de mémoire*?"[27]

Apart from being thought-provoking, the question is also extremely revealing, because it points to an important assumption: that the issue of *whether* the obligation or duty exists is already resolved, and it only remains to determine *why* it exists. It is not "*Est-ce qu*'il y a", but "*pourquoi* y a-t-il. . ." The second part of the assumption, of course, is that memory is linked to morality, the domain in which any *devoir* operates. There are convincing arguments to back this up, concerning the manner in which memory is a condition both of humanity and individuality, its capacity to bind people together in collective entities, and its pivotal position in most legal and educational systems. The counter argument is that memory is not in itself a moral duty, but should be governed by morality. In other words, that it should not be used for unethical ends.

These issues were discussed by an illustrious panel of experts in a television programme broadcast some weeks after the *bac* in question. "Le devoir de mémoire",[28] part of *la Marche du siècle* series on *France 3*, conducted the debate in the context of a short documentary film on the subject of Vichy's transit camps and France's official archives policy. One of the guests, the philosopher Paul Ricoeur, summed up the obligatory aspect of memory by speaking of "une dette envers les morts". The French-Jewish memorial activist Henry Bulawko has used the same expression when explaining what motivates his work.[29] This conception of memory is particularly apt for violent conflict, and even more so for violent conflict involving collective entities, where the sacrifice of the dead is transformed, by statute and ceremony, into a lesson for the living. So the relationship is often expressed in terms of debt: we "owe" it to those who died not to let their memory disappear at the same time as their physical presence.

---

[27] My italics.
[28] Broadcast on 30 June 1993.

So the idea of memory as *devoir* as opposed to *fête*, as a warning as much as an example, was solidly anchored in France by the 1990s. It was considered salutary to pass on a well-rounded collective memory to younger generations, a memory containing self-criticism as well as praise. In 1994 communications minister Alain Carignon took the step of asking the "radios jeunes", such as *Fun*, *Skyrock* and *NRJ*, to make a concerted effort to "sensibiliser" young people to the "drame des années noires".[30] Although they normally served up a diet of throw-away pop music and pop culture, *Fun* and *Skyrock* in particular reacted favourably, illustrating the extent to which the comprehensive pedagogical mission was taken seriously.

Critics of the "devoir"

The conception of memory as a state of moral awareness that can prevent repetition of the mistakes of the past, summed up concisely by the French expression, "le devoir de mémoire pour que plus jamais ça", had come to be taken for granted. Yet some observers have pointed out that the notion is simplistic in the extreme, and does not even attempt to do justice to what is in reality a complex psychological process. Memory is not simply a commodity, like contentment or kindness, that one is duty bound to maximise; it is a psychic process that implies selection and distortion, and hidden purposes that are not always very moral. Memory is not a synonym for conscience.

Henry Rousso has gone so far as to use the expression "l' *idéologie croissante* du devoir de mémoire",[31] implying that this was no fragile fad, but a coherent body of ideas. It had, he said, installed itself as a new orthodoxy, with its own set of taboos and

[29] Interview of 19 April 1999.
[30] Reported in *Le Monde* of 17 March 1994.

its own *langue de bois*.[32] Emma Shnur, whose family was almost wiped out by the Nazis, expressed astonishment that, at the end of a century overshadowed by Freud, the nuances of the human psyche could still be ignored for the sake of a pithy formula which she resumed as: "On vous fait connaître une réalité monstrueuse, on crée un traumatisme moral, et vous voilà vacciné contre le mal".[33] Rather than the shock tactics, Shnur advocated a process whereby the intellect would be put to work, slowly and deliberately. "Il y a des lieux et des temps pour la commémoration et l'hommage aux victimes, mais il faut aussi des lieux et des temps distincts pour la froide analyse historique".[34] For Shnur, this would imply not just a recognition that genocide was committed at Auschwitz and elsewhere, but also a knowledge of the history of the previous three decades, at the very least.

Serge Barcellini had ample time to reflect on the nature of collective memory during his ten years in charge of the Ministry for Ex-Servicemen's *Délégation à la mémoire et à l'information historique*. Despite having been responsible for the transmission of an important part of the national memory, Barcellini was wary about the lack of perspective that had turned the elusive and ambiguous notion of "memory" into a moral absolute. Memory for memory's sake, he said, was dangerous. Far from being a moral obligation, it was merely a tool, which could be used for good or ill. He gave as an example the vast "travail de mémoire" that he had seen the Bosnian Serbs accomplish in the early 1990s, before they translated that memory into bloody action. One might also mention the "duty to remember" that has hampered efforts to find peace

[31] My italics.
[32] Interview in *Marianne*, 30 March-5 April 1998.

[33] *Le Monde*, 5 December 1997.
[34] *Le Monde*, 5 December 1997.

in Northern Ireland, the Basque country, the Middle East, and elsewhere.[35] "Memory-as-tool" is only as good or as bad as the end for which it is used.

Barcellini was also worried by the move away from an exemplary pedagogical model towards one which taught people to be ashamed. He thought that it was dangerous, particularly when dealing with young people, to privilege negative role models at the expense of positive ones. "La composante pédagogique (of a memorial policy) doit prôner l'exemplarité", he said uncompromisingly.[36] His view was echoed by the minister for ex-servicemen, Philippe Mestre. Mestre spoke in a tone redolent of the nationalists of the Third Republic when he said, in the context of the commemorations of June 1994, said that "il faut que (la jeunesse) apprenne les noms des héros qui sont tombés pour que revive la France".[37]

To the critics, the complementary trait of invoking "la mémoire" and "les jeunes" was nothing more than a ruse intended to lend gravitas to an often shoddy product. The media found themselves under attack here. Conan and Rousso were particularly unimpressed: "c'est une pratique devenue l'alibi le plus courant de la télévision pour se donner un semblant de vernis pédagogique".[38] There was indeed a problem when the quality of the programme or article did not square with the noble motives given to justify its diffusion; or when due consideration was not given to the enormous responsibility that comes with any "pedagogical" undertaking. It was easy to overlook this responsibility when the duty to transmit memory had become such an apparently self-evident truth.

---

[35] Dissatisfaction with the notion of *devoir de mémoire* continued beyond the period covered here. In March 1998 the *Académie universelle des cultures* (chaired by Elie Wiesel) organised a conference on the theme of "Memory and History". Speakers at this conference seemed determined to set limits to the *devoir de mémoire*. Paul Ricoeur preferred to talk of a *travail de mémoire*, and recalled that society also needs "l'oubli" in order to function (reported in *L'Humanité*, 28 March 1998).

[36] Raimond, p.86.

[37] Interview in *Le Figaro*, 26 April 1994.

[38] Conan and Rousso, p.311.

Emma Shnur, observing the "leitmotiv" of an "affirmation répétée d'un devoir de mémoire et d'un devoir de transmission aux jeunes générations", wondered how it could be that "on n'est pas saisi par le doute, effrayé par une telle responsabilité".[39] Perhaps, she suggested, a little more humility was in order, along with a recognition that this willingness to "transmit" was not enough to appease the collective conscience. Shnur feared that young people would be oppressed by the sheer weight of knowledge of something like the Holocaust, that the scale and nature of the evil, in the context of an already daunting world, might increase feelings of hopelessness or resignation. There had to be a deeper understanding, and even a measure of awe, of the momentous events in question, before any lessons were passed on to such an impressionable audience.

If the "devoir de mémoire" were just another media-friendly sound byte, then one would be entitled to dismiss it lightly. Yet the preoccupation with memory and its transmission is a feature of human nature that is more profound than that. It must not be forgotten that transmission of memory often springs from the noblest ideals. In certain situations, the memory to be passed on to posterity is regarded as so valuable as to be worth dying for. Isaac Schneersohn, a Jew living in wartime France, went to incredible lengths to assemble and co-ordinate a group of archivists whose task was quite simply to record what was happening. All that mattered was that the truth be preserved: "Je ne savais pas si je survivrais, aucun de nous ne croyait qu'il sortirait vivant de l'enfer. Mais je n'avais qu'un seul désir, aussi longtemps que je le pourrais, consigner ce qui se passait".[40] These were the straitened origins, in 1943, of the *Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine*.

[39] Interview in *Le Monde*, 5 December 1997.
[40] *Autrement*, n°88 (March 1987).

Such commitment may seem rather tragic or even futile in view of the horrors that have continued in the latter half of the twentieth century in spite of World War Two's "lessons", but it is also commendable. For the traditional alternative to this reaction - distorting or burying the unpleasant aspects of one's history for the sake of present peace of mind - can be extremely dangerous. As soon as one admits that it is possible or even desirable to pass on a falsified version of history to posterity, then the way is open to an Ingsoc-style rewriting of the past according to the prerogatives of the present. It is a temptation that can never be discounted, as we have seen in relation to France, but in a healthy society it should be counterbalanced by those who seek to transmit the harsh facts, that they may serve as lessons. The makers of the *Marche du siècle* programme of 30 June 1993 interviewed a former member of the Resistance who had been deported to a concentration camp. He was emphatic about the need to record facts for posterity, and said that the deportees biggest error was not to have appointed historian-scribes to write everything down as it was happening. This man had little faith in the willingness or ability of humanity to always bear witness to the historical truth, but it would be more accurate to say that humanity has a love-hate relationship with that particular concept: certain people, at certain times and in certain circumstances, have gone to extraordinary lengths to uncover, reveal and preserve it; others, or even the same ones, at other times and in other circumstances, have gone to extraordinary lengths to conceal, distort and destroy it.

Memory, structured into formal acts of remembrance, is thus seen as a way of enabling someone or something to "live on" after it has physically gone. In fact French civil society makes provision for this transition through the system of "fondations". Their legal status as "personnes morales" makes them perpetual, whereas "associations"

and the like only live as long as their members, as "personnes physiques", are alive. During our period, then, some of the federations and associations with their roots in the war years came together to create foundations statutorily equipped to survive beyond the last eyewitness. In 1990 former deportees created the influential *Fondation pour la mémoire de la Déportation.* In the same year the *Fondation de la Shoah* was established. The *Fondation de la Résistance* was recognised "d'utilité publique" in March 1993. Its motto was, "la flamme de la Résistance ne s'éteindra pas".[41] The Charles de Gaulle Institute made similar provision for the future, by establishing the *Fondation Charles de Gaulle* in 1992. More inventively, but still with the same objective of keeping memory alive, the "Compagnons de la Libération", the élite group honoured by de Gaulle for active resistance to Vichy and Nazism, decided that, when there were no more *compagnons* remaining, their memory was to be preserved by the French towns honoured by the title of "Compagnons de la Libération", namely Paris, Nantes, Grenoble, Vassieux and Vercors.

Allied to this notion of compensating for human mortality was the image of an ongoing war between memory and nothingness, a war which was ultimately more important, and certainly less one-sided, than that between life and death. As Tzvetan Todorov put it, referring to Serge Klarsfeld's *Mémorial de la Déportation des Juifs de France*, there was the feeling that, "la vie a perdu contre la mort, mais la mémoire gagne dans sa bataille contre le néant".[42]

This martial conception of memory enabled a new form of "resistance" to be undertaken. Elie Wiesel gave notice of this with his paper entitled "La Mémoire comme Résistance", delivered to a conference in Lyon in October 1992.[43] His theme evidently struck a chord, and became something of a battle cry in the years that followed. At the

[41] Jean Kahn's archives.
[42] Todorov, p.16.

official unveiling of a monument to foreign resistance fighters in Besançon, the mayor, Robert Schwint, said that, "en rendant hommage aux étrangers dans la Résistance, nous entrons nous-mêmes dans la Résistance, dans *la Résistance à l'oubli*".[44] In April 1994 François Mitterrand, presiding at the official opening of the memorial-musuem at Izieu, praised those who had "maintenu ici *la résistance à l'oubli*".[45] Similarly, a sub-heading in *Le Monde* in 1994 ran, "Préparant l'anniversaire du débarquement allié en Normandie, les acteurs du 6 juin 1944 combattent contre l'oubli".[46] In the war against forgetting, of course, failure to remember was regarded as collaboration with the enemy, a form of treason. Hence the motto of the Resistance museum in Besançon: "ne pas témoigner serait trahir".

Expressed in such terms, "l'oubli" was figured as an aggressive, independent, external force, but this was really just a manner of speaking. The battle was an existential one, between the temptation to forget and a putative moral obligation to remember. Yet it became fashionable to speak of this combat against "l'oubli" as if "l'oubli" could some day be eradicated forever. When examined closely this turns out to be a trick of language. Memory implies both conservation and effacement: the human mind does not function like a computer, simply storing every piece of information that is fed into it. It engages in a massively complex process of selection, retaining certain items, prioritising some of those it retains, definitively forgetting some items, provisionally putting others to one side. In this respect, collective memory is less flexible, and more predictable, than individual memory, because there has to be a degree of consensus and simplification before anything can properly be said to belong to a

[43] Malet, ed.
[44] The ceremony took place on 28 September 1993. Text of speech in Jean Kahn's archives.
[45] Text of speech taken from *Le Déporté* of May 1994.
[46] 17 May 1994.

collective consciousness.[47] Since it is neither possible nor desirable to remember everything, the battle against "l'oubli" is in reality a battle against specific instances of forgetting. One joins the battle when one considers that a certain episode is not sufficiently present in the collective memory. This collective memory is a pattern formed by a unique combination of remembering and forgetting; therefore, when one engages in a "lutte contre l'oubli", what one is actually doing is endeavouring to rearrange this pattern of memories and lacunae.[48]

So Ernest Renan was surely correct when he pointed out that collective memory was necessarily self-censored. Collective entities, especially nations, would not be formed if it were not for the capacity to forget: "l'oubli, et je dirai même l'erreur historique, est un facteur essentiel de la création d'une nation."[49] Unity is rarely achieved without a certain amount of struggle, and therefore violence. This, at any rate, has been the experience of most nations. Perhaps future supra-national units – a European federation, for example, will be created pacifically. Renan's point was that, if every past dispute were inscribed indelibly in the memory of those involved, and if that memory were used as the basis for present behaviour, then society would be nothing more than a patchwork of communities, coexisting uneasily in a state of mutual mistrust.[50] After a particularly cruel civil war in Ancient Greece, the Athenian democrats imposed an oath by which all citizens agreed not to recall the events of the recent past. Betrayal of the oath was punishable by death.[51] Within the national community, some aspects of the past are instinctively played down or passed over, for the sake of a workable harmony. Other aspects, the great successes, and perhaps

[47] Todorov, p.14.
[48] Robert Frank, 'la mémoire empoisonnée', p.487.
[49] Ernest Renan, *Oeuvres complètes*, I (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1947), p.891.
[50] In a similar vein, George Mitchell, in his days as a US senator, was wont to complain that American schoolchildren knew little about history; after his experience as mediator in Northern Ireland, he realised that it is also possible to have too great a sense of history. (*The Economist*, 21 December 1996).
[51] Jacqueline de Romilly in *Le Figaro*, 26 March 1998.

failures, experienced collectively, are, naturally enough, remembered collectively, as a nation. "Un instinct nous dit", said Lucien Febvre, "qu'oublier est une nécessité pour les groupes, pour les sociétés qui veulent vivre. Ne pas se laisser écraser par cet amas formidable, par cette accumulation inhumaine des faits hérités".[52]

From this vantage point "national narratives" like de Gaulle's "France résistante", or the homogeneous group of "victimes du nazisme", seem less incomprehensible. Myth was provided where detailed analysis of the past seemed inappropriate. The myth, when viewed objectively, is of course exposed as false: as we have seen, there was much more to France during the war than resistance; and some people were victims not of Nazism but of French collaboration. No wonder Renan also said that "le progrès des études historiques est souvent pour la nationalité un danger".[53] It comes as no surprise that the Resistance fraternity, among others, has often seen history as a deadly enemy, sowing division where once there was unity. Historians are by no means at fault for pursuing the truth, of course, but it is unrealistic to expect a national consciousness to balance serenely two contradictory ideas: that it is at once unified and deeply fragmented.

The state's method of encouraging its members to forgive and forget is the amnesty, a word which derives from the Greek *amnesia*, meaning forgetfulness. That tactic has been employed on many occasions in France, generally after bitter instalments of the "guerre franco-française". The centrality of this tradition has been confirmed on the highest authority: François Mitterrand, for one, observed that, "Dans l'histoire de France, il est rare que les grands déchirements n'aient pas été effacés par des amnisties

[52] Quoted in Prost, p.301.
[53] 1947, p.891.

ou des oublis volontaires dans les vingt ans qui ont suivi".[54] Looking back at French history, Mitterrand's point is justified. Amnesties were proclaimed after most of the recent outbreaks of civil war which France has endured: the Dreyfus affair, Vichy, Algeria, New Caledonia. On each of these occasions the claims of justice and "le devoir de mémoire" were passed over in favour of the claims of social harmony. The Fourth Republic's generous amnesty policies of the late 1940s and early 1950s meant that, by 1958, the number of collaborationist prisoners had been reduced from 43 000 to 19;[55] in 1953; the National Assembly intervened in the trial of SS soldiers accused of the massacre of 642 men, women and children at Oradour-sur-Glane. The deputies decided that, in the interests of national harmony, it was imperative that the fourteen French Alsatians who had participated in the slaughter be granted an amnesty. The people of Oradour and the Limousin never forgot this betrayal of justice, but their outrage was considered an affordable price for keeping a more serious wound closed.

These ideas have never lost their relevance to French history; and they were revitalised in the decades which followed the German occupation. However, the concept of an *oubli nécessaire*, and with it the *mythe nécessaire*, was no longer deemed widely acceptable in an age that was solemnly devoted to the cult of memory, which it regarded as a moral imperative. Riding high on a wave of outrage after the Touvier case was dismissed, the notion that the uncomfortable truth had to be recovered reached a peak in public opinion in 1992. According to one survey in April of that year, only 16% of French men and women thought it necessary to "turn the page", whereas 79% preferred, "pour les générations futures", to continue to pursue war criminals.[56]

[54] Olivier Wieviorka, *Nous entrons dans la carrière* (Paris: Seuil, 1993).
[55] The amnesty laws were voted on 16 August 1947, 5 January 1951 and 6 August 1953.

Crimes against humanity

Although each one represents a subject in their own right, it is impossible to discuss collective memory of the occupation without mentioning the trials of war criminals which took place in France in the 1980s and 1990s. For these trials came about because of the predominance of two of the discourses referred to in this chapter: the pedagogy of memory and "le devoir de mémoire".

Trying alleged war criminals half a century after the crimes were committed was not primarily a matter of legal justice. These trials had far more to do with the battle for memory waged by those who wished to transmit certain facts and certain lessons to posterity. Their primary purpose and justification, as Alain Jakubowicz has said, was to "fixer la mémoire".[57] There was a fear that the whole memorial edifice built up around World War Two might one day collapse if it was not shored up by the solid beams of legal judgement. In this respect, the role played by the trials of Barbie and Touvier (and later Papon) for "crimes against humanity" was not dissimilar to that played by other forms of commemoration. The intention was to anchor the past in the conscience of the present, in order that it would not be lost in years to come. The fate of elderly individuals who were unlikely to live for much longer was of little relevance, though it seems callous to say it. What counted was the impact on the collective consciousness of present and future generations. Paul Touvier's trial, like that of Klaus Barbie, was filmed. The aim was not to provide an diverting spectacle for television audiences, but to pass on the memory intact. The reels were thus consigned immediately to official archives, to be used as "les meilleurs réquisitoires" against what Jakubowicz identified

[56] *Le Parisien*, 16 April 1992.
[57] 1995, p.185.

as "cette volonté d'oublier un passé peu glorieux qui s'est manifesté tout au long de l'affaire Touvier".[58]

"La justice," to quote Robert Badinter, "quand il s'agit de crimes contre l'humanité, est d'abord mémoire."[59] A war crimes trial forty or fifty years after the event is above all a debate, and not a pleasant one, about the past (which also makes it a debate about identity, since identity breathes the oxygen of history). Thus in reviving the whole process by extraditing Klaus Barbie from Bolivia, the authorities were doing much more than attending to unfinished legal business, they were offering "un moment exceptionnel" to the collective memory.[60] As Elisabeth Roudinesco pointed out at the time, such trials are unique in that the facts are not really in doubt, and the guilty verdict has, to all intents and purposes, already been passed. It amounts to a form of liturgical rite by which an entire moral and political system can be officially and symbolically condemned, and at the same time inscribed durably in the collective conscience. In the final analysis, there is little that is conventionally legal about a trial for crimes against humanity. "On juge un système à travers un responsable, surtout on reconstitue pas à pas ce qui s'est passé, contre la machine de mort qui veut tuer le souvenir lui-même de la mort".[61] The language of the trials of Barbie, Touvier and Papon is the familiar language of memorial and commemoration.

More specific to these "memorial trials" is the problem of coming to terms with a massively complex subject through the cross-examination of just one of its actors. Is it ethically or legally defensible to use a mechanism designed to establish the innocence or culpability of an individual in order to establish and diffuse "the truth" about a series of events so distant in time? Clearly, since the 1980s, the prevailing view has been that it is

[58] 1995, p.188.
[59] *Le Monde*, 18 July 1992.

[60] Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy*, p.218.

not only defensible but necessary. Even so, some of those who accepted the need to straighten out the collective memory of *les années noires* expressed anxiety about the suitability of legal proceedings for doing so. Certain characteristics of the legal process detract from its suitability as a teaching aid, and trying a man in a context vastly different from that in which the crime was comitted throws up a number of practical and ethical problems. As Jean-Marc Varaut asked rhetorically, would it have been right to try a former *Communard* fifty years later, after the First World War, for crimes committed amidst the chaos of 1870?[62] Also, as time goes on the stock of potential witnesses is inevitably reduced by death, and the capacity of jurors to fully comprehend the context of the period is eroded. Then there is the peculiar nature of the legal process to consider: there is no specific requirement that legal proceedings must eventually reveal "the truth"; all that is required is that the accused be found guilty or acquitted according to the evidence presented. Although much time and effort is devoted to contextualisation during these trials - for that of Maurice Papon, historians were invited to fill in the background before the trial proper - in the final analysis it is not the general context that is being judged. Nor is it simply a matter of gathering as much reliable information as possible about the case and laying it out before the judges and jurors; the prosecution and defence are free to use any legitimate means to secure or avoid a guilty verdict. It may well be in the interest of one of the parties to sow doubt and confusion in order to render a safe verdict impossible. And it is usually in the interest of the prosecution to exaggerate the gravity of the deeds allegedly committed, just as it is in the interest of the defence to minimise them. Eric Conan's criticism of the Maurice Papon trial can be applied to any such trial: far from functioning as a weapon in the battle for *la mémoire* against *l'oubli*, under certain circumstances they can be made to

[61] *Quinzaine Littéraire*, n°491 (August 1987), p.17.

switch sides. The judicial process "peut s'opposer à la mémoire", said Conan, since it is relatively straightforward for the accused to "s'esquiver dans le flou (. . .) et de dire le faux comme le vrai, entretenant des doutes que l'ouverture d'un livre d'histoire dissiperait dans l'instant."[63]

When the Touvier case was still actual, it is true, faith in trial-as-history-lesson was not at the low ebb of the Papon trial, but there were some dissenting voices. Henry Rousso refused to testify at the trial of Maurice Papon, protesting that the pedagogical credentials attributed to the previous trials were completely bogus: "ces procès n'ont contribué en rien à une meilleure connaissance scientifique de la période, bien au contraire".[64] Writing in *L'Esprit* in January 1991, Paul Thibaud said that there was a need for "d'autres moyens que le châtiment tardif de coupables longtemps planqués pour assainir la mémoire nationale". There is a certain incongruity in bringing an aged, frail and respectable-looking man before a court and having him represent four dark years of a nation's history. Needless to say, the defence is free to exploit the apparent reality-deficit: how can this man standing before us answer for crimes from another age?

The trial of Paul Touvier was criticised by certain historians because it gave only a partial view of the reality of the Milice.[65] This was inevitable, since Touvier was charged with crimes against humanity for his role in a specific, anti-semitic incident. Legally, he could not have been tried for carrying out the duties which, as a member of the militia, would have occupied most of his time, that is to say attempting to nullify the *maquis*. This is not a crime against humanity. Basing one's appreciation of history solely on the trial, one could be forgiven for thinking that the militia spent all their time

---

[62] Maurice Papon's lawyer, speaking on *Le Grand Débat*: 'Faut-il oublier Vichy?' *France-Culture*, 28 November 1994.
[63] *L'Express*, 26 February-4 March 1998.

[64] *La Hantise du passé. Entretien avec Philippe Petit.* Paris, Textuel, 1998. Quoted by Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau in 'La Grande guerre, le deuil interminable', *Le Débat*, n°104, March-April 1999.
[65] Notably Henry Rousso (again) in, for example, *Les Collections du Nouvel Observateur*, n°16, p.73.

tracking and persecuting Jews, which, in spite of the undoubted antisemitism of the movement, and in spite of incidents like that of Rilieux-le-Pape, does not give the full picture. Thus the function of such trials as pedagogical lessons is compromised by the necessary restriction of the subject matter to a specific and legally recognisable type of crime.

To make matters even more complicated, the definition of what constituted a "crime against humanity", as established by the Appeal Court in April 1992, moved the goalposts, and caused the prosecution to redirect its aim. Prior to this, in order to obtain the maximum sentence, the strategy had been to claim that Touvier had acted autonomously in carrying out his vile deeds. But once the condition of "ideological hegemony" had been set, and the judges had decided that the militia did not fill that condition, it became clear that the best tactic would be to claim that the crimes were committed at the behest of the Germans, who clearly had an ideological agenda. What had previously been Touvier's defence - that he was only obeying orders - suddenly became the prosecution's best chance of success. It is difficult to discern the salutary "lesson" for youth in all of this juridical opacity. Good legal strategy does not necessarily make good history.

That said, it is undeniable that these hearings, flawed though they were, brought forth and recorded testimonies that seemed destined to remain unvoiced. And, though it may appear at times to lack credibility, the judicial system brings a certain gravitas to whatever it touches. The very things that people find frustrating - the slow progress, the pedantry, the sheer volume of information - are the very things that make them take a legal verdict seriously. More generally, high-profile court cases never fail to provoke wide-ranging public debate, even if only to question the wisdom of holding them in the first place. As with commemorations in general, one can be for or against their content,

tone, or very existence, but the fact that they take place at all gives the issue concerned a more prominent place in the collective consciousness. "Memorial" trials and commemorative ceremonies serve as "shop windows", displaying the subject matter for a public who might not otherwise stop and look. But if they are intended to transmit a balanced, global narrative then they are certainly deficient. They are most effective when treated as a supplement to, rather than a substitute for, historical pedagogy.

Human rights

It is in the very nature of a commemorated episode that it be plundered for "lessons", that its relevance to the present be accentuated. And if there was one single theme that prevailed within the new pedagogy of war and occupation it was that of the universal nature of human rights. This is perhaps as it should be, since when we take lessons from any historical event we are inclined to relate them to the world as we find it. Indeed, the value of learning about history is that it contains lessons that can be applied to the present time. Necessarily, then, in a pedagogical discourse the general is privileged over the specific, the universal over the particular. And it is accepted that certain values, like human rights and freedom, ought to be considered as eternal, unlike political systems and national frontiers. Crimes against *humanity* are "imprescriptible" in French law, whereas crimes against individual human beings are not.

Any approach that dictates that lessons be learned and applied to current problems is not unproblematic. The most salient example is the persecution of the Jews. For if this is ceaselessly compared to other instances that look to be similar, there is the risk of banalisation. Too many examples of "genocide" make the Jewish genocide look unremarkable. Jewish groups were divided over this question, although it is fair to say

that the more vocal ones favoured an interpretation that emphasised the uniqueness of the Shoah. On the occasion of national Deportation Day in 1986, the FNDIRP[66] issued a communiqué in which it applied lessons drawn from wartime deportations to the problem of famine in Africa. This met with a terse riposte from the "Agence télégraphique juive", which was unhappy that "en mettant en parallèle la déportation avec la famine en Sahel et en Ethiopie, il continue (. . .) à banaliser la Shoah".[67] It is true that, made without due thought, such comparisons can be offensive to victims of deportation, extermination or persecution, and can foster an unhealthy climate of relativism, in which everyone appears to have been as bad as each other down through the years, so there is no point in reacting at all. On the other hand, if one holds that the Shoah was a unique event, then it loses its pertinence as a warning, as a lesson for present and future generations. If the camps, deportations and persecutions are presented as singularly freakish and diabolical, how can they be compared with anything else for pedagogical purposes?[68]

The aspects of the past that are considered to be worth dwelling on inevitably reflect the preoccupations of the present time. By the end of our period it seemed anomalous that, of the 350 or so pages that constituted Pétain's "dossier" during his trial (for treason), only four of them related to specifically anti-Jewish activities; or that, in the archives of the *Etat français*, there were very few documents relating to the "question juive".[69] The Israeli academic Asher Cohen, having analysed the pro-Vichy press, concluded that, even in that context, Judaism and the Jews was far from being one

[66] *Fédération nationale des déportés, internés, résistants et patriotes.*

[67] Serge Barcellini in *Vingtième Siècle*, n°45.
[68] Todorov, p.38.
[69] Peschanski, p.172.

of the principal themes.[70] As Jean-Marc Varaut pointed out (with questionable motives), "la question juive", which summed up the 1990s conception of Vichy, "ne se posait pas en 1945".[71]

During the Occupation the issue of persecution of Jews was seldom broached. The London Free French, on behalf of whom René Cassin broadcast regularly on the BBC, only alluded to Vichy's anti-Jewish policies for the first time in 1941. Even then, the message of solidarity was only addressed to fellow French nationals, the "Israélites français"; there was no mention of non-French Jews, and no call to resist the anti-Jewish measures. The main thrust of the message was to assure the Jewish population that "le peuple français n'est pas responsable des mesures" taken against it.[72] Even when it became abundantly clear that the Jews of France were being deported and murdered, the Resistance did not change its priority, which was to salvage national pride and to contribute to the military defeat of Germany. None of the eighty five convoys of deportees that left France for the east between March 1942 and August 1944 were ever attacked or sabotaged.[73] And there were even some Resistance movements, such as that led by Henri Fresnay, which approved the antisemitism of the *Etat français*, but disapproved the policy of collaboration.[74] Another Resistance group, the *Organisation civile et militaire*, advocated stopping Jewish immigration in a pamphlet of June 1942.[75]

While no one in France had ever claimed that human rights were irrelevant to war and occupation, the theme had not been prominent in the official and collective memory of the post-war decades.[76] The Gaullian framework for understanding that

---

[70] Cohen, p.v (René Rémond's introduction).
[71] Maurice Papon's lawyer, speaking on *Le Grand Débat*: 'Faut-il oublier Vichy?', *France-Culture*, 21 November 1994.
[72] Cohen, pp.204-5.
[73] André Kaspi in *Pardès* n°16 (1992).
[74] Conan and Lindenberg in *Esprit*, n°198 (January-April 1994).
[75] Mentioned by Henry Rousso in 'Où en est l'histoire de la Résistance', *L'Histoire* n°41 (January 1982).
[76] Human rights were an awkward subject while France still refused the right of peoples to self-determination in the colonies, and carried out torture in Algeria.

period was concerned mainly with the nation and its territorial, political and moral integrity. Collective forms of remembrance were considered to be in the service of national unity and identity, and there was little encouragement for initiatives that might serve an alternative ideology putting crimes against humanity before crimes against the nation. Initially Vichy was regarded as criminal because it had betrayed France by negotiating the armistice of 1940 and subsequently collaborating with the occupying forces. During the period of *épuration* the suspected collaborators were punished as traitors, guilty of "intelligence avec l'ennemi", rather than as violators of human rights. The inscription on the tomb of the unknown STO martyr at Père-Lachaise reads, "victime de la *trahison* et de la barbarie nazie".[77] The film director Clouzot was forbidden from working because his film *le Corbeau* was considered to be "antifrançais".[78] Georges Bernanos wrote that the "hommes de Vichy" were "jusqu'au bout prisonniers de l'armistice, c'est-à-dire d'une effrayante humiliation nationale".[79] In other words, the key to the whole issue was national military defeat, not the treatment of individuals and minorities.

The 1981 victory of the left, with its human rights-orientated ideology, can be seen as a turning point. Despite its claim to be the "pays des droits de l'homme", it was only after the socialist victory of 1981 that France finally ratified the European convention safeguarding "human rights and fundamental dignities".[80] François Mitterrand declared in 1986 that "les Droits de l'Homme (. . .) sont au centre de tout".[81] It was also François Mitterrand who, in 1989, presided over a resolutely "droits-de-l'hommiste" bicentenial of the French Revolution. These developments typify a period

[77] Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.441; my italics.
[78] *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 22-28 April 1999.
[79] *Leçons de ténèbres. Résistants et déportés*, ed. by Jean Manson (Paris: Plon, 1995).
[80] Alfred Grosser, *Les identités difficiles* (Paris: Presses de Sciences-Po, 1996), p.100.
[81] Michel Martin-Roland, *Il faut laisser le temps au temps. Les mots de François Mitterrand* (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1995) p.29.

in which the rhetoric of human rights, and the abuse thereof, was brought to bear on many different domains of French life, and started to dominate attitudes to the Second World War. The Franco-German television company *Arte* thus proposed a double menu for its programmes on the 1994 annivesaries of landings and liberations. One set of programmes was to focus on the Second World War *per se*, the other on "des questions plus contemporaines," including "des problèmes specifiquement français, comme la responsabilité de Vichy à travers le procès Touvier ou celle des fonctionnaires à travers les affaires Papon et Bousquet."[82] There was no question of celebrating blithely the end of occupation; Vichy's human rights abuses had to be dealt with at the same time.

In France during the 1980s and 1990s, the sacrosanct nature of human rights was one of the few ideas that ellicited a consensual and relatively committed response. There was an overt interest in the rights of France's ethnic, linguistic, regional, religious and even sexual minorities. The rise of Harlem Désir's *SOS Racisme* is symptomatic of this preoccupation, as is, in a negative sense, the rise of the *Front national*. At the same time there was an increased awareness of humanitarian difficulties outwith national frontiers. Again, the mounting success and renown of a single organisation, Bernard Kouchner's *Médecins sans frontières*, can testify to this. The "no borders" label expressed the universalist philosophy of the age. In mainstream politics, too, the tone was much more pro-European and internationalist than it had been under previous Elysée tenants. The notion of "human rights" was certainly vague and open to interpretation, but the majority of people in France and the Western world professed to "believe in" it. It was grafted onto a memory of World War Two that had to be transmitted, because it was a duty, a *devoir*.

[82] *Le Monde*, 11 November 1994.

Against the Gaullists' "pédagogie de l'honneur national" and Giscard's clumsy attempts to please the Germans,[83] there developed a left-wing consensus that perceived the Allied victory essentially as a victory for democracy, tolerance and human rights over the ideology of Nazism. Instead of forgetting about the victory over Nazi Germany, it was to become, in the words of socialist ex-servicemen's minister Jean Laurain, "une magnifique leçon d'éducation civique", reminding younger generations that basic rights and democracy ought not to be taken for granted, and had only been attained through enormous sacrifice.[84] As early as 1982 the 8 May commemoration of Allied victory was reinstated and revamped, framing a pedagogical discourse that promoted international fraternity and human rights. Jean Laurain hoped that the 8 May would be an opportunity for "les jeunes du monde" to "communier dans un même idéal de paix et de fraternité".[85] Laurain was preoccupied with the themes of peace and human rights, and in 1982 the pedagogical-memorial branch of his ministry was reorientated in this direction.[86] It was rebaptised "la Commission de l'information historique pour la paix".

This does not mean that the nation was suddenly abandoned altogether as a frame of reference. Debate in the National Assembly on the restoration of the 8 May national holiday, in September 1981, is revealing in this respect. The old narrative telling of a nation's heroism triumphing over the evils of Nazism was not totally obsolete. Alain Hautecour, sponsoring the law, declared that "cette fête est celle de la liberté retrouvée, cette victoire est celle de la nation tout entière, sur la dictature et la barabarie nazie". The secretary of state for ex-servicemen, Jean Laurain, concurred: "Le 8 mai symbolise

[83] Notably by abolishing the 8 May national holiday.
[84] Debate at the National Assembly, 23 September 1981.
[85] Debate at the National Assembly, 23 September 1981.
[86] Interview with Serge Barcellini in Raimond, p.73.

la volonté du peuple de France rassemblé dans l'élan de la résistance".[87] If the French account of the war years had taken on a more universalist tenor, it had not yet lost confidence in the nation's essential qualities. Vichy's crimes, in short, were not yet central to that account.

Eleven years later, in 1992, the National Assembly was again discussing war and occupation, but the tone was rather different. In the wake of the Vél' d'hiv' affair representatives discussed how best to commemorate persecutions committed during the period of collaboration.[88] Serge Barcellini has analysed both debates, and sees them as indicative of the change in emphasis that was taking place. Of course, the subject matter was not the same in each case, but this is in itself significant. In 1981, the terms "nazi", "hitlérien" and "national-socialiste" appeared 18 times in total; "Vichy" was alluded to twice, and Pétain was not mentioned. During the debate held in 1992, the terms "Vichy", "Etat français" and "Pétain" occured 20 times, with "nazi" and "allemand" appearing only six times.

From 1981 onwards, most of the changes to official and collective forms of remembrance took the human rights discourse on board. From the Vél' d'hiv' to the Matteoli commission, national prestige had to bend to pressure from individuals and communities. Where memorial inscriptions used to oppose "la barbarie allemande" and "les résistants français" or "les victimes françaises", they started to allude to, say, French malefactors and Jewish victims. Whereas Pétain and his supporters were tried for treason, Touvier and Papon were tried for "crimes against humanity", an offense that is now on the French statute books (thanks in no small measure to the efforts of Mitterrand). Every year since 1989 the war memorial complex at Caen, one of whose objectives is "la défense des droits de l'homme", has organised a "concours international

[87] Serge Barcellini in *Vingtième Siècle* n°45, 1995.
[88] This was subsequently made the object of a presidential decree.

de plaidoiries pour la défense des droits de l'homme", which enables lawyers from all over the world to come and denounce current human rights violations. The esplanade leading into this complex bears the flags of all the nations, allied or not, who participated in the battle of Normandy.

In January 1991 a representative of the *comités internationaux des camps de concentration nazis* wrote to François Mitterrand with a proposal that these camps be taken out of the jurisdiction of individual nations and placed under the aegis of an international body such as UNESCO. The correspondent argued that these sites did not belong to any one nation, but "au patrimoine historique et moral de l'humanité".[89] The suggestion was never acted upon, but it is typical of the direction things were taking. In October 1992 a conference was held in Lyon on the theme of "Résistance et mémoire, d'Auschwitz à Sarajevo". Three of the papers given dealt with the subject of human rights.[90]

In 1992 Noël Copin, in an editorial for *La Croix*, could state explicitly that "la faute du gouvernement de Vichy, c'est moins l'acceptation de la défaite devant les armées ennemies que la *capitulation morale* devant l'idéologie nazie".[91] War, in other words, was not about military defeat or victory but about morality and ideology. As Philippe Burrin observed, "on est passé en quelque sorte d'un régime coupable d'avoir lésé une personne collective, *la France*, à un régime coupable d'avoir lésé les droits de l'homme".[92] The idea that the nation was "a collective person" which could be "betrayed" by surrender to an enemy, was much less fashionable than it once had been, and was no longer deemed worthy of providing a lense through which the past may be

[89] Jean Kahn's archives.
[90] Malet, ed., 1993.
[91] 14 July 1992.
[92] In *Les Lieux de mémoire*, III, part1, p.342.

scrutinised. There had been a gradual shift in the moral and conceptual framework, exterior to the event itself, by which it was thought about and judged.

An opinion poll in *Le Figaro-Magazine* in December 1994 ranked the reasons people had for reproaching Vichy. The most popular reproach, with 57%, was the policy of rounding up Jews. The policy of collaboration with the Germans was cited by 56% of those polled. Then came another antisemitical policy, that of the *statut juif* of October 1940. It was chosen by 52% of opinion. Further behind was the creation of the *milice*, with 36%. But the act which made this all possible, the abolition of the Third Republic, was by far the least commonly held reproach, gathering only 11% of opinion.[93] "Vichy" had come to signify "anti-semitism", to the exclusion of those aspects previously deemed important.[94]

Le Front national

During the 1980s and 1990s one of the most urgent messages to be transmitted was that intolerance, particularly when of an antisemitic or xenophobic nature, was dangerous. More than most conflicts, World War Two had come to be seen as a battle of good against evil, in which tolerance was clearly aligned with good, intolerance with evil. The French, having flirted so dangerously with the wrong side, were desperate to guard against the same thing happening again: the most efficient way to do so was to educate the young. So the effort of memory that formed the basis of these lessons took on a moral dimension – hence the much-vaunted "devoir de mémoire" dealt with earlier in this chapter.

[93] Poll referred to in Flood and Frey, 'The Vichy Syndrome revisited', *Contemporary French Civilisation*, vol.19, n°2 (1995) p.246.
[94] Henri Amouroux, *La page n'est pas encore tournée*, (Paris: Robert Lafont, 1993) p.12.

The preoccupation with the antisemitic and xenophobic aspects of collaboration and occupation can partly be explained by the rise of the extreme right.[95] Paradoxically, this rise was facilitated in the first place by the relatively iconoclastic approach to the war years which began to gain the upper hand in the 1970s. In the context of a more frank and widespread debate about the period, contributors felt increasingly at liberty to dispel myths, break taboos and transgress "party lines". The fresh approach was productive, but the products were not to everyone's taste. During the decades of uneasy silence over the detail of collaboration, that is to say roughly until the 1970s, no politician would have dared say the things Le Pen and his supporters started saying, for fear of raising the spectre of Vichy. But by the time the *Front national* started its ascent in the mid-1980s, the spectre had already been raised, and people had started to talk about the relevant issues. Le Pen was able to profit from the relative freedom of expression to appeal to people who, up until then, had been lying low.

The late 1970s and, above all, the early 1980s were marked by the emergence of an unashamedly right-wing intellectual consciousness, hitherto unthinkable in a climate where the term "intellectual" had generally been synonymous with "Marxism", and often "resistance" and "deportation" as well. It was conveyed most articulately perhaps by the circle of rightist intellectuals, such as Yves Le Gallou, Yvan Blot and Bruno Mégret, gravitating around the *Club de l'Horloge*, founded in 1974. These three, and others like them, went on to be promininent in the *Front national*.

In parallel to this was a proliferation of neo-negationist theses minimising the scale or significance of the Final Solution. The most high-profile French proponents were Robert Faurrisson in the 1980s, and then Bernard Notin in the 1990s. Notin was forced out of his post at Lyon III University in 1994, after publishing "revisionist"

[95] The "racisme-antisémitisme" rubric in the index to *Le Monde* expanded from a small section of one column in 1981 to almost a full page of three full columns by the mid-1980s.

work.[96] Prominent members of the *Front National* had been known to express interest in these theses, although they could not afford to be too forthright. In 1987, and again in 1997, Jean-Marie Le Pen opined that the gas chambers were no more than a "detail" of the history of the Second World War. In 1991 FN regional councillor Bruno Gollnisch pleaded for "respect de la liberté d'expression pour les enseignants qui exercent un regard critique sur l'histoire de la Seconde guerre mondiale".[97] However, he later denied having spoken up for negationism or revisionism.

The presence of such people on the political scene brought an urgency and intensity to the debate on Vichy, and quickened the sense that the past was supremely relevant to the present. The *Front national* started taking up to 15% of the vote in elections, and periodically France witnessed shocking acts of antisemitism such as the desecration of the Jewish cemetery at Carpentras in 1990. It seemed that the only reasonable discourse was one which put the accent on vigilance, affirming that there was a real danger of a return to extremism if people became too complacent. Many intellectuals decided to take the fight to the extremists and revisionists. Pierre Vidal-Naquet did so in 1987 with *Les assassins de la mémoire*, in which he dismantled negationist theses. The extremist positions of the *Front national* and its fellow travellers represented, in the eyes of many people, a return to the anti-Republican values that had underpinned the *Etat français*. Henry Rousso described the movement in the 1980s as "une droite qui puise ses références dans une tradition, dans un système de valeurs, dans une 'vision du monde' qui, à tort ou à raison, rappelle la décennie maudite 1934-1944".[98] For those who, in 1992, signed the petition in *Le Monde* demanding that president Mitterrand acknowledge Vichy's crimes, that initiative was seen not simply as an

---

[96] Reported in *Le Monde*, 16 February 1994.
[97] Reported in *Le Monde*, 7 August 1991.
[98] 1987, p.208.

attempt to win an historical squabble, but as part of the contemporary political battle against the *Front national*. In the words of Jean-Marc Roberts, one of the signatories, "il ne faut pas lâcher sur Vichy, parce que je reconnais dans la vie politique d'aujourd'hui tellement d'attitudes, de pertes, de mots qui rappellent la Révolution nationale".[99]

In 1993 Jo Amiel wrote in the introduction to his book about a *rafle* in a sanatorium that the work represented his "contribution à la défense de la vérité" in the face of mounting negationism.[100] In February 1994 *le Patriote résistant*, the organ of the FNDIRP, was promoting a book on deportation entitled *Le Grand livre des témoins*.[101] According to one advertisement, the book was not just a historical document, but a weapon to be used in the on-going battle against negationist tendencies: "Qu'il (the book) prenne une place importante dans le combat pour la vérité, contestée par des individus dont les campagnes de falsification poursuivent le but évident de nier la réalité des crimes commis". Holocaust negationism was denounced in *Les Chemins de la mémoire*, produced by the ex-servicemen's ministry, on two separate occasions: in 1991 by the minister Louis Mexandeau, and in March 1993 by Roger Jouet, head of the *Délégation à la mémoire et à l'information historique*.

In such a way did the ramifications of the Vichy period reach forward, for good or for ill, into contemporary politics, injecting urgency into the debate about the kind of nation France wanted to be, and wanted to be seen to be. In such a way, also, did contemporary realities impinge on the narrative of the nation's recent history.

Since Robert Paxton, there had been a tendency to think of Vichy not as a product of the defeat of 1940, but as the continuation of an established tradition of reactionary,

---

[99] Conan and Rousso, p.53.
[100] *La rafle: un sana très ordinaire, 1942-1944* (Paris: les éditions du cerf, 1993).
[101] The book was presented to François Mitterrand at the headquarters of the FNDIRP on 24 November 1994.

xenophobic politics. In Alain Ferrari's 1998 film *Milice, film noir*, for instance, an unbroken line joins the *Front national* of the 1990s to the defenders of *l'Algérie française*, the *Etat français*, the pre-war *cagoulards*, and so on. It would be fair to say that, partly as a consequence of the search for arguments against the *Front national*, this became the predominant interpretation, especially cherished by a media keen to have a discernible line of demarcation.

It may seem churlish to cast a critical eye over such a noble cause; however, historical accuracy does not always coincide with prescriptive notions of what *ought* to be the case. That is what makes it, at times, troubling and contentious. It is quite possible to call into question a lazy tendency to draw simplistic parallels between occupied France and Mitterrand's (and Le Pen's) France, and make sweeping generalisations which cast the *Front national* as the latest incarnation of the *Etat français*. No one would deny that there were many disturbing similarities. *Front national* activists could still be heard referring to the Republic as "la gueuse"; and whenever the name of Pétain was uttered at *Front national* rallies, there was warm applause.[102] However, there were also many differences, and in order that comparisons may be drawn for "pedagogical" purposes, the differences were often passed over. It is important to recall that the majority of those who worked for, supported or tolerated Pétain did not do so *primarily* because they wanted to exclude a racial minority from the national community. There was a hard core which endorsed such policies, but support for Pétain and Vichy was much wider than that initially. This was because, in the desperate and confused circumstances of the time, people saw Vichy as the least bad way of conserving some form of autonomy while avoiding total annihilation. With the benefit of hindsight we can say that they made a grave error of judgement, and one

[102] For example at the "diner patriotique" in Metz on 11 December 1998, as reported in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 17-23 December 1998.

which had terrible consequences for certain categories of people. Also, we can (and must) criticise their willingness to exclude certain groups of people from the national group, thus leaving the road to persecution wide open. But this is very different from saying that, in 1940, the majority of French people were basically Lepenites before their time.

In contrast the *Front national* in the 1980s and 1990s was, to all intents and purposes, a single issue party, and that single issue was race, or immigration.[103] In voting for that party, an elector made a *free choice* to support policies that would make life more difficult for specific categories of people. His hands were in no way tied by the reality of a military defeat and the threats of an immensely powerful enemy, as they would have been in 1940.

So in dealing with the issues surrounding occupation and collaboration historians, but more so politicians and other public figures, had their room for manoeuvre restricted. As Mitterrand found to his cost, adversaries were not slow to draw attention to any views that could be considered suspect. Therefore, before offering any sort of analysis or opinion people took care to make it clear that they held no brief for Vichy. This meant refusing to voice publicly the view that the page ought to be turned, or that the obsession with Vichy's dark deeds imperilled balance and perspective. Naturally, when the extremist *National Hebdo* was complaining of "le déchaînement médiatique"[104] over the Touvier case, when Alain Sanders was protesting at "ce bruyant exhibitionnisme", and declaring that "je n'ai pas à m'excuser d'être français" on the Vél' d'hiv' anniversary,[105] the mainstream moved instinctively in the other direction.

---

[103] Other major themes, such as insecurity, are linked to the theme of immigration.

[104] *National Hebdo*, 23-29 April 1992.
[105] *L'Humanité*, 18 July 1992.

Thus the persistence of the extreme right in castigating the "saturation" coverage of Vichy fostered a curious situation: the subject was omnipresent, and yet this omnipresence was rarely acknowledged by those responsible for it. Any attempt to put antisemitic acts in perspective, as only one aspect of war and commemoration among many, could easily be attacked as "minimisation", and comparisons could be drawn with Jean-Marie Le Pen's description of the gas chambers as a mere "detail". Thus even a tentative move in that direction was a dangerous course to take. There were those, of course, who were worried about this situation. Historians, politicians, and people who had been involved in other aspects of the war, were frustrated, but were wary of expressing their disquiet in public, lest they be identified with the *Front national* and its fellow travellers.[106]

A European and internationalist outlook

In the broadly universalist and internationalist context of the Mitterrand years, it was inevitable that one of the "lessons" given during commemorations would be that international cooperation, and in particular European integration, were necessary in order to neutralise the threat of another full-scale war. This was particularly true of the Allied landings in Normandy, which were crucial to the liberation of French territory, and at the same time part of the wider conflict between the Allies and the Axis, and therefore between democracy and fascism. In 1984 and again in 1994 the idea of commemoration was expanded far beyond strengthening the bond between citizen and state, to become an opportunity to forge and reinforce links across national boundaries. For Mitterrand, this would not weaken internal cohesion; on the contrary, the idea was

[106] For example Jean Kahn, former counsellor at the Elysée, as well as spokesmen from the FNDIRP and the FNCPG (*Fédération nationale des combattants prisonniers de guerre et combattants d'Algérie*) have

that internal cohesion could actually benefit from a more wholehearted embrace of the outside world.

Gaullists, on the other hand, had always maintained that France should not become too closely dependent on anyone else, least of all the USA. Although they would never say so explicitly, committed Gaullists considered the *débarquement*, an Anglo-American venture on French soil, to be a humiliation as much as a salvation. De Gaulle himself had gone so far as to refuse to attend the D-day 20th anniversary commemorations, whilst making a point of being present for the more Franco-centric anniversary of the Provence landings.

In contrast, the D-day commemorations in 1984 were enthusiastically embraced by the governing socialists, and were marked by the inclusion of more nationalities than ever before. Traditionally, seven nations had been deemed worthy of representation: France, the USA, Canada, the United Kingdom, Holland, Belgium and Norway. Before the fortieth anniversary, five more nations claimed a right to participate. They were Luxembourg, Greece, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Denmark. In a spirit of inclusiveness, it was decided that these nations would be allowed representation, if only at a secondary level. On top of this came another claim, this time from the Soviet Union, which argued that the Normandy landings had been rendered possible by the battle of Stalingrad, and that the Soviet Union ought therefore to be invited. Once again the request met with a favourable response, and the USSR was permitted to attend, albeit in a passive role. Finally there was the problem of the Federal Republic of Germany, which seemed to be positioning itself for a request. In the spring of 1984 it looked as if this might develop into a full-scale controversy, so François Mitterrand decided to act. On the eve of a Franco-German summit in April he announced that a memorial ceremony involving the two nations would take place before the end of the

---

expressed such views strongly in private.

year. The ceremony was duly held at Douaumont on 22 September 1984. Also, Jean Laurain was instructed to attend a German memorial service held at its cemetery in La Cambe, on 7 June.

While the participation of all these nations may seem to point to an atmosphere of international harmony, the truth is that most of the participating governments and heads of state were at least as concerned about their popularity at home as about foreign relations. They were keen to be seen paying homage to their own veterans. In 1984 this was still greatly appreciated by public opinion – more so than any internationalist gestures. The British authorities, for example, held three exclusively British ceremonies, at Ranville on the 5 June, and Bayeux and Arromanches on 6 June.

By 1994, France was a reliable partner of NATO, and one of the engineers of a reinvigorated process of European integration; German troops were to parade down the Champs-Elysees on 14 July 1994 for the first time in more than fifty years.[107] In October 1994 Mitterrand, accompanied by the Spanish prime minister Felipe Gonzalez, would speak at a ceremony at the monument in Prayols commemorating the Spanish Republicans who, having fled Franco's Spain, joined the French Resistance.[108] (The memorial had been officially opened in 1982, by socialist education minister Alain Savary.)[109] In his speech, Mitterrand would evoke the international fight against fascism, and link this to the European project in which France and Spain were now partners.

It was to be expected, then, that all the potent symbolism of the major D-day ceremonies would point to the benefits of international cooperation and European

[107] As part of *Eurocorps*.
[108] Text kindly supplied by Jean Kahn.
[109] Barcellini and Wieviorka, p.279.

integration. Of the fourteen official ceremonies on 6 June 1994, eight involved at least two nations. The occasion was used not to affirm France's independence but to foster even closer relations with her European and North American friends. In his speech at Omaha beach on 6 June, Mitterrand was unequivocal both in his pro-European and internationalist stances: "l'Europe sauvée ne pouvait être qu'une autre Europe. 340 millions d'Européens se sont dotés de lois communes. Un conflit armé est devenu, entre eux, inconcevable. Réconciliés, les adversaires de la bataille de Normandie marchent désormais du même pas"; or again, "du 6 juin date le signal: puisse s'organiser partout le dialogue pour la paix des pays du monde, des peuples, sous l'égide des Nations unies."[110]

Mitterrand also gave an interview to *Libération*, published on 6 June, in which he said that one of the important lessons of the Normandy landings was that it was necessary to quicken the pace of European defence integration. When this point was put to Gaullist prime minister Edouard Balladur that evening, his lack of enthusiasm was palpable, although, since this was also his party's official policy, he could not disagree, and offered some pro-European and pro-Atlantic sentiment.[111] All in all, there was not such a large gap in policy between Matignon and the Elysée.

Mitterrand also took the opportunity to recall that European unity was conceived in the first place as a means of avoiding war.[112] He had harsh words for those who did not share his view, declaring that "tous ceux qui, ici ou là, par nationalisme, par frilosité, ou par égoïsme, prêchent en faveur du repli sur soi, font preuve d'une bien courte vue et d'une grande imprudence."[113] *Le Monde* noted that Mitterrand was seeking, "habilement", to bolster relations between Europe and the United States

[110] *Le Monde*, 8 June 1994.
[111] Evening news on *France 2*, 6 June 1994.
[112] *Le Monde*, 7 June 1994.
[113] *Le Monde*, 7 June 1994.

through the "retrouvailles solennelles des Alliés".[114] So strong was the supranational flavour that a leader in *The Times* of 26 December 1994 denounced efforts during the previous summer to turn the commemorative events into "a celebration of European unity".

The grand pyramidal dramatisation that formed the focal point of the 1994 ceremonies departed from the classic "morts pour la patrie" approach to war commemoration. Entitled "au nom des hommes", it made no direct reference to either Germany or Nazism: the accent was on abstract themes like peace, co-operation, the future of Europe, rather than on the detail of "who did what and when". The *tableaux vivants* that were presented on stage were allegorical in character: there was no attempt to achieve a realistic re-enactment of the battles.[115] A spokesman for the state's *Mission du cinquantenaire* which, along with the local authorities, financed and organised the event, explained that "the goal is to broadcast a message of peace and hope to younger generations."[116]

Nonetheless, it must not be forgotten that, when the issue of German participation surfaced in 1994, as it had in 1984, the Elysée was firm in its refusal. Despite all the magnanimous talk of peace and reconciliation and the efforts to avoid offensive triumphalism, this was still the commemoration of a decisive military operation in which there was necessarily a winner and a loser. Mitterrand's political instincts told him that pro-European gestures had to be counterbalanced by deference to the hard facts of a war which had set certain nation-states, including France and Germany, against each other. The issue of Germany's participation or non-participation caused something

[114] 6 June 1994.

[115] Desquesnes, p.173. He also disapproved of the ending to the representation, in which one of the actors declared that "C'est beau de gagner la guerre en la détestant", complaining that the message ought to have been more positive. Alain Rollat made the same observation in *Le Monde* of 8 June 1994.
[116] *Scotsman*, 7 June 1994.

of a stir in the media and among some politicians, and it was rumoured that Chancellor Kohl's request for an invitation had been turned down. As it transpired, Helmut Kohl had never formerly asked to take part in the ceremonies. Nonetheless, public opinion appeared to regret the fact that the head of the German government was not invited. President Mitterrand received scores of letters on the subject, the vast majority of which expressed disappointment at the treatment of Chancellor Kohl.[117] A poll published by the Catholic weekly *La Vie* found that 56% of French people were "très ou assez favorable" to his presence. In an editorial for *Le Figaro* of 7 June 1994, F-O. Giesbert regretted that neither Helmut Kohl nor Boris Yeltsin had been invited. He wrote:

> Rien ni personne n'est venu gâcher cet anniversaire où manquaient malgré tout M. Kohl qui est en droit de considérer que la victoire de l'Allemagne sur elle-même a commencé, le 6 juin 1944, sur les plages normandes. M. Eltsine n'aurait pas été de trop. Avec ces deux symboles là, la célébration eut été parfaite.[118]

However, it is probable that, had Kohl been invited, the protests would have been just as numerous.

8 May 1995 was the last significant commemoration at which France was represented by François Mitterrand. In attending the ceremony in Berlin, he underlined one of the few unambiguous aspects of his career: his belief in the European project, at the heart of which lay Franco-German reconciliation. Moreover, in his address he went so far as to pay tribute to the German soldiers, who were "courageux, quel que fût leur uniforme", and who "acceptaient la perte de leur vie". In a somewhat contradictory

[117] Jean Kahn's archives.

[118] Desquesnes, pp.163, 191 (note to former).

manner, in view of his internationalist sensibility, he also admired the "patriotism" of the *Wehrmacht*. The fact that they were fighting for "une mauvaise cause" was mitigated, according to Mitterrand, by the fact that "ils aimaient leur patrie".[119]

In this way did the president ensure that his exit from the world stage was accompanied by something resembling a bang, rather than a quiet whimper. He could afford to be more reckless here than he had been at previous commemorations, where he had to be seen to be safeguarding national consensus even when attempting to put his message across. Of course, Mitterrand's belief in the need for a Franco-German "motor" at the heart of Europe, and for a European identity to take hold in France, had been a constant since the early 1980s. However, with the opening of Europe towards Germany's traditional spheres of influence in the east, the partnership was looking less solid than it once was. Every opportunity - no matter how contentious - was taken to counteract this process.

Clearly he was prepared to risk political strife in France - including allusions to his own ambiguous war itinerary - in order to reaffirm his commitment to the European ideal or, perhaps more accurately, to simply get something "off his chest". Amongst his own staff and political family there was disquiet. The speech that Jean Kahn had helped prepare had not contained that passage; Mitterrand had improvised the most controversial parts.[120] His opponents were more vocal in their disapproval. Jean-Paul Piérot's editorial in *L'Humanité* spoke of the shock and disbelief that greeted news of Mitterrand's speech: "plus d'un téléspetateur français n'en crut pas ses oreilles lorsqu'il entendit les propos", he affirmed.[121] Professor Joseph Rovan said that "son jugement

[119] *Le Monde*, 10 May 1995.

[120] Interview with Jean Kahn, 10 March 1999.
[121] 10 May 1995.

d'aujourd'hui rejoint ce qu'il était en 1941, un jeune militant de droite";[122] Gaullist deputy Pierre Lellouche trained his guns on the president's willingness to subordinate everything else, including sound moral and historical judgement, to the European project: "Je regrette qu'au nom de la construction européenne, de l'amitié franco-allemande, à laquelle je crois, on fasse une réécriture permanente de l'histoire".[123] Alfred Grosser contested Mitterrand's allusion to the "courage" of the Wehrmacht troops, pointing out, as German defence minister Volke Rühe had done, that the real moral courage was shown by the few German people who resisted Hitler.[124]

The present applied to the past

This episode reminds us that there is a fine line between focusing on aspects of the past that seem relevant to the present, and simply falsifying the past according to present prejudices or preoccupations. Historical, or any other, reality, is always "refracted through the observer's own prism".[125] There is an ever-present temptation to see things not as *they* are, but as *we* are. Alain Duhamel has made the same point in different words: "les Français, comme les autres peuples, sont prisonniers (. . .) de leurs passions et de leurs mythologies. Ils ne croient pas ce qui est mais ce qu'ils voient et ils ne voient pas ce qui est mais ce qu'ils croient."[126] Similarly, the historian Georges Duby has reminded us that, in reconstituting the past, "nous faisons intervenir notre propre culture, notre propre subjectivité."[127]

---

[122] *Le Monde*, 11 May 1995.
[123] On *RMC* radio station; reported in *Le Monde*, 12 May 1995.
[124] *La Croix*, 11 May 1995.
[125] *France: Image & Identity*, ed. by Jeff Bridgford (Newcastle: Newcastle-upon-Tyne Polytechnic Products, 1987), p.2.
[126] *La Politique Imaginaire* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995), p.9.
[127] *l'Express*, 14 February 1992, p.51.

There are times when this "intervention" is deliberate and cynical: for example, in July 1982 the ceremony marking the fortieth anniversary of the "rafle du Vel' d'hiv'" was ignored by the communist party's organ *l'Humanité*[128], most probably because of a completely unrelated affair: the PLO's armed struggle against Israel in the Lebanon, which the French communist party supported. Around this time *l'Humanité* was full of damning reports of "l'agression israélienne au Liban". During the commemorative ceremonies, on the other hand, there had been many impassioned messages of support for Israel's actions. It is unlikely that this omission had much of an impact on collective memory, but it demonstrates that the potential for abuse is always there.

I have suggested in this chapter and throughout this study that during our period there was a move away from an interpretation of war and occupation based on national sovereignty and national identity. However, that "prism" cannot be disregarded altogether. A survey in 1992 asked French people to define themselves with reference to a geopolitical space. In reply to the prompt, "Avez-vous le sentiment d'appartenir d'abord. . .", 37% replied "à la France". The next most popular response was "A votre région ou pays d'origine", with 24%, followed by "votre région actuelle", on 23%. "Au monde" was chosen by 9%, while "à l'Europe" came last, with only 5%.[129] So despite being one of the more artificial and more recently established of the above determiners, the national dimension remained pre-eminent. An idea that was given concrete form towards the end of the eighteenth century was looking likely to survive into the third millenium: that idea was that, while men and women may have many levels of identity, it is the nation that provides them with their principal sense of belonging.[130] We should

[128] July 1982.
[129] *Francoscopie 1992* (Sécodip poll). A similar poll conducted in 1995 had comparable results, although there were only two identities in the frame, French and European. The prompt was "Vous personnellement vous sentez-vous. . .", and the responses were as follows: "Seulement français" - 29%; "Plus français qu'européen" – 29%; "Autant français qu'européen" - 36%; "Plus européen que français" - 2%; "Seulement européen" - 1%; "Ni français ni européen" - 2%; "Sans réponse" - 1%.
[130] Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993) p.3.

not be too surprised, then, if, from time to time, a collective sense of history still seemed to be at the beck and call of national prejudice (the last word being used in as neutral a sense as possible). And this was not simply a matter of political expediency, although it is seldom politically damaging to reiterate one's commitment to one's country. Even François Mitterrand was unequivocal about where his loyalty ultimately lay: "Je suis par goût assez internationaliste. Mais si la collectivité nationale à laquelle j'appartiens se trouve en danger, alors je réagis en patriote".[131]

For the liberation of Paris, for instance, the exceptional nature of the military operation engendered a certain confusion over the identity, that is to say the nationality, of the "real" liberators of the capital. It was such an attractive role that, fifty years on, it seemed that everyone was claiming to have played it. The presenter of the evening news bulletin on *TF1* referred to "tous ces résistants *qui ont repris tout seuls* leur capitale".[132] *The Guardian* reported the remarks of an American present at the 1994 commemorative events: "I had no idea that the French liberated Paris by themselves. I always thought the Americans got here first and joined Ernest Hemingway at the Ritz."[133] *The Independent*, meanwhile, refers to the British Royal Signals as "the first liberators of Paris."[134] Logic dictates that at least two of these claims could not be accurate.

When the time came to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the victorious (for the Allies) finale to the Second World War in May 1945, national differences of interpretation were still a factor. Despite Maastricht and all the progress made in the field of European integration; despite the War's supposed status as a universal struggle between good and evil, freedom and slavery, democracy and despotism; despite the multi-national character of the commemorative events, there was evidence, still, of the

[131] Elie Wiesel, *François Mitterrand: mémoire à deux voix* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1995).
[132] 25 August 1994; my italics.
[133] 26 August 1994.
[134] 23 August 1994.

deep-rooted, visceral tendency to seek the reassurance of an ingrained sense of belonging, often accompanied by an irrational mistrust of "the other".

Writing in the *Financial Times* of 10 May 1995, Ian Davidson complained that the fiftieth anniversary of the German surrender had been exploited by each nation for its own purposes: "the solemnity of the remembrance (. . .) is being hijacked for the public relations purposes of the governments of today". Historical accuracy had suffered, he claimed, from each country's insistence on its own interpretation: for Britain, the motivating factor was nostalgia; for Russia, memory of a time when it fought on the right side; for Germany, it was a liberation from her own Nazi ideology; for France, meanwhile, "it is a reminder that Charles de Gaulle, by force of will, transformed France from an ignominiously defeated nation into an élite companion of the victorious".

It is tempting to conclude that the only possible approach must be that of the purist, refusing to let subsequent values obstruct a clear view of the historical facts. Yet this is to neglect the truth that all facts are seen through a filter of values. It is also, in its extreme form, to proclude a pedagogical approach to history: for the main justification for teaching history to young people is that valuable lessons can be learnt from it – lessons that apply to the present. But in order to draw these lessons, some sort of judgement must be passed on the period concerned. Crudely speaking, the past must be divided into good and bad - what we approve of and what we disapprove of. Unless we are content to let the conduct of historical actors remain uncommented, making this division requires us to impose our own judgements, which inevitably involves the imposition of our own values. Therefore, by investing history with purpose and relevance, one must also, to some extent, superimpose modes of thought that are not necessarily those of the time.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WHO CONTROLS COLLECTIVE MEMORY?

The medium and the message

One of the crucial points that ought to be emerging from this study is that, just as the present is shaped by the past, the past is very much dependent on the present. The relationship is a dialectical one, in that, while present concerns and outlooks can alter the way we view our past, it is that very past that has helped shape our present concerns and outlooks. On one side we have Marx's historical determinism: "The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living". On the other side we have the likes of Orwell, who demonstrated in *1984* that if the will, organisation and technology were in place, it might be possible to eradicate the past completely, and construct an entirely new one. Reality is sometimes much less relevant than the manner in which it is perceived and represented. Whatever exists outside of consciousness, and expression of that consciousness, might as well not exist. This is especially true of our modern world in which the medium is often much more influential than the message. As Alain Finkielkraut has noted, Lenin's famous deference towards "the stubborn facts" would be out of place today: "Dans le monde d'aujourd'hui, les faits ne sont pas têtus, les faits sont précaires, dociles, malléables. On peut les accommoder à toutes les sauces: les plier aux volontés du dogme, ou les absorber dans le ventre mou de l'opinion".[1]

If the medium shapes the message, it is important to determine how that medium or media functioned during the period that concerns us, with regard to the commemoration of war and occupation. These events were organised by official bodies

[1] *L'avenir d'une négation* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), p.14.

such as the state or associations of *anciens*, which were themselves "media" in that they were transmitting information. But in order to reach a wider public they relied on what is more commonly referred to as "the media", that is to say, the press, radio and television. *L'Histoire* magazine of May 1984[2] published a survey which asked people how the memory of Liberation had been "transmitted or maintained" in their experience. One element of the media, television, was the most common choice, ranked alongside "récits de famille" on 40%. The next most popular response was "official ceremonies", on 26%. "Books" and "school" were next with 25% and 23% respectively.

While it would be inaccurate to depict the French collective conscience as completely in thrall to television, that medium did, along with radio and the press, exercise considerable influence. And where once the audiovisual sector was controlled by the state, the process of liberalisation that took place under Mitterrand helped to revolutionise practices and attitudes.[3] Television and radio made the most of their new freedom, and adopted a much more irreverent attitude towards state authority.[4] The government could no longer rely on these media to tell the people what it wanted them to hear. French-Jewish radio stations, for example, knowing the composition of their audience, were unlikely to see the need to tailor their content to suit the government, or to suit a wider French audience.[5]

The modern media are notoriously efficient when it comes to amplifying or simply manufacturing popular trends. During the 1980s and 1990s the French media

---

[2] n° 67.

[3] François Mitterrand had come a long way as far as broadcasting freedom was concerned. As Minister for Information under the Fourth Republic, he had presided over a system of stringent control of broadcasting which, from our perspective, seems almost totalitarian. In a speech to the National Assembly in 1949, he explained that it was the role of radio and television to serve the national interest. Political disinterestedness was clearly out of the question. "La radiodiffusion française a quotidiennement à faire de la politique, une politique nationale des intérêts de la France." (Grosser 1996, p.87).

[4] Programmes such as *Les Guignols*, France's *Spitting Image*, would have been unthinkable under the previous system.

[5] There is now a French-Jewish cable telelvision channel also.

helped to stimulate and nourish a demand for diverse aspects of the nation's past. Antoine Prost noted that there occurred at this time "une mobilisation médiatique sans précédent en faveur de l'histoire".[6] Ménière identified the trend in his *Bilan de la France*: "Archives, patrimoines anciens et récents: les années quatre-vingt sont marquées par une frénésie d'appropriation de tous les objets du passé".[7] In their introduction to a special historical edition of *Autrement* in March 1987, Nadine Gautier and Jean-François Rouge started from the observation that "le passé est un produit à la mode". It seemed inconceivable that, during Giscard d'Estaing's *septennat*, the teaching of history in schools had been regarded as something of an anachronism, and had looked set to be abolished altogether in its traditional form.

For the most part, state authorities were happy to indulge, and even encourage, the interest in history and the "engouement patrimonial". Mitterrand's culture minister Jack Lang initiated a project known as "les journées du patrimoine", whereby historically interesting state-owned buildings were opened to the public for a weekend. To give an indication of their popularity, the two "journées du patrimoine" of 1994 attracted together more than six and a half million French people.[8] However, some of the implications of this fascination would ultimately lead to problems for the authorities. This was true in particular of the period of war and occupation.

Memory in vogue

The past was making a comeback, but its packaging had changed. Quite simply, *memory* was seen as a more attractive word than *history*, in the same way as advertisers

[6] 1996, p.31.
[7] p.240.
[8] *Le Point*, 22 July 1995.

prefer the word *home* to *house*. *History* was a dry, hierarchical, academic discipline; *memory* was authentic, alive, closer to "the people". Narratives of the past which were blatently imposed from on high, by politicians, teachers or churches, were treated with suspicion. One had only to be true to oneself; anything that was genuine came from "within". In this context, "la mémoire est devenue le recours ultime, gage d'authenticité et source illimitée d'informations".[9] The term *history* suited certain purposes, but, if one wanted to capture the public imagination, it was better to talk of *memory*, which had the "soul" that people craved.

From March to July 1984 an extraordinary series of full-page advertisements appeared in *Le Monde*. Each one of the six advertisements contained in its heading a reference to "la mémoire courte".[10] Three of them, indeed, were commissioned by a left-wing association calling itself "La Mémoire courte". And it was this organisation which sparked off the minor "memory war" with the first advertisement, on 16 March. Entitled simply "la mémoire courte", its purpose was to remind people of all the crimes perpetrated by "les hommes de la droite et de l'extrême droite" throughout history. Although they denied wanting to wake the old demons which had so frequently "poussé les Français à la violence", the authors alluded to most of these past conflicts. Vichy, needless to say, featured prominently. The language used was uncompromisingly ideological, and the message was that the past could not be forgotten. "**Nous n'avons pas la mémoire courte**. Nous n'oublierons pas qui nous sommes, d'où nous venons et d'où viennent nos adversaires."[11]

On 27 March came a "Rèponse à ceux qui ont la mémoire trop courte", using the same format as before. The authors were the members of a rival association called

[9] D. Nicolaidis in *Autrement*, April 1994, p.11.
[10] The advertisements were reproduced in *Vingtième siècle* n°5 (January 1985). This was a special edition dealing with "les guerres franco-françaises".
[11] *Le Monde*, 16 March 1984; bold print in original.

"Dialogue et vérités". Again, the history of France was selectively summarised, but this time the left were the criminals, and the right the victims or heroes. Inevitably, "la Mémoire courte" saw fit to use its right of reply, and another text appeared on 11 May, urging people once more to remember the mistakes of the "réactionnaires". On 30 May, "la mémoire courte" ran another of its texts, this time on a specific subject: the battle over education. Both the tone and the historical references were typically provocative.

The last two texts in the series dealt specifically with the Occupation. The first, which appeared on 13 July 1984, was commissioned by the "Association pour défendre la mémoire du Maréchal Pétain", whose motives were not difficult to discern. The title was from one of Pétain's speeches: "Français, vous avez la mémoire courte". There followed a list of the good things he had done for the French people, including protecting them from "la toute-puissance allemande et sa barbarie". The text concluded by calling for reconciliation, quoting François Mitterrand as saying that "les réconciliations d'aujourd'hui dominent les vieilles ruptures". The final text in the series was in the name of "les fils et filles des déportés juifs", and was a response to the "texte publicitaire tentant avec impudence de réhabiliter Pétain". It was also intended to coincide with the forty-second anniversary of the Vél' d'hiv' arrests. In contrast to that of 13 June, the title this time was, "Français, vous n'avez pas la mémoire courte". Recent French history was recalled once again. In this case, of course, all the evidence suggested that Pétain had no right to be "rehabilitated".

At the very least, this "bataille de mémoire" demonstrates that the notion of collective memory was not an irrelevance in 1980s France, and also that the Second World War and the German occupation had a privileged and disputed place in that memory. Memory had always been a weapon in the struggle for power, but, by the 1980s one had the distinct impression that it was becoming an end in itself.

Strictly speaking, then, it was not simply history that was back in vogue, but a more subjective way of dealing with the past, commonly known as collective memory. In the words of Conan and Rousso, "la mémoire" benefited from "une certaine fortune éditoriale et médiatique" in the 1980s and 1990s.[12] No longer a neutral word denoting a mental faculty, "memory" became a positive, desirable value and also a slogan commanding immediate attention: anything that involved remembering was inherently good, worthy, ethical. In 1988 Jacques Le Goff observed that memory was "un des objets de la société de consommation qui se vendent bien".[13] Memory, in its different forms, was marketed with the professionalism we normally associate with conventional consumer items or modern political parties. Commemorations were subject to sponsorship deals, media contracts, spin-doctoring, and gave rise to spin-off products. Rémy Desquesnes, in an article on the commemorative ceremonies marking the fiftieth anniversary of the D-Day landings, entitled one passage "les gagdets du cinquantième". In it he described how the commemorations were exploited for commercial profit by the marketeers of Normandy: "Dans tous les grands magasins, on trouvait au rayon des produits alimentaires toute une gamme de produits labélisés cinquantième anniversaire: camembert, Calvados, pommeau, vin de Bordeaux supérieur, champagne, biscuits."[14] But the most popular item was a lapel badge in the form of the US Paratroopers' grasshopper mascot. The fashion for badges – or "pin's", as they were called, evidently came into play. History and schoolboy fad were married to great effect: more than two million lapel badges were produced. Advertisers sought to benefit from "l'effet cinquantième" by making reference to D-Day in their posters and slogans. The RATP used a photo of an LCP landing craft with the caption, "Nous avons bien amélioré le

[12] 1994, p.22.
[13] 1988, p.170.
[14] In *Contemporary French Civilisation,* vol.19, n°2 (1995), p.157.

statut de 2e classe, depuis 50 ans". Another series of posters showed the different chronological stages of the allied assault on de Gaulle's "Lip" watch.[15]

As Annette Wieviorka and others observed, memory was increasingly being presented in the form of a "spectacle".[16] In fact this was not an entirely new phenomenon. In France the tradition of *liesse populaire* had long been seen as indispensable to all but the most solemn national commemorations. The presiding authorities had always realised that it was not enough to preach at people via speeches and other educational initiatives, and had sought to involve people in less cerebral ways. Parades and *bals populaires* are merely an older form of memory-as-spectacle. That said, in a modern world in which, every day, millions of messages are sent out to grab our attention, some kind of spectacle has to be provided in order to make any impression at all on the collective conscience. To quote Pierre-Henri Jeudy, "Comme il s'agit de convaincre le public le plus large de la grandeur unique de l'événement, tous les moyens sont bons pour tirer les bénéfices d'une sauvegarde de nos mémoires collectives". Jeudy denounced the "tournure kitsch" that this had brought to commemorative ceremonies.[17] Not for the first time, the press was critical of a phenomenon it had helped develop. Peter Philipps of *Die Welt* reproached the commemorations of the Normandy landings for their "Hollywood" tendencies.[18]

The new version of memory-as-spectacle could no longer limit itself to the traditional forms of war commemoration, involving a solemn ceremony at the *monument aux morts*. While these continued to function as important focal points, new modes of commemoration were also introduced. The sites of commemoration became increasingly diverse and imaginative; they were chosen or modified in order to give a

[15] In *Contemporary French Civilisation,* vol.19, n°2 (1995), p.158.
[16] *La Croix*, 14 July 1992.
[17] In *Libération*, 6 June 1994.
[18] *Le Monde* press review of 8 June 1994.

more immediate and engaging evocation of the event in question. For the fiftieth anniversary of the Normandy landings, in 1994, it seemed natural that the ceremonies should have taken place on the beaches themselves. Yet this form of commemoration had only been tried for the first time a decade earlier, for the fortieth anniversary. That had been the initial departure from the *monument aux morts* form for the Normandy landings, and it was representative of the wider trend towards more diverse and innovative forms of remembrance.[19]

Using the fiftieth anniversary year of 1994 as a *point d'orgue*, local and regional authorities in Normandy succeeded in developing a successful brand of World War Two memorial tourism. The hundreds of thousands of clients (620 000 in 1994, one third of them school children) were not left to gaze at ruins and monuments: the past was brought alive as a spectacle, by means, notably, of a 360 degree cinema screen, a live reconstitution of military operations, and a sound-and-light spectacular. "Devenue une attraction", says Rémy Desquesnes, "l'histoire peut attirer les foules et être source d'une véritable culture populaire". He then adds, approvingly, that these things "font beaucoup plus pour la connaissance de l'histoire qu'un savant cours professoral".[20]

This last point is contentious, since it appears to assume that the immediate impact of the "spectacle" is all that counts. The truth is that, if they are to convey a durable message, these populist forms of history must be complemented by a more sober, detached version, which may not give such instant gratification. There is no guarantee that anything will remain after the noise and light has died down. The central event of the 1989 bicentenial of the French Revolution was a grandiose spectacle organised by a publicist. It captured flamboyantly the post-modern, cosmopolitan spirit of the time, and was hailed as a great success. However, those involved have subsequently expressed

[19] Interview with Serge Barcellini, 6 May 1999.
[20] In *Contemporary French Civilisation*, vol.19, n°2 (1995).

disappointment that there has been no lasting legacy of the bicentenial focal point; all that remains is a hazy memory of another colourful parade down the Champs-Elysées.

In fact the Normandy region did manage to avoid that trap, and to temper spectacle with solemnity. The endless rows of white crosses in the war cemeteries do not fail to leave a lasting impression. And the memorial, museum and conference centre at Caen, in which the visitor is literally led downwards into hatred, persecution and war, can hardly be accused of levity. The impact of the memorial complex is not lost on those who visit, and a recurring motif in the visitors book is "plus jamais ça!"[21] In the final analysis the organisers of memory in the region have not succumbed to the temptation to turn everything into a sound-and-light spectacular.

Professional historiography took stock of the shift in emphasis from history to memory with the publication between 1984 and 1992 of *Les Lieux de mémoire*, edited by Pierre Nora. The state followed suit in 1992, when the government department known as the *Mission permanente aux commémorations et à l'information historique* changed its name to *Délégation à* la mémoire *et à l'information historique*. As its director Serge Barcellini explained, it was felt that everyone else "faisaient de la mémoire", and the government did not want to appear to have been left behind.[22] Two years earlier the *Mission permanente* had taken out advertising space in the French press. The text of the advertisements employed the word "memory" thirty three times, while "history" was used only five times.[23]

These changes bear witness to the *rapprochement*, or at least a change in the relationship, between history and memory that took place during our period. "Memory"

[21] Alluded to by Henri-Pierre Jeudy in *Libération*, 6 June 1994.
[22] Interview of 6 May 1999.
[23] Henry Rousso, 'Pour une histoire de la mémoire collective: l'après-Vichy', in *Les Cahiers de l'IHTP*, n°18 (June 1991).

became so ubiquitous, and so attractive a catch-word, that scholarly and official history had to descend from its pedestal, overcome its distaste and try to grapple with it. In the 1980s an association of history teachers called "Nous sommes des professeurs de *mémoire*" was created. Evidently the bias towards *memory* was not deemed incompatible with a mission to promote *historical* knowledge.

Plainly the balance of power between history and memory was being reversed. The former was now at the beck and call of the latter. In France, mainstream historiography had seen part of its task as bringing some sort of order to a chaos of competing and overlapping memories, and giving the product respectability by applying the label "national history". For Lucien Febvre, amongst others, it was also a system of redistributing the weight of the past so that the burden was not too much to bear.[24] During our period, in contrast, the prevailing fear was not that the past may burden the present, but that part of it may be lost. History was placed at the service of an all-powerful memory. Historians were regularly exhorted to fulfill their "devoir" of remembrance, and took to justifying their enterprises in these terms. No longer was history the master of memory, or even much of an alternative or antidote to it.

If we talk of a rapprochement between history and memory, we must suppose that they had previously been separated. At the beginning of the twentieth century,[25] historians were starting to talk about their discipline in scientific terms, and a distinction was made between, on one hand, a dispassionate academic discipline, and on the other, "la mémoire partisane". This memory was necessarily plural, since it was subjective, belonging to different groups or individuals. History gave itself a more universal

---

[24] Prost, 1996, p.301.
[25] See Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. by Lewis Coser (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

vocation, since it endeavoured to remove from its field of vision the encumbrances of background, nationality, ideology.

One of the consequences of this development was a shift in the relationship between history and collective identity. Scientific history did not inform identity, since identity by its very nature implied a lack of balance. In identifying with any collective entity, one was forced to discard other possible identities, to commit oneself (even if there was no conscious choice being made) to certain narratives, ideas and values over others. Memory was held to be capable of fueling pride or hatred, cementing allegiances or sparking violence, while history, as a science, ought to be able to defuse such ardour.[26] "Dès qu'il y a trace, distance, médiation, on n'est plus dans la mémoire vraie, mais dans l'histoire," affirmed Pierre Nora.[27] Put bluntly, what he is saying is that memory is biased, history unbiased. More poetically, François Bédarida has said that "la mémoire a pour objectif la fidélité, l'histoire la vérité.[28] According to these formulations, then, memory is all about unconditional attachment, history is subject to one condition: objective truth.

War and occupation, as remembered collectively during the Mitterrand years, provided moments of tension which illustrate these definitions. In particular there was friction between the living witnesses to the events and those who analysed them as history. One of the more revealing clashes took place at a lecture given by Daniel Cordier, comrade and biographer of Jean Moulin, at the Sorbonne in 1982. On this occasion Cordier was speaking as a historian, rather than as an eye witness. He backed up his arguments with documents and careful analysis. His lecture caused a rumpus, however, because it departed from the idealised, heroic memory of resistance which

[26] Alain Brossat, 'Libération, fête folle', in *L'Express*, 18 August 1994.
[27] *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, I, p.xvii.
[28] *Esprit*, July 1993, p.7.

some of the audience had retained. These witnesses were deeply offended that someone – even someone with Cordier's credentials – could wish to tarnish the *image d'Epinal* that had been an article of faith for so long.[29] In a similar vein, *L'Express* of 18 August 1994 reported that, at a conference coinciding with the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Paris, a former member of the Resistance, incensed by what he was hearing, stood up and launched a tirade against historians: "Soyez tranquilles, messieurs les Historiens," said the former *résistant*. "Quand nous serons morts, vous aurez raison".

The relationship between history and memory may have evolved, but the two ideas remained interdependent. Popular or partisan memory continued to be sustained to some extent by what historians choose to feed it; historians had their interest stimulated by popular memory. In Claude Berri's 1997 film *Lucie Aubrac*, the heroine is seen teaching her pupils about the importance of transmitting memory, and insisting that "c'est à travers la mémoire que l'histoire s'écrit". Jacques Le Goff defined memory as "le vivier où puisent les historiens".[30] As Thomas Ferenczi pointed out, in his relationship with memory the historian is a double agent, simultaneously the "indispensable auxiliaire" and the "inévitable intrus".[31] In the final analysis, history is written by human beings with beliefs and opinions. These cannot be completely bypassed, nor is such a bypass desirable. History is a social practice, before it is a pure science. It is therefore governed by the rules and forces that govern society. Collective memory, conversely, does not amount to the creed of a blind faith, which each member of the group has by heart. There is room for variegation, and even a spirit of fairness and moderation. Collective *identity*, therefore, is not simply unbridled bigotry based on falsified historical narratives.

---

[29] Recounted by Dominique Schnapper, 'la citoyenneté à l'épreuve: les musulmans pendant la guerre du Golfe', in *Revue française de science politique*, 43 (April 1992).
[30] 1988, p.10.
[31] *Le Monde*, 29 August 1994.

Any move back towards a more fragmented, memory-based method of framing the past can have both positive and negative consequences. Taking the positive interpretation, one can applaud a realisation of the important role memory plays in the formation of identity, and in the education of present and future generations. One can evoke for example the *Centre de la Mémoire* at Oradour-sur-Glane, which constitutes an unrivalled reminder of man's capacity for barbarity in certain circumstances. Or one could mention the dignity given back to French Jews by acknowledgment of the treatment meted out to themselves or their ancestors by the Vichy government and the occupying forces. In this case, a specific group held onto a truth that both official history and the wider popular memory would rather have banished.

Yet it remains true that memory is no substitute for history, and lacks the solid foundations which would enable it to resist the vagaries of fashion. It may be observed that, while the war years, particularly Vichy, were "in" during our period, this had not always been the case, and there was nothing to guarantee that it would remain so. When it pleased popular opinion, led by the media, to become fascinated by another aspect of the past, what would be left of the memory of Vichy? Memory, in its popular - sometimes populist - form, is necessarily fickle because it is democratic. Group memories are prone to excessiveness and intolerance, and it would be unwise to abandon the ideal of an objective, universal narrative of the past to a *laissez-faire* system where the most sensational or aggressive versions were allowed to dominate.

An over-zealous media?

Regarding the war period in general there emerged an appreciable gap between the priorities of the media (and public opinion, in so far as it was represented by the

media) and that evinced by the political, judicial, and administrative "establishment". The practice and discourse of investigative journalism had become widespread in France by the 1980s, and the seemingly endless supply of political "affairs" that marked the late 1980s and early 1990s testified to the vibrancy of that style of journalism. Significantly it was left to a journalist, Pierre Péan, to reveal the truth about François Mitterrand's involvement with the extreme right and Vichy.[32] Historians had been unwilling or unable to do so.

Mitterrand could claim a direct role in provoking this discussion, by virtue of his cooperation with Péan during his research for *Une Jeunesse Française*. The president had given Péan access to everything he needed to write his book, but was "stunned" by what he considered to be the scandal-mongering and treacherous nature of the final version.[33] Admittedly, the decision to cooperate could be construed as a damage limitation exercise on Mitterrand's part. Previously he had allegedly avoided the subject, both in public and in private. Elie Wiesel noted that in all his conversations with the former president, "il ne mentionnait jamais Vichy".[34] Towards the end of his second term, however, it was clear that silence would only be interpretated as guilt, so he had little to lose from a more open approach.

The damage limitation exercise was itself a limited success. Mitterrand was heavily criticised for his prior duplicity. Some of his supporters disowned him. The furore was aggravated when Mitterrand appeared on television to explain himself. He described former Vichy chief of police René Bousquet as a man of "exceptional stature", and justified the anti-Jewish laws of 1940 and 1941 by pointing out that they only affected non-French Jews. Only his staunchest allies did not desert: Jack Lang

[32] In *Une Jeunesse française* (Paris: Fayard, 1994).
[33] The word "ahuri" was used by Jean Kahn, who was an Elysée adviser at the time.
[34] *Paris-Match* special edition on Mitterrand, 18 January 1996.

praised the president for encouraging discussion of the period. The extreme right also defended Mitterrand, and complained that there was in fact no "scoop", since it had already tried to draw attention to Mitterrand's past, but that no one had taken any notice. In July 1991 the neo-fascist magazine *Le choc du mois* had published pictures of Mitterrand taking part in a xenophobic demonstration in the 1930s, but there was little reaction in political or media circles, probably because of the disreputable origin of the article.

The media, along with some "anti-establishment" historians, borrowed the language of investigative journalism when dealing with the subject of Vichy. It sometimes seemed as if the period was viewed as a massive scandal waiting to be discovered. The reality was rather different, as historians had been working away quietly for a number of years before Vichy became popular with journalists. The bulk of the facts about the period had already been revealed. Vichy was not Watergate or Rainbow Warrior: the misdeeds had not been hidden from the people by the political class. Quite simply, in the decades that followed liberation, the mass of French people, the media included, had not had any great desire to dwell on those details. Certainly, those who governed France could be accused of having been over-cautious when faced with an upsurge in public curiosity, but that is not the same as a "cover-up". As is often the case with media-led obsessions, perspective was completely lost for a time. There had never been so much candour in official attitudes to war and occupation as there was towards the end of the Mitterrand years (although that candour was of course relative). This is not to say that there was no more progress to be made. Nonetheless, improvements were largely overlooked by journalists and other opinion formers.

Belief in the existence of a law of silence was often deep-seated and passionate. Zeev Sternhell, one of the "anti-establishment" historians, was bitter in his criticism of

"l'historiographie française traditionnelle", and in particular of the eminent historian René Rémond. In response, Rémond was moved to denounce the "fable" of a taboo over Vichy, ascribing it to simple ignorance of the sterling work that French historians had accomplished on the subject. So much for professional historiography: in the public arena, according to Rémond, things were even more clear-cut: "Quant aux débats publics dans les médias, ce serait plutôt l'obsession que le refoulement."[35] In other words, it was because people genuinly *wanted* to assume their nation's past by coming to a frank knowledge of it that Vichy was such a topical subject, not because the whole of France was running scared from a few troublesome researchers.

Articles devoted to Vichy, while being published thick and fast, still ritually explained that the period was covered by an unwritten law of silence. For much of the Mitterrand presidency, one could hardly open a newspaper or magazine without being confronted by some aspect of the German occupation, much of it "revealing" details of Vichyite misdeeds. The television reviewer in *Le Monde* still insisted in 1994 that "Le sujet traité ici (the press under Vichy) est encore largement tabou aujourd'hui, tout comme le régime de Vichy lui-même".[36] The historian Rémy Desquesnes, again in 1994, was more explicit: "Ainsi s'est imposé depuis cinquante ans (. . .) une mémoire collective, version arrangée de l'histoire faisant l'impasse sur tout un tas de choses *qui ne se disent pas*".[37]

In 1995, despite the fact that Jacques Chirac had just accepted collective responsiblity for Vichy's crimes on behalf of the French nation, a remarkable 34% of French people thought, or at least felt compelled to say, that "On ne parle pas assez de

[35] *Le Monde*, 21 September 1994, 2 October 1994.
[36] *RTV*, 13-14 March 1994.
[37] In *Contemporary French Civilisation*, vol.19, n°2 (1995), p.187; my italics.

l'extermination des juifs pendant la guerre".[38] With constant repetition, the supposed cover-up had become a received idea, a self-evident truth that required no empirical back-up. It was also a neat, if facile, trope which automatically conferred "news value" on the subject treated. There would be little sense, admittedly, in a writer introducing his article by pointing out that the subject had become banal, unless he was purporting to explain why. There was a temptation to stress the negative or shocking points (which also provides a pat explanation for the alleged "cover-up": the topic was too shocking to be revealed) at the expense of a certain distance which might enable one to grasp the nuances of a complicated issue.

For instance, the deportation of people living on French territory was condoned by no one, and no one contested the basic facts about the internment and deportation camps. So in actual fact, there was not much of substance to be "exposed" about them. Yet any non-specialist who happened to glance at a typical exposé of the "camps" could be forgiven for thinking that they were concentration camps of the same nature as Auschwitz and Buchenwald. Unless explicitly informed otherwise, this is the connotation that the word "camp" has for most people in the context of World War Two. It is only in reading, watching or listening closely that one receives the information that these were deportation or internment camps, most of which had been built by the Popular Front government for refugees of the Spanish Civil War. The use made of them by Vichy was, of course, utterly unacceptable, but not quite in the same league of horror as the Nazi concentration camps. Anne Brynberg, herself the author of a book entitled *Les Camps de la Honte*, was moved to express unease at the sensationalist nature of some work on the camps and Vichy generally: "This kind of

[38] IFOP poll for *l'Evénement du jeudi*, 27 July-2 August 1995. In a similar poll in 1991 the corresponding figure had only been 20%.

exaggeration about the Vichy régime, which is in no way comparable to Hitler's Germany, is potentially dangerous", she said.[39]

One could also detect a tendency to cry scandal before seeing the evidence. In November 1991 Serge Klarsfeld claimed to have discovered, the previous month, a census of Jews living in the Paris region (the former Seine department) which had, apparently, been concealed by the authorities since the War.[40] The "revelation" caused much consternation and excitement, and appeared to constitute damning evidence of the state's role in the "cover up" of the incriminating detail of collaboration. *Le Figaro* ran with the headline "les fichiers de la honte dormaient dans un placard".

In April 1992, René Rémond was appointed at the head of a commission charged with shedding light on the affair. Rémond's interim report, made public at the end of 1992, caused a stir, but not in the way that was expected. It claimed that the controversy had been misplaced, since the *fichier* discovered by Klarsfeld was simply a list of those arrested, not the census ordered by the Germans. The file that did exist had not been concealed, and had in fact been used constantly in the administration of pensions, while the census file had been destroyed between 1948 and 1949: in other words, there had been nothing to hide for forty five years. The interim report concluded, with a hint of exasperation, that "le fichier dont la prétendue découverte a soulevé une vive émotion a été détruit, ce qui rend partiellement sans objet une partie de la controverse".[41] However, the calming of a controversy does not excite the media as much as its revelation, and the interim report received less attention than Serge Klarsfeld's initial

[39] In *The Independent on Sunday*, 3 January 1993.
[40] In August, Serge Klarsfeld had been appointed to the committee working on the attribution of the statute "mort en déportation". In this capacity he was able to consult the archives at the *ministère des Anciens combattants*.
[41] *Le Monde*, 1 January 1993.

declaration had done. By this time the press and media were more interested in the imminent presidential decree establishing a day of commemoration of Vichy's crimes.[42]

This episode highlighted the pressure the authorities were under to prove their "transparency" with respect to the war years. In the "fichiers juifs" affair, the minister for ex-servicemen Louis Mexandeau was initially taken to task by the *Commission nationale de l'informatique et des libertés* for his passivity in the face of Klarsfeld's claims. François Bédarida, notably, told the commission that "le passif de ce ministre n'invite pas à lui faire confiance".[43] Yet Mexandeau, and the *Commission* were described as "légers" by René Rémond, for having prematurely validated Klarsfeld's claim. In a climate which was hostile to any perceived concealment of facts or documents, it would have been difficult to make a sound judgement. Louis Joinet, adviser to the prime minister on human rights, and a participant in the decision-making process, admitted frankly that the pressure had affected judgement: "J'ai commis une erreur en novembre 1991 en croyant qu'il s'agissait du fichier du recensement de 1940. Nous étions pris sous le feu de diverses pressions".[44] A revealing comparison can be drawn between the reaction of the authorities in 1991 and their reaction to a similar situation in 1979. Then, a government spokesman had flatly denied that files containing

[42] According to Barcellini in *Vingtième Siècle*, n°45.
[43] Barcellini in *Vingtième Siècle*, n°45.
[44] *Le Monde*, 1 January 1993. When the commission handed in its full report, in March 1996, it did, nonetheless, make some discomfiting revelations. There were several different categories of file, which explains to some extent the confusion referred to in the main text. Some were lists of detainees from Pithiviers, Beaune-la-Rolande and Drancy, others were census files. There were two main types of file. The first type was an index built up from arrests and raids; the second type, used in the Paris region, was more sinister. It was a list of families that was used to track Jews.
It transpired, also, that prefects were still ordering files to be created or updated after June 1944. René Carmille, head of Vichy's demographic service, was obsessed by improving data processing. In 1941 he had devised a method of coding national identity cards in order to keep track of Jews.
Conscious of the report's potential impact on the national conscience in the present and for the future, its authors also made some significant recommendations: that the documents be given a special place in the Archives Nationales, that some of the indexes should be displayed at the Memorial to the Unknown Jewish Martyr, and that microfilm copies should be housed in the Centre de documentation juive contemporaine.

references to racial origin existed, and the matter was not pursued. By the 1990s the climate no longer permitted such a peremptory response.[45]

The state under pressure

During the controversy surrounding the Vél' d'hiv' anniversary and the responsibility of the French state, the pressure brought to bear on the French authorities was at its height. Again, the press and media played a prominent role. It was *Le Monde* which, in June 1992, had carried the petition that had started the whole affair. On the whole they were unsparing of Vichy and also of Mitterrand, who was refusing an official avowal of culpability (details in chapter four). One of the more hard-hitting cartoons in *Le Monde* depicted the president sweeping a piece of paper marked "Vichy" under a tomb-like memorial to the Vél' d'Hiv' victims.[46] The evening news programme on *Antenne 2*, reporting on the Vél' d'hiv' commemoration of 16 July 1992, referred frankly to the "antisémitisme" of the Vichy régime, and showed footage of a rally held at the velodrome in 1941 in which a speaker, denouncing Jews in violent terms, was applauded by a huge crowd. In direct contrast, the judges who, three months previously, had dismissed the case against Paul Touvier, had based their judgement on the interpretation that Vichy was not invested with "une idéologie précise", that is to say that it was not essentially or coherently antisemitic.[47]

The temptation to tar Vichy with the same brush as Nazi Germany, criticised by Anne Brynberg (above, p.244) was again present in the attacks on the authorities. The "Vél' d'Hiv' '42" committee, authors of the June petition, accused the State of being

[45] *The Observer*, 7 July 1996.
[46] 18 July 1992.
[47] *Le Figaro*, 15 April 1992.

"deaf as well as dumb", and claimed that an official declaration need not be seen as an attack on the Republic. After all, "personne n'a pensé que le geste de Willy Brandt s'agenouillant à Auschwitz (in fact it was at the former Jewish ghetto in Warsaw) était dirigé contre la République de Weimar ni contre la République fédérale".[48] Evidently there were those in France who hoped for an equivalent moment of collective contrition: the Vél' d'hiv' committee, in its response to Mitterrand's speech on the 14 July, reiterated its wish for "un acte politique engageant la nation toute entière". To compare Vichy France to Nazi Germany was to enter into extremely dangerous territory, but it seemed at the time that this was the direction that the most vocal critics had chosen to take. The preoccupation with the antisemitic aspects of the Vichy régime, and the clamour for a grand gesture of remorse, left little room for a distinction between the *Etat français* and the Third Reich. Yet it was partly because the distinction between the *Etat français* and the Third Reich seemed to be blurring that Mitterrand was wary about giving the wrong impression to the outside world. A high profile official gesture may have been construed as an implicit admission that France was just as guilty as Germany.

One can identify a phenomenon of "over-correction" in relation to war and occupation, whereby the minimisations of the past became exaggerations in retrospect. Again, the phenomenon was particularly noticeable in the press and media. One of the most noteworthy examples was the nationality of the Jews who were rounded up for deportation from France. For the record, 52 000 of the 76 000 Jewish deportees were not French citizens.[49] But, either by error or deliberate omission, many accounts gave to believe that Jews who were French citizens were treated in the same way as those who were not. An *Envoyé spécial* documentary on the internment camp at Drancy reported

[48] *Le Monde*, 16 July 1992.
[49] *Le Monde*, 6 July 1996; also Peschanski, p.76. Of the Jewish victims of French nationality, approximately 8 000 were born in France of non-French parents, and another 8 000 were naturalised French.

that, in 1941, "70 000 *Français* sont arrêtés par la police". The narrator also described Drancy as "un camp (. . .) qu'on remplissait de Français parce qu'ils étaient juifs". Yet elsewhere in the programme the more accurate term "Juifs déportés de France" was employed.[50] Similarly, a reader's letter published in *Le Monde* on 13 July 1992 protested against a previous correspondent's implication that Vichy had not persecuted French citizens who were Jews. In the letter it was claimed, falsely, that "les milliers de victimes de la rafle du Vél' d'hiv'" were French.

In fact, most of the arrested Jews were recent immigrants, fleeing persecution in Eastern Europe. However, overlooking this fact took the shock factor up a notch: to deport one's fellow citizens is even more appalling than to deport "foreigners". Or perhaps these commentators considered that it would be offensive to differentiate between two grades of such an awful crime, given that deportees all ended up in the same hellish predicament; perhaps the accumulation of years of fascination with Vichy's antisemitic policies led them simply to assume that French Jews were targeted in the same way and to the same extent as non-French Jews. After all, even the deportation memorial on the Ile de la Cité is dedicated to the "deux cents mille martyrs *français* morts dans les camps de la déportation".[51]

Whatever the reason, confusion had installed itself by 1992 to a much greater extent than a decade earlier: *Le Monde* of 14 July 1982 immediately made reference to "la grande rafle des juifs *étrangers ou apatrides*".[52] These terms are reiterated several times on the first page. What is more, the article affirms that there were instructions given that any children born in France were to be left alone. Whether or not these instructions were properly executed, they confirm that there was some sort of attempt to

[50] 'Drancy, la honte', broadcast on 6 October 1994 on *France 2*.
[51] My italics.
[52] My italics.

privilege French citizenship over racial origin. By 1992, such details (which do not excuse anything, but simply reveal more of the truth) seemed to have gone out of circulation altogether.

There was also a minor polemic over the alleged omission of the Vél' d'hiv' episode in a dictionary of street names. Again the normally meticulous *Le Monde* lost sight of the facts, which led it into a double error.[53] Initially the newspaper had accused Jacques Hillairet, author of the *Dictionnaire historique des rues de Paris*,[54] of having deliberately failed to mention the *rafle* in the appropriate section. When it was pointed out that it was in fact included in the supplement, *Le Monde* published a corrigendum in which it nonetheless regretted that some bookshops did not offer the supplement with the dictionary. Once again the head of *Editions de Minuit* was obliged to write, this time to say that the supplement was contained within the main body of the dictionary! *Le Monde* finally admitted that it had been wrong on both counts.

These examples point to the existence of a kind of neurosis which transformed necessary vigilance against complacency into indiscriminate suspicion. It was assumed, until proven otherwise, that everyone speaking or acting in an official capacity was implicated in the "cover-up". But there was no evidence of a cover-up in any strict sense of the term.

Not surprisingly, complaints about the excesses of the media were extremely common among the different *acteurs de mémoire* of World War Two. A recurring theme was the alleged obsession with unearthing the scandalous and the sensational, to the detriment of more nuanced or more positive elements. A study of the *monde combattant* for the ex-servicemen's ministry, carried out in 1991, referred to an article in *Le Grand Invalide*, the newsletter for the war-wounded, "qui s'insurge contre la

[53] 17 July 1992.
[54] Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1992.

recherche scandaleuse du sensationnel qui semble prévaloir, chez les journalistes, sur le souci objectif d'informer".[55] M. Girard, president of the FNPG,[56] told me that he had no desire to talk to the press: "les journalistes," he said, "cela ne nous intéresse pas".[57] Paul Thibaud saw the media as a pernicious influence, in that it had granted itself the right to narrate and interpret, taking over from those with first hand experience. For Thibaud, Thierry Wolton's "revelations" about Jean Moulin were an example of these phenomena: "L'opération Moulin-KGB est en phase avec le pseudo-moraliste niveleur de valeurs, démagogique, prétentieux que *le post-totalitarisme médiatisé* produit et reproduit parce que c'est l'idéologie immanente des animateurs de télé, procureurs universels manipulant des jurys de lycéens".[58] Elysée counsellor Jean Kahn has expressed similar views, and has made it clear that François Mitterrand shared his disenchantment with the press and media.

Interestingly, Jewish groups did not appear to share that disillusionment, which suggests that they had largely succeeded in imposing their agenda. CRIF[59] president Jean Kahn, speaking on *France 3* in July 1993,[60] praised the media warmly, saying that "ils font un travail que je qualifie de remarquable" with regard to the activities of Vichy. Jewish memorial activist Henry Bulawko also told me that he was happy with the work done by the press and the media.

[55] Jean Kahn's archives.
[56] *Fédération nationale des prisonniers de guerre.*
[57] Interview of 26 March 1999.
[58] *Esprit* n°198 (January-April 1994).
[59] *Conseil représentatif des institutions juives de France.*
[60] Late evening news, 16 July.

Who transmits memory?

On the whole, whatever happened to collective memory during our period had little to do with deliberate government policy. The "Big Bang" of the 1970s had opened up an appreciable gap between "official" memory and a plethora of "mémoires souterraines",[61] all clamouring for attention. And it is clear that, in any modern democracy, the state does not have a monopoly of intervention in the domain of commemoration and collective memory. As we have seen, there are forces at work - notably the media - which are much more influential than a governmental department could ever be.

Throughout most of the history of the French Republic, the state had had an exceptionally privileged access route to the hearts and minds of its members. But by the Mitterrand years this was no longer the case, and the state had little influence on the contents of the collective conscience. Often it merely reacted, at times half-heartedly, at times more decisively, to something that was outwith its control. In many instances it could only "officialise" what was already done. The new commemoration of the Vichy government's "racist and antisemitic crimes and persecutions", decreed in February 1993, is a good example. Serge Barcellini, former head of the *Délégation à la mémoire et à l'information historique*, described the new ceremony as "une prise en compte officielle" of something that was commonly accepted anyway. The role of the official bodies was to belatedly accord its approval.

That said, official approval still carried some weight. In claiming that "la mémoire collective française est malade de ce non-dit" (i.e. Mitterrand's refusal to accept responsibility on behalf of France) the signatories of the petition in *Le Monde* in July 1992 were admitting that collective memory craved some sort of official backing. The implication was that there existed a deficit in the collective memory of a people that

could be made good by a declaration from an elected representative. Collective memory was imagined as a kind of virtual bank account into which the authorities could make top-up payments when necessary. These top-up payments took the form of additional commemorative ceremonies, recognition of historical events, official apologies for past deeds, and so on.

However, the relationship between official history and collective memory is at best complex, at worst unfathomable; it is difficult to discern a general pattern, each case apparently working according to its own dynamic. Collective consciousness reacts to and influences the state that frames it, and the state reacts to and influences collective consciousness, while both react separately to outside factors. Similarly, it is difficult to gauge to what extent the intellectuals who felt moved to sign the petition, and speak on behalf of "la mémoire collective française" were representative of France as a whole. It would perhaps be helpful to borrow Denis Peschanski's notion of "le grand public éclairé" - designating those people who have a relatively high level of education, who read books, who are interested in history, politics and current affairs – when we use the epithet "collective" with regard to our topic.[62] Reading newspapers like *Le Monde*, one is liable to come away with the false impression that such issues captivate the nation, when in fact most people are indifferent or mildly baffled. Mitterrand's 1993 decree and Chirac's declaration in 1995 were welcomed on the whole, but they hardly constituted a panacea for the collective psyche, as the petitionists seemed to expect.

Nevertheless the French state has implicitly acknowledged that there *is* a meaningful relationship between official memory and collective memory. It is one of the few democratic nations to have built up a centralised body to coordinate

[61] Luc Rosenzweig in *Le Monde*, 15 September 1994.
[62] 1997, p.10

remembrance and commemoration of war. Since 1920 the *Ministre des Anciens combattants et Victimes de guerre* has incorporated some sort of service dealing with the memory of conflicts in which France participated. At first the provision was minimal, its remit covering only "Etat civil et sépultures".[63] Then, in 1946, a *Comité du souvenir et des manifestations nationales* was established. In the aftermath of the Second World War, it was accepted that memory and commemorations ought to be organised at ministerial level.

In 1981, the arrival of the socialists and communists heralded another reorganisation within the ministry. The new government created the *Commission de l'information historique pour la paix* in 1982. The director, Serge Barcellini, led a team of six people, and his mission was primarily pedagogical. In 1983 the body was renamed *Direction des statuts et de l'information historique*, and by 1984 it employed 180 people. However the change of majority after the 1986 general elections led to a severe reduction in the service, and yet another change of designation: now it was called the *Mission permanente aux commémorations et à l'information historique*, and had a much reduced staff of twenty. It was enlarged again in 1988, and given back responsibility for war cemeteries and official statutes (*états civils*). Finally, in March 1992, all the services connected with memory and commemoration were brought together in a *Délégation à la mémoire et à l'information historique*.

Now the four prerequisites for a comprehensive memorial policy[64] were in place as part of the same structure: to the original patrimonial component, the sepultures service, had been added a ceremonial element, the *Comité du souvenir et des*

[63] Tombs were the first state "politique de mémoire" to be democratised. After the Crimean War of 1854-55 it was decided that ordinary soldiers, and not just officers, were worthy of proper burial, and this was taken in hand by the state.

[64] As formulated by Serge Barcellini in, for example, *Les Chemins de la Mémoire* n°18 (April 1992). He sometimes (eg. *Les Chemins* n°16 February 1992) referred to a fifth, "savant" component, related to conferences, archives, etc.

manifestations nationales. The last two prerequisites, education (or "pedagogy") and vigilance (lest the same thing happen again), were explicitly covered by the *Commission de l'information historique pour la paix* which, as the name suggests, was charged with the paradoxical task of promoting peace through propagating information about war. As we saw in chapter six, this two-pronged approach, combining pedagogy and vigilance, had become the dominant one by the 1980s.

Far from being coy about its role as organiser of national memory, this branch of the French government was proud of its capacity for intervention. There was an implicit recognition at the start of a new decade (the 1980s) and a new political era, that French people had become fascinated by certain aspects of their own past, and that the state would have to deal with that fascination. In his forward to *Les Chemins de la mémoire* of October 1991, Serge Barcellini recognised that "les batailles de la mémoire sont à l'ordre du jour". The implication was not that this situation was to be regretted, but that it required an even more committed mobilisation on the part of the official bodies, and a recognition of the significance of commemoration. Barcellini confirmed that development also: "la journée nationale commémorative" became "le principal *outil* dont se sert le gouvernement pour intervenir dans le domaine de la politique de mémoire".[65] Thus commemoration was treated as a "tool" at the disposal of the government for furthering its ends. Fortunately, the reality of this is less sinister than it sounds, because in a democracy the ends of the government are, broadly speaking, those of the citizens. If they do not like the way in which the "tool" is being used, they are free to express their disapproval.

Serge Barcellini, head of the *Mission permanente* which was about to become the *Délégation*,[66] pursued the "tool" metaphor when he wrote in *Les Chemins* that the new

[65] *Vingtième Siècle* n° 45; my italics.
[66] Serge Barcellini had been head of the *Commission*, then the *Mission*, and finally the *Délégation*.

structure meant that, from then on, "l'Etat dispose d'un véritable outil au service de sa politique (de mémoire)". The *Délégation* would henceforth be equipped to "participer pleinement à la mise en œuvre de cette grande politique de mémoire dont la France a besoin".[67] In an interview in 1993, Barcellini was unequivocal about the relationship between the *Délégation* and the state: "La Délégation, c'est l'Etat (. . .) Quand elle organise une commémoration Jean Moulin, c'est l'Etat qui commémore Jean Moulin."[68]

So the philosophy of the state memorial services under Barcellini was voluntarist, in so far as voluntarism was still possible: the state could and should take a proactive role in shaping the memory of its citizens, especially where that memory included a momentous, consequential conflict like the Second World War. Barcellini was probably right to believe that a well-organised and energetic state body could have some influence. In 1983 his service issued a circular proclaiming the "année Jean Moulin" which encouraged local and regional authorities, educational establishments and other vectors of memory to commemorate the occasion as fully as possible. One of the suggested methods of doing so was to rename streets after the Resistance hero. The idea was taken up by a large number of municipalities, and by the end of the year there were hundreds more *rues*, *allées* and *voies Jean Moulin* than there had been the previous year.[69]

The role of the state, then, was to suggest, sponsor and coordinate, but not to enforce. Barcellini has admitted as much.[70] In spite of the *Délégation*'s desire to be as proactive as possible, he did not conceive of the official bodies as dictatorial in nature. The memorial policy adopted in 1982 had always sought to be open and pluralistic, he claimed. "La Mémoire des guerres et conflits contemporains est pluraliste et ouverte. Ce

[67] n°18 (April 1992); my parentheses.
[68] Raimond, 'Un exemple de politique publique de la mémoire: la délégation à la mémoire et à l'information historique', p.7.
[69] Raimond, p.86.

sont cette pluralité et cette ouverture qui assurent les fondements de la nation française".[71] In 1981, the relevant ministerial department was liaising only with the French Ex-Servicemen's Association. By 1993, links had been forged with a whole range of concerned parties, including history teachers, museums, libraries, and diverse "associations de mémoire".

The diversity extended to the type of commemorative activity that was covered in *Les Chemins*. No longer was official commemoration synonymous with a wreath at a cenotaph. It had become extremely eclectic, and traditional ceremonies were featured alongside stamp collecting and sporting events. However, the very fact that there was a ministerial department with a coherent policy and structure framing all the diversity suggested that this was not a completely "laissez-faire" set-up. Presumably pluralism ended where the founding ethos began. War "memory" and "historical information" were still conceived of as national matters, in which the nation-state could and should have some input.

And for all its heterogeneity, the canon of commemorative events admitted to the pages of *Les Chemins* remained fairly "safe". Pierre-François Raimond, having analysed the content of the newsletter from September 1990 to June 1993, found that the memory of Resistance and Liberation dominated all others when it came to World War Two. He divided the articles into forty-eight specific categories, and calculated the number of articles for each category. He also categorised events according to whether they were financed and organised completely by the *Délégation* (or its predecessors), whether they were financed and organised in partnership with someone else, whether there was a state representative present at the ceremony, or whether there was simply a mention of it in *Les Chemins*. The most popular theme was found to be "Résistance", with ninety nine

[70] Interview of 6 May 1999.

mentions; then came "Résistants Martyrs", with eighty six, followed by "Libération", mentioned in sixty five articles. In contrast, the headings "8 mai capitulation", "collaborateurs", "Vichy" and "camps en France" received, respectively, fourteen, three, ten and fourteen mentions. There was no official presence at any of the events in the last four categories, whereas a representative of the state was dispatched on six occasions to events from the first three categories. In fact there were more articles (five) devoted to the memory of French Resistance against the Japanese in Indochina than there were on collaborators (three).

This seems entirely in accordance with Barcellini's strategy of trying to salvage as much national self-esteem as possible from World War Two. Anticipating the momentous but delicate fiftieth anniversary year of 1990, his department had issued a *fiche de pilotage* which outlined the major themes and events for the year to come. Under the heading, "le sens des commémorations du cinquantième anniversaire" was the entry, "Un fil conducteur - la Résistance à l'ennemi". This despite the fact that dry, objective history would not view French resistance to the enemy as the leitmotiv of that year. In the same *fiche de pilotage* we notice that collective memory is regarded as imperfect and improvable. The French soldiers who fought in the failed campaigns of 1940 deserved more recognition: "commémorer la Bataille de France c'est d'abord rendre hommage aux combattants de '40 qui méritent mieux que l'image inscrite dans notre mémoire collective".[72]

To redress the balance to some extent, it should be noted that there was a respectable number of references (forty-five) to commemorations relating to the deportation of Jews from France. Also, in 1991 the *Délégation* supported a cassette and book package entitled *1942 – Vichy, l'antisémitisme d'Etat*; and in March 1993 the text

[71] n°16, February 1992. For reasons that remain obscure, the word "mémoire" was usually given a capital *M* in *Les Chemins*.

of the decree establishing the day of commemoration of the "racist and antisemitic crimes and persecutions" of the *Etat français* was reproduced in *Les Chemins*.

Yet Barcellini was concerned at the penchant for Vichy-related scandal that animated the media – now "l'acteur de mémoire privilégié"[73] - and some sections of public opinion, and felt that there was a need for an antidote, in the form of a more considered and sober, perhaps even patriotic, approach. In his foreword to *Les Chemins* of December 1991, he complained that collective memory was at the mercy of media scandal-mongering, and that, in consequence, "on a tendance à oublier tout ce qui n'est pas affaire, à omettre la part non scandaleuse de la mémoire".

Although Barcellini was a socialist, he had a surprisingly Gaullian conception of war commemoration.[74] While he recognised its validity in certain contexts, he believed that the "focalisation" around Vichy would pose a problem as soon as "Vichy devient supérieur à Londres".[75] That predicament, he added, was not far away. He also questioned the wisdom of the new commemoration of Vichy's "racist and antisemitic persecutions", held for the first time in July 1993.

While it has a duty to serve its citizens, the state also has a duty not to jump on any bandwagons that happen to be passing. One of these bandwagons, in Barcellini's estimation, was that of human rights, which had made a "très forte poussée" since at least 1982.[76] He included under this heading a specifically Jewish memory, which was "en plein développement" at the time, and to which he was unwilling to give an impression of "surdimensionnement".[77] Barcellini did not share the resolutely "droit-de-

[72] Jean Kahn's archives.
[73] Raimond, p.86.
[74] Raimond, p.84.
[75] Raimond, p.86.
[76] Raimond, p.86.
[77] Raimond, p.86.

l'hommiste" sensibility of the ex-servicemen's minister under whom he worked initially, Jean Laurain. He admitted that he deliberately sought out material for *Les Chemins* that did not square with the predominant human rights philosophy.[78] In particular he went to visit associations representing "le monde combattant" to encourage them to find ways of passing on the memory of their experience of the war years.

For Barcellini, the putative universalism of the human rights discourse had no place in a national ministry for ex-servicemen. "La mémoire des guerres, c'est d'abord une mémoire de *l'identité nationale*", he declared. In wartime, continued Barcellini, "on est mort pour la France. On n'est pas mort pour l'humanité. On n'est pas mort pour sa commune."[79] Strictly speaking, of course, this is true. Yet it ignores the wider issues at stake in conflicts between nations, particularly since the Second World War. Allied propaganda notwithstanding, it is surely useful to see that war in terms of an immense battle for freedom, democracy and tolerance, as well as a fight between nation states for territory and power. Thus we return to a recurring problem: in remembering World War Two, people feel compelled to make a choice between these two interpretative templates. One is either for a national approach or a universalist approach, when in fact both are not just valid but necessary.

The commemorative arm of the ex-servicemen's ministry had to try to find a compromise between these approaches. It also had to try to strike a balance between the general and the particular, that is to say between an over-arching national memory and its various subdivisions. In 1990 the *Mission permanente* placed an advertisement in *L'Histoire* drawing attention to its function as an "outil de mémoire".[80] The text outlined

[78] Raimond, p.86.
[79] Raimond, p.86. The practice of introducing "mort pour la France" to the *état civil* of those concerned started during the First World War, by a law of 2 July 1915, modified by that of 28 February 1922. (Barcellini and Wieviorka 1995 p.11) This second law served as the legal basis for the inscription of "morts pour la France" on war monuments.
[80] n° 129 (January 1990).

the *Mission*'s objectives in conserving the memory of war. On the one hand there was a "volonté de rassemblement", which would unite disparate memories around "les temps forts de leur histoire nationale"; on the other hand, ran the text, "la mémoire des guerres et conflits contemporains favorise l'expression des mémoires particulières: mémoire juive, arménienne, africaine, harki." There was also the European element to be added to the mixture: "la mémoire des guerres et conflits contemporains est un des fondements de la Mémoire de l'Europe". It is not always clear how this compromise can work itself out in practice, however. Either the experience of a group is remembered in its specificity, or some of that specificity is sacrificed in order to enable a wider public to participate. As we have seen throughout this study, this often gives rise to tensions between different groups, each firmly defending its own memorial territory.

However, by 1993 Barcellini had been succeeded at the *Délégation* by Roger Jouet, who did not share his misgivings about the prevalent human rights discourse. Jouet believed that it was essential that the ideals of human rights, European integration, and peace, be linked to the commemoration of war.[81] Interestingly, under Jouet, the logo of the *Délégation* was changed from a militaristic symbol - a soldier's helmet cut through by blue, white and red stripes - to something more civilian-friendly - four faces in profile, also in white, blue, white and red.

La paix civile

Ultimately, representatives of the state are obliged to consider the cohesiveness of that state. Serge Barcellini confirmed this when he said that certain aspects of the past are "difficile à manier pour des hommes dont une des tâches fondamentales est de

[81] Raimond, p.86.

préserver l'unité de la nation".[82] In this respect the ex-servicemen's ministry and the Elysée were at one. The main difference in approach was that François Mitterrand was prepared to forget about certain aspects of the nation's past in order to preserve unity, whereas, for a government department whose *raison d'être* was the transmission of memory, forgetting was not an option. According to Jean-Pierre Elkabbach, who interviewed Mitterrand on television in September 1994, the president "estime avoir pour charge de maintenir la paix civile entre les Français, et que cette paix passe par *l'oubli du passé*".[83]

One of the president's key roles is that of guarantor of national unity, and he must think carefully before doing or saying anything that may jeapordise it. Mitterrand acknowledged this as early as 1982 when he said that "le Président de la République française ne peut pas avoir d'autre passion que celle de l'unité nationale".[84] Simplified accounts of the Mitterrand presidency give the impression that these early years were entirely devoted to the socialist experiment, and that little thought was given to national unity. The above declaration suggests, on the contrary, that Mitterrand always knew where his duty lay. That said, he had been manifestly more sensitive to this aspect of his position since the divisive ideological confrontations of the early 1980s, and had re-invented himself as a supra-political figure in time for the 1988 presidential elections. During the election campaign he had devoted the last three pages of his "lettre à tous les Français" to what *Le Monde* termed "son souci primordial – la paix civile".[85]

So there were times when, in the interests of national prestige or harmony, the Elysée seemed intent on stalling the commemorative initiatives that came from the ex-

[82] Raimond, p.49.
[83] Teyssier, p.518; my italics.
[84] Speech at Guéret (Limousin) town hall, 3 May 1982.
[85] 8 April 1988. Among Mitterrand's other conciliatory declarations at this time were: "Nous ne sommes pas les 'bons', ils ne sont pas les 'méchants'" (speech at Rennes, 8 April 1988); "Je veux que la France soit unie et elle ne le sera pas si elle est prise en main par des esprits intolérants, pas des partis qui veulent tout, par des clans ou par des bandes" (declaration of candidature on *Antenne 2*, 22 March 1988).

servicemen's ministry. It was inevitable that the Elysée would not support all the projects proposed by its ministry, particularly when that ministry's "clients", the ex-servicemen, were clamouring for commemorative attention. Former Elysée adviser Jean Kahn has dossiers packed full of letters from associations of former soldiers, resisters, deportees, internees, prisoners of war, and others, requesting some form of presidential benediction for their commemorative ceremonies. This was the case with regard to the anniversary of the defeat of 1940, for instance. As we saw in chapter five (p.169), the president was unwilling to dwell on what was, for him and many others, a painful memory.

Serge Barcellini has said that Mitterrand seemed more reluctant to back the ministry's initiatives during his second *septennat* than he had been before re-election. The president undoubtedly felt that the glut of unavoidable anniversaries, coupled with a growing public interest in certain aspects of the past, would give him enough to do. In November 1991 Elysée counsellor Jean Kahn wrote a disapproving note to the president in which he reported that "depuis deux ou trois ans, le secrétariat d'Etat aux anciens combattants tente d'endiguer une frénésie muséographique".[86]

When the controversy surrounding the "Vél' d'hiv'" anniversary broke in 1992, it raised the question of whether the president's obligation towards national unity made it impossible for him to "inculper son pays" by recognising collective guilt for past misdeeds.[87] Mitterrand's reasoning, like that of his predecessors, was that national reconciliation was the priority, and that rattling old skeletons would benefit no one. For Mitterrand, French history was a potentially inexhaustible source of schism, and had to be handled with care:

[86] Note of 27 November 1991. Jean Kahn's archives.
[87] André Frossard in *Le Figaro*, 1 July 1992.

> mon point de vue depuis de longues années, c'est qu'il faut tenter de mettre un terme à la guerre civile permanente entre Français; que si l'on prend tous les éléments de l'histoire où les Français se sont déchirés, si l'on n'essaie pas d'y mettre un terme, on ne se conduit pas comme il faut par rapport à la France.[88]

This recalled Pompidou's statement justifying the pardon for Paul Touvier in 1972. He had said that it was time to "jeter le voile" and forget the years when "les Français s'entre-déchiraient et s'entre-tuaient". It also echoed the view of Georges Kiejman, former Under-Secretary of State for Justice, who declared in October 1990 that "Au-delà de la nécessaire lutte contre l'oubli, il peut paraître important de préserver la paix civile".[89] Mitterrand himself professed to see no conflict between truthful memory and national unity, but had a clear sense of what he saw as a presidential duty. Defending his record against his detractors he exclaimed: "Que me veut-on? La mémoire doit rester fidèle et j'ai tout fait pour la servir. Serait-il honteux de servir aussi l'unité nationale? A chacun son devoir."[90] In the same interview he defended statements he had made in an 1991 interview, in which he had expressed discomfiture over the prospect of French people being tried for war crimes, and had admitted trying to slow down legal proceedings against René Bousquet. Alluding to the period of occupation and collaboration, he had said, "on ne peut pas vivre éternellement sur ces choses-là".[91]

In spite of its undoubted fascination with the more sombre aspects of the war years, the public seldom failed to approve of appeals for national harmony. A *Sofres* survey in 1995 asked whether "il faut condamner le régime de Vichy et continuer d'en parler pour ne pas oublier" or whether "il faut tourner la page au nom de la

[88] Quoted by Nathan Bracher in 'Mitterrand and the lessons of history', in *Contemporary French Civilisation*, vol.19, n°2 (1995).
[89] *Esprit*, May 1992, p.6.
[90] *Le Progrès de Lyon*, 23 April 1994.
[91] Olivier Wieviorka, *Nous entrons dans la carrière* (Paris: Seuil, 1993).

réconciliation nationale". 45% of respondants said that "il faut condamner", while 48% thought that "il faut tourner la page".[92] Already in September 1994 an IPSOS poll had found that 61% of French people approved François Mitterrand's preoccupation with national reconciliation, which, in a series of television appearances, he had offered as an excuse for concealing his flirtations with the extreme right and Vichy.[93] These tendencies led some commentators to conclude that public opinion was returning to its former indulgent stance towards Vichy, perhaps a sign that saturation point had been reached. Denis Peschanski even detected a rehabilitation of the good Vichy/ bad Vichy approach theorised by Robert Aron in the 1950s.[94] These ideas, he claimed, had seen "un regain de faveur dans le milieu savant au début des années 1990"; he made explicit reference to Henry Rousso. However, there is a distinct lack of evidence to support this affirmation.

What people really wanted, it seemed, was to deal with their past without tearing the social fabric apart. In April 1994 76% of those polled by IFOP said that French people accused of crimes against humanity "doivent être jugés".[95] However, the second half of the prompt was "sans que cela nuise à la réconciliation nationale". It is an offer few would refuse. A real test of the public will to try alleged war criminals whatever the cost would have replaced this with "*même si* cela nuit à la réconciliation nationale".

The value of this argument was diminished to some extent by its ubiquity. "National unity" and "social peace", like "freedom" and "democracy", are things that everyone supports, because everyone has a different conception of what they mean. Those far out on the political right, for instance, were strongly in favour of national reconciliation - as long as it meant forgiving acts of wartime collaboration. The theme

[92] *Sofres*, 1995, p.45. This disillusionment continued through to Maurice Papon's trial in 1997, which was plagued by uncertainty over its validity and usefulness.
[93] *IPSOS* for *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 29 September 1994.
[94] 1997, p.10.

of the sixth annual "Université" held by the right-wing *Club de l'Horloge* was "la seconde guerre mondiale est-elle terminée?" In the introductory pamphlet, the tone was set to the affirmative: "le moment est venu de dépasser les fractures de notre histoire pour refaire l'unité de la nation française".[96] Everyone was in favour of unity, but only on their terms.

Moreover, there was a danger that the vigorous and free debate that defines democracy might be stifled from above if every contentious claim was deemed "divisive". There is an extremely fine line to be drawn between healthy discussion and destructive division. At the *Club de l'Horloge* conference referred to above, speakers openly advocated selective memory in order to avoid recrimination. M. Leroy insisted that "la mémoire de la guerre peut et doit être celle de tous les Français, réconciliés dans le souvenir des heures glorieuses et des souffrances partagées". This sounds magnanimous, but, in practice, it would involve undoing a rather different process of reconciliation that had been going on since the 1970s: that of the French with a more self-critical version of their wartime activities. It is doubtful whether M. Leroy's conception of national harmony would have had room for the trial of Paul Touvier, the Vél' d'hiv' ceremonies, the enquiry into the "fichiers juifs", or, later, the Matteoli Commission.[97]

---

[95] IFOP poll in *Le Journal du dimanche*, 24 April 1994

[96] Held in Nice in 1990; reported in *Le Monde*, 10 October 1990.

[97] Set up in 1997 by Alain Juppé in order to establish the whereabouts and ownership of goods allegedly stolen from Jewish families by the Nazis.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION: THE DEREGULATION OF REMEMBRANCE

Clearly, the relationship between commemoration, collective memory and collective identity with regard to the war years did not become any simpler during our period. Nonetheless, it is possible to arrive at a number of conclusions, the first of which is that, on one level, commemoration carried out the same function in 1995 as it had always done: it united people in belief in a glorious past. To paraphrase Henri Amouroux, commemoration not only encourages unity, it presupposes it. The great national myths, principally de Gaulle's 18 June rallying call, the Resistance, and liberation, were still a force, albeit a diminished one. One has to bear that in mind in dealing with all the changes that occurred.

However, it is also clear that these changes did indeed occur. For one thing, the great national myths had to face up to serious scrutiny for the first time since the 1950s. They may not have been banished completely, but they were certainly no longer looked at in the same way. In fact they were regarded precisely as myths, which suited certain purposes but which could not be believed in as gospel truth. The reality of a civil war in which Frenchman fought against Frenchman had begun to supplant that of *la France résistante*; indeed the *guerre franco-française*, a term first coined in the 1960s, was itself beginning to take on the allure of a national myth.

As part of this reconstruction of collective memory, collective identity was also revised. By the end of our period, "la France" meant something different, for most people, than it had fourteen years earlier. Formerly "la France", when it was invoked in commemorative discourse, was an ideal as much as a geo-political space. The dominant notion of Frenchness simply excluded any aspects - such as Vichy - that did not fit in

with the ideal. For de Gaulle and many of his generation, "la vraie France" was "la France résistante", or to be more precise, "la France combattante". There was no room for collaborationist or *attentiste* France in that self-definition.

But in 1995 Jacques Chirac provided the symbolic flourish for a *fait accompli* when he declared that it was in fact "la France" which had persecuted Jews during the Occupation. It was the culmination of a process that had been intimately tied up with commemoration. Much of the pressure to admit that Vichy was France's business was focused on the ceremonies marking the anniversaries of the mass arrests at the Vél' d'hiv', and the fiftieth anniversary, in 1992, can be seen as a turning point. François Mitterrand refused to say that France was implicated, but he must have realised that, sooner or later, someone in his position would have to.

One of the problems for Mitterrand and others of his generation was that they were used to thinking in terms of "*la* France", when in fact it was perhaps more appropriate to think of "*les* France". This was a sensitive subject, because, in the aftermath of a conflict in which the nation had been divided and conquered, the priority had been to re-establish the Republic as the "one and indivisible" entity it was supposed to be. Paradoxically, as the serious threats to the nation's unity retreated into the past, fewer people saw the need to safeguard that unity at all costs.

Therefore when individuals defined themselves with reference to a group, they were less likely to turn to the nation-state. Jewish deportees, for example, started to define themselves as Jewish, rather than French deportees. Not only did this impinge on "le mythe de l'unicité de la déportation",[1] it meant that France could not perpetuate an interpretation according to which it was the victim and Germany the aggressor. The fact had to be faced that Jewish people were deported and murdered not because of their Frenchness but because of their Jewishness. At the same time, other minority groups

took the opportunity to make their voice heard, and to construct for themselves a specific collective memory. It has to be said, too, that the people who governed the country were by no means unanimously hostile to these developments. In any case, the effect of all this was to undermine the capacity of the nation to remember as a nation rather than a collection of disparate groupings.

Another development that occurred during our period had to do with the lessons drawn from the war and occupation. If we accept that one of the objectives in remembering the past is to apply it to the present, then the "lessons learned" will necessarily change according to the needs and preoccupations of that present. Hence the prevalent commemorative theme of human rights and universal values, which displaced a discourse that placed great value on national integrity and national heroism. Again, one might observe that this switch of emphasis took place at a time when there was no real external threat to territorial integrity. That could be taken for granted, and indeed sovereignty could even be voluntarily dissolved within European institutions. Commemoration of war was necessarily revised in the light of the new context.

Finally, we saw during our period a change in the balance of commemorative power within France. The state was no longer in a position to dictate the play, and this was largely due to the new-found power and independence of the press and, especially, the televised media. The Vél' d'hiv' affair, like that of the *fichiers juifs* or the transit camps, demonstrated that the media were determined to ask difficult questions about the nation's past. It is easy to forget how docile the media had been before the 1980s and 1990s, and the sudden penchant for investigative style journalism.

Of course, the French state being what it is, it did not simply hand over the keys to national memory to pressure groups and journalists. The state's department for war commemoration actually grew considerably during our period, although this was largely

[1] Rita Thalmann, interview of 3 June 1999. Also quoted p.150.

a consequence of the increasing public fascination with the nation's recent past, and an attempt to bring a degree of order to the multitude of commemorative initiatives.

The *Délégation à la mémoire et à l'information historique*, under the direction of Serge Barcellini, tried as far as possible to be voluntarist in its approach, and often acted as an antedote to media hype. Yet Barcellini himself admitted that the state's role was often simply to officially approve or disapprove of what had already happened.

In short, the commemorative market had been opened to competition, and the central state authorities could no longer regulate as they once had. The system of dealing with collective memory, if not quite *laissez-faire*, was no longer as *dirigiste* as it once had been. This in turn had produced a new version of the national memory of war and occupation, as manifested by commemorative practice and discourse. The new version was, in comparison to its precursors, sceptical, self-critical and fragmented.

In this respect it was fitting that the last ever French head of state to have taken part in the war should have presided over a thorough examination and revision of the nation's collective memory, before passing the baton to the next generation. It was fitting, too, that his successor, Jacques Chirac, should have completed the process by admitting, once and for all, that France was responsible for *all* of its past.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary sources

My primary sources are, for the most part, interviews and newspaper, magazine and periodical articles. Details are given in the main body of this thesis. In addition, the following books were used as primary sources:

Barcellini, Serge and Wieviorka, Annette, *Passant, souviens-toi* (Paris: Plon, 1995)

Institut Charles de Gaulle, *Actes des Journées internationales tenues à l'Unesco, Paris, 19-24 novembre 1990 (tome premier: dans la mémoire des hommes et des peuples)* (Paris: La Documentation française-Plon, 1991), in particular Nicole Racine-Furlaud's article on 'Mémoire du 18 juin 1940'.

Martin-Roland, Michel, *Il faut laisser le temps au temps. Les mots de François Mitterrand* (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1995)

Ministère de la Défense, *Il y a 50 ans, la libération. Allocutions de François Léotard, Ministre de la Défense* (Paris: Ministère de la Défense, 1994)

Mitterrand, François, *Discours: 1981-1995* (Paris: Europolis, 1995)

Raimond, Pierre-François, 'Un exemple de politique publique de la mémoire: la délégation à la mémoire et à l'information historique' (unpublished masters dissertation, Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, Paris, 1994)

Rémond, René, *Le fichier juif: rapport de la commission presidee par René Rémond au Premier ministre* (Paris: Plon, 1996)

Wiesel, Elie, *François Mitterrand: mémoire à deux voix* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1995)

Other cited works

Amiel, Jo, *La Rafle: un sana très ordinaire, 1942-1944* (Paris: les éditions du cerf, 1993)

Amouroux, Henri, *La page n'est pas encore tournée* (Paris: Robert Lafont, 1993)

Azèma, Jean-Pierre and Bédarida, François, *La France des années noires*, vols 1-2 (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1993)

Berstein, Serge, *La France de l'expansion* (Paris: Seuil, 1989)

Bridgford, Jeff, ed., *France: Image & Identity* (Newcastle: Newcastle-upon-Tyne Polytechnic Products, 1987)

Chagnollaud, D. and Méchet, P., *Enquêtes Louis-Harris 1995* (Paris: Denoël, 1995)

CNRS, ed., *La mémoire des Français: 40 ans de commémorations de la 2ème guerre mondiale* (Paris: éditions du CNRS, 1986)

Cohen, Asher, *Persécutions et sauvetages: Juifs et Français sous l'Occupation et sous Vichy* (Paris: les Editions du Cerf, 1993)

Conan, Eric and Rousso, Henry, *Vichy: un passé qui ne passe pas* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994)

Duhamel, Alain, *Les Peurs Françaises* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993)

Duhamel, Alain, *La Politique Imaginaire* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995)

Ferro, Marc, *The Use and Abuse of History* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984)

Ferro, Marc, *L'Histoire sous surveillance* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1985)

Finkielkraut, Alain, *l'avenir d'une négation* (Paris: Seuil, 1982)

Gildea, Robert, *The Past in French History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994)

Girardet, Raoul, *Mythes et mythologies politiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1986)

Goyet, Bruno, *Etudes des commémorations en France dans les années 1980* (thesis for DEA in Political Studies at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques, Paris, 1991)

Grosser, Alfred, *Les identités difficiles* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1996)

Halbwachs, Maurice, translated by Coser, Lewis, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1992)

Ignatieff, Michael, *Blood and Belonging* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993)

Jakubowicz, Alain, *Touvier: histoire du procès* (Paris: Editions Julliard, 1995)

Khon, Hans, *Making of the Modern French Mind* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1955)

Le Goff, Jacques, *Histoire et Mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988)

Malet, Emile, ed., *Resistance et mémoire, d'Auschwitz à Sarajevo. Actes du colloque de Lyon, octobre 1992* (Paris: Hachette, 1993)

Ménière, Laurent, ed., *Bilan de la France 1981-1993* (Paris: Hachette, 1993)

Namer, Gérard, *La commémoration en France de 1945 à nos jours* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 1987)

Nora, Pierre, ed., *Les lieux de mémoire* vols. 1-3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1984, 1986, 1992)

Ozouf, Mona, *Festivals and the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass./London: Harvard University Press, 1988)

Péan, Pierre, *Une Jeunesse française* (Paris: Fayard, 1994)

Peschanski, Denis, *Vichy 1940-1944: Contrôle et exclusion* (Paris: Editions Complexe, 1997)

Prost, Antoine, *Douze leçons sur l'histoire* (Paris: Seuil, 1996)

Renan, Ernest, *Oeuvres complètes: Tome 1* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1947)

Rousso, Henry, *Le syndrome de Vichy* (Paris: Seuil, 1987)

Smith, Anthony D., *National Identity* (Penguin: London, 1991)

Teyssier, Arnaud, *La 5ème République 1958-1995* (Paris: Editions Pygmalion/Gérard Watelet, 1995)

Todorov, Tzvetan, *Les abus de la mémoire* (Paris: Arléa, 1995)

Wieviorka, Annette, *Déportation et génocides. Entre la mémoire et l'oubli* (Paris: Plon, 1992)

Wieviorka, Olivier, *Une certaine idée de la Résistance* (Paris: Seuil, 1995)

Winock, Michel, *Parlez-moi de la France* (Paris: Plon, 1995)

uncited works

Alexandre, Philippe, *Plaidoyer impossible* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994)

Andersen, Benedict, *Imagined Communities* (Verso: London & New York, 1991)

Ardagh, John, *France Today* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1987)

Asselin, Jean-Charles and others, eds., *Etudes sur la France de 1939 à nos jours* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1985)

Becker, Jean-Jacques, *Histoire politique de la France depuis 1945* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1994)

Bernard, Philippe, *l'Immigration* (Paris: Le Monde-Editions, 1993)

Bernstein, Richard, *Fragile Glory: A Portrait of the French* (London: The Bodley Head, 1991)

Blanc, Rousso and De Tourtier-Bonazzi, *La Seconde Guerre mondiale: guide des sources conservées en France* (Paris: Archives nationales, 1994)

Bloch, Marc, translated by Peter Putnam, *The Historian's Craft* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1954)

Braibant, Guy, *Les Archives de la France. Rapport au premier ministre* (Paris: La Documentation française, 1996)

Braudel, Fernand, translated by Sarah Matthews, *On History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980)

Braudel, Fernand, *The Identity of France*, vol.2 (London: Collins, 1990)

Cairns, John C., *France* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965)

Candau, Joël, *Mémoire et identité* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998)

Cerny, Philip G., *The Politics of Grandeur* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1980)

Charpentier, Gérard M., *Les peuples francophones dans le monde contemporain* (Québec: Guy Saint-Jean, 1985)

Chaunu, Pierre, *La France: Histoire de la sensibilité des Français à la France* (Paris: Laffont, 1982)

Citron, Suzanne, *le mythe nationale: l'histoire de la France en question* (Paris: les éditions ouvrières, 1989)

Cohn, Bernard S., *An Anthropologist among the historians and other essays* (Delhi: O.U.P, 1990)

Colombani, Jean-Marie, *Mitterrand: le roman d'une vie* (Paris: Mille et Une Nuits, 1996)

Colombani, Jean-Marie, *La France sans Mitterrand* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992)

Combe, Sonia, *Archives Interdites* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994)

Cook, Malcolm, ed., *French Culture since 1945* (London: Longman, 1993)

Crubellier, Maurice, *La mémoire des Français* (Paris: Henri Veyrier, 1991)

De la Gorce, Paul-Marie and Moschetto, Bruno, *Que sais-je: la 5ème République* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992)

De Sà Rêgo, Carlos, *Une Nostalgie de grandeur* (Paris: Ramsay, 1985)
Duby, Georges, ed., *Histoire de la France* (Paris: Larousse, 1992)

Duhamel, Alain, *De Gaulle, Mitterrand: la marque et la trace* (Paris: Flammarion, 1991)

Duhamel, Jérôme, *Vous les Français: 56 millions de Français en 2200 sondages* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1989)

Duhamel, Jérôme *Grand inventaire du génie français en 365 objets* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1990)

Duhamel, Olivier and Jaffré, Jérôme, *L'état de l'opinion (Sofres) 1989-1995* (Paris: Seuil, 1990-1995)

Duhamel, Jaffré, Méchet, eds., *L'état de l'opinion (Sofres) 1996* (Paris: Seuil, 1996)

Farmer, Sarah, *Oradour: Arrêt sur mémoire* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1994)

Faurisson, Robert, *Réponse à Jean-Claude Pressac sur le problème des chambres à Gaz* (Colombes: RHR, 1994)

Faux, Legrand and Perez, *La Main Droite de Dieu* (Paris: Seuil, 1994)

Fillaire, Bernard, in collaboration with the FNDIR and UNADIF, *Jusqu'au bout de la Résistance* (Paris: Stock, 1997)

Finger, Blanche and Karel, William, *Opération vent printanier* (Paris: La Découverte, 1992)

Finkielkraut, Alain, *la mémoire vaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989)

Flower, J.E., ed., *France Today* (London: Methuen, 1971)

Forbes, Jill and Kelly, Michael, eds., *French Cultural Studies: an introduction* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1995)

Fourastié, Jean, *Les trente glorieuses* (Paris: Fayard, 1979)

François, Michel, ed., *La France et les Français* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972)

Frossard, André, *Excusez-moi d'être français* (Paris: Fayard, 1992)

Gellner, Ernest, *Culture, Identity and Politics* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1987)

Girardet, Raoul, *L'idée coloniale en France de 1871 à 1962* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1972)

Girardet, Raoul, ed., *le nationalisme français* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1966)

Gouze, Roger, *Mitterrand par Mitterrand* (Paris: Le cherche midi éditeur, 1994)

Grafmeyer, Y. and Raymond, J.-D., eds., *Français, Qui êtes-vous?* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1981)

Grosser, Alfred, *Affaires extérieures* (Paris: Flammarion, 1984)

Haddock, B. A., *An Introduction to Historical Thought* (London: Edward Arnold, 1980)

Hayes, Carlton J. H., *France: A Nation of Patriots* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1930)

Hayward, Jack, ed., *De Gaulle to Mitterrand: Presidential Power in France* (London: Hurst and Co., 1993)

Hirschfeld, G and Marsh, P., eds., *Collaboration in France* (Oxford: Berg, 1989)

Hobsbawm, Eric, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: C.U.P, 1992)

Hobsbawm, Eric and Ranger, Terence, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1995)

Hoffmann, Malchazar and Ross, eds., *The Mitterrand Experiment* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987)

Institut d'histoire du temps présent, *Histoire et temps présent - journées d'études des correspondants départementaux* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 1980)

Institut d'histoire du temps présent, *Ecrire l'histoire du temps présent. Actes de la journée d'études de l'IHTP* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 1993)

Jeanneney, Jean-Noël, *Le passé dans le prétoire* (Paris: Seuil, 1998)

Jelen, Christophe, *La France éclatée* (Paris: Nil, 1996)

Kantin, G. and Manceron, G, *Les Echos de la mémoire. Tabous et enseignement de la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Paris: Le Monde éditions, 1991)

Kimmel, A. and Poujol, J., *Certaines idées de la France* (Frankfurt am Main: Diesterweg, 1982)

Klarsfeld, Serge, *Vichy-Auschwitz: le rôle de Vichy dans la solution finale de la question juive en France - 1942* (Paris: Fayard, 1983)

Labbé, Dominique, *le vocabulaire de François Mitterrand* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1990)

Lacouture, Jean, *Citations du président de Gaulle* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1968)

Le Goff, J. and Nora, P., eds.; *Constructing the Past* (Cambridge University Press/Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1985)

Manson, Jean, ed., *Leçons de ténèbres. Résistants et déportés* (Paris: Plon, 1995)

McMillan, James F., *20th Century France: Politics and Society 1898-1991* (London: Edward Arnold, 1992)

Mermet, Gérard, *Francoscopie 1988, 1989, 1990, 1992, 1994* (Paris: Larousse, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1995)

Mermet, Gérard, *Démocrature: comment les médias transforment la démocratie* (Paris: Aubier, 1987)

Mitterrand, Danielle, *En toutes libertés* (Paris: Ramsay, 1996)

Mitterrand, François, *Réflexions sur la politique étrangère de la France* (Paris: Fayard, 1986)

Mitterrand, François, *Mémoires interrompus* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 1996)

Molho, Danièle, *François Mitterrand* (Toulouse: Editions Milan, 1995)

Mossuz-Lavau, Janine, *Les Français et la Politique* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 1994)

Namer, Gérard, *Mémoire et Société* (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1987)

Nicolet, Claude, *l'idée républicaine en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982)

Nevers, Guy, *Les Français vus par les Français* (Paris: Barrault, 1985)

Nourissier, François, translated by Foulke, Adrienne, *The French* (London: Hutchison, 1970)

Paris, Erna, *Unhealed Wounds: France and the Klaus Barbie Affair* (Toronto: Methuen, 1985)

Parker, Noel, *Portrayals of Revolution* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990)

Pickering, W.S.F., *Durkheim on religion: A selection of readings with bibliographies* (London and Boston: Routledge & Keegan, 1975)

Porch, Douglas, *The French Secret Services* (London: MacMillan, 1995)

Price, Roger, *A concise History of France* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995)

Rémond, René, *La Politique n'est plus ce qu'elle était* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1993)

Roberts, J.M., *The Penguin History of the World* (London: Penguin, 1992)

Rosoux, Valérie-Barbara, *La mémoire du Général de Gaulle: culte ou instrument?* (Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium: Bruylant-Académia, 1998)

Rudorff, Raymond, *The Myth of France* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1970)

Said, Edward W., *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993)

Samuel, Raphael, *Theatres of Memory, volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London/ New York: Verso, 1994)

Sanson, Rosemonde, *Les 14 juillet* (Paris: Flammarion, 1976)

Segalen, M, ed., *L'autre et le semblable* (Paris: Presses du CNRS, 1989)

Sieburg, Friedrich, *Dieu est-il Français?* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1930)

Silverman, Maxim, ed., *Race, Discourse and Power in France* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1991)

Smith, Anthony D., *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995)

Stolérie, Lionel, *Entrer dans le 21^{e} siècle: Essai sur l'avenir de l'identité française (rapport du groupe "Horizon 2000" présidé par E. Le Roy Ladurie)* (Paris: La Découverte/ La Documentation française, 1990)

Todd, Emmanuel, *The Making of Modern France* (London: Blackwell, 1991)

Tombs, Robert, ed., *Nationhood and Nationalism in France* (London: HarperCollins, 1991)

Tombs, Robert, *France 1814-1914* (London: Longman, 1996)

Twain, Mark, *Speeches* (New York/Oxford: OUP, 1996)

Verdié, Mirelle, ed., *L'Etat de la France et de ses habitants. 1989 edition* (Paris: La Découverte, 1989)

Vidal-Naquet, Pierre, *Les Juifs, la mémoire et le présent* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991)

Weber, Eugen, *Peasants into Frenchmen* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1979)

Weber, Eugen, *My France: Politics, Culture, Myth* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1991)

Weil, Simone, *L'Enracinement* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949)

Wieviorka, Michel, *La France raciste* (Paris: Seuil, 1992)

Wright, Gordon, *France in Modern Times* (New York/ London: Norton, 1995)

Zarate, Geneviève, *Enseigner une culture étrangère* (Paris: Hachette, 1986)

Zeldin, Theodore, *The French* (London: Collins Harvill, 1988)