

## **ABSTRACT**

### **POST-COLONIAL IMMIGRATION IN FRANCE: HISTORY, MEMORY, AND SPACE**

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France is a country that has not yet fully integrated its colonial past into its national identity, especially with regards to immigration. The unwillingness to do so creates an overly idealistic vision of French history, which hinders France's recognition of post-colonial immigrants as historically and sociologically identifiable groups with legitimate claims. A collective national amnesia regarding the less glorious parts of French history thereby leads to many current social conflicts. Two works in popular genres – Les passagers du Roissy Express, by François Maspero, and Meurtres pour mémoire, by Didier Daeninckx – provide different narratives, which contradict the official versions of important historical events, especially the persecution of Jews during WW II and the massacre of Algerians during a demonstration in Paris on October 17, 1961.

POST-COLONIAL IMMIGRATION IN FRANCE:  
HISTORY, MEMORY, AND SPACE

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My work is dedicated to all victims of injustice.

# Introduction

## History and memory

It is often said that time wipes away memories and heals all wounds. However, in many cases, time does not erase recollections, nor the scars associated with them; instead, individuals often keep alive important memories. These may later become a collective reminiscence, which can serve as a communal, unofficial history. Maurice Halbwachs, a French philosopher and sociologist, argues in his book Collective Memory that “there are no recollections which can be said to be purely interior, that is, which can be preserved only within individual memory. Indeed from the moment that a recollection reproduces a collective perception, it can itself only be collective” (Halbwachs 169). The main points that Halbwachs tries to illustrate are that individual memory is socially constructed by factors such as environment and should be viewed as a reconstruction of the past in light of the present. Memory is arguably the most beneficial mental function for human beings. It is the operating mechanism for our learning process, enabling us to develop our personal identity by mediating between social context and individual experiences. There exists no healthy individual who does not have a memory. In fact, some who claim to not remember may well be those whose memory has been so painfully marked by the past that they try to suppress it. A frightening and shameful past may be forgotten by choice or as an involuntary defense mechanism, because that past threatens the core of an individual identity. The same may be true for a nation. A selective memory can serve well those who prefer, or feel the need for, a state of partial amnesia. Either selectively forgotten or remembered, all elements of the past nonetheless shape our memory and, hence, personal or communal history.

Historians repeatedly assert that history is a collection of events stored in collective memory, which they present to the public as a factual narrative. They also caution that those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it. They themselves, however, do not escape from the very human behavior of selectivity. They are always influenced by a variety of factors, including social or political pressures, when collecting the information that they use to reconstruct the events of the past. In addition, they are subject to the sometimes adverse and painful effects of the events that shape their own identity. The writing of history is thus subject not only to the sometimes ambiguous nature of information but also to certain pressures on the historian.

Subjectivity is an undeniable aspect of historical awareness and historiography. Historians may unwittingly bias their interpretation when they study events that have strong personal significance. They may also distort their accounts of events that they see either as

shameful to their national heritage or identity, or else as constituting glorious national precedents and great achievements. Events that are extremely painful may well be ignored, denied or sugarcoated. When historians produce distorted or biased accounts, these may be generally accepted by society and handed down to subsequent generations, who consequently live with only illusions about the past. The impact of this can be transferred through historical public records and public policies to the point that true history is forgotten entirely. It is ironic that historians urge their readers to remember the past, yet they themselves sometimes omit key evidence from their accounts or inject them with nationalist bias that make it difficult to remember accurately. By producing unbiased, comprehensive and multi-faceted accounts, even of a past that is painful to national memory, responsible historians can facilitate national healing and allow citizens to more accurately judge the past for themselves. The quest for memory is also the search for one's history, or what Pierre Nora calls "lieux de mémoire" (sites of memory). For Nora, sites of memory are where "cultural memory crystallizes" (7). They are identity markers created by nations, regions and social groups to achieve specific goals. In his view, constructed history replaces true memory. This explains significantly why history is usually written inaccurately, and, therefore, needs to be rewritten. Halbwachs urges historians to distinguish between history, on the one hand, and collective memory on the other. To him, history is the reconstruction of the past from a significant distance. Collective memory, on the other hand, is a series of recollections shared by a particular group whose images of the past are shaped by the needs of the present. Historians, therefore, need to examine the methods by which memory helps to construct the identity of different social groups (41).

The study of French culture provides many fascinating examples of how history and memory played and continue to play an important role in shaping national identity. France is no doubt a nation that is obsessed with its history, yet it has yet to come to terms with much of its past, which remains unresolved. Two literary works - Les Passagers du Roissy-Express, by François Maspero, and Meurtres pour mémoire, by Didier Daeninckx - illustrate the complexity and importance of the relationship between memory, history and immigration in France.

## **Part I**

### **Identity and Space in Les passagers du Roissy-Express.**



I certainly don't regret having been for a pleasure stroll among my own people, in this country of mine, in the spring of the French Revolution bicentenary year. I still think it is there, not elsewhere, that my country's life is being lived, played out. That is where its life force is. Its future. I'm simply more pessimistic about the future than I was four years ago. I hope with all my heart that I'm wrong. (Maspero\* 268)<sup>1</sup>.

François Maspero is a novelist with a background as a radical publisher. He set out to explore the Parisian terra incognita one day in 1989, in part because he had shamefully realized, as a globe-trotting journalist, that he knew Shanghai, China, more intimately than the suburbs of his home city, Paris (Maspero 12). Before beginning his month-long journey to the suburbs to discover what was out there, Maspero discussed the project with his friends. Some initially ridiculed his idea and warned him that the Paris suburbs are a seemingly shapeless muddle, or a circular purgatory with Paris as Paradise in the middle. This kind of response manifestly comes from ignorance, ethnocentrism and self-centeredness. Maspero, however, is well aware that France, having spawned this monster in the first place, continues to feed it and makes it a dumping ground for its less privileged classes. Since the suburbs are mostly populated by immigrants, the ethnic French majority usually does not frequent them or take steps to celebrate their importance and significance to France's history, culture and heritage. Alec G. Hargreaves, a professor of French and Francophone Studies, argues that while the United States celebrates its national heritage as a land of immigrants, France chooses a different path: Americans view immigrants as an important factor in the building of their national community, whereas the French see immigrants only as "sustainers of a nation with a long history behind it, rather than as partners in the construction of a new national community à l'américaine" (Hargreaves\* 250). Although the suburbs serve as a social and economic resource for a group of people (immigrants), they also provide a staging ground where group identity is created and displayed. It is in the suburbs that a major part of France's past, history and identity is still waiting to be

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the thesis and in the bibliography, I occasionally use an asterisk by the name of an author to distinguish two publications by the same person.

discovered and revived. Even though Maspero alleges from the beginning of his text that his journey is one of open-ended discovery, he cannot hide from the reader the internal struggles he felt as he prepared for his journey, knowing that he would have to deal with the past and the present: “Mais qu’est-ce qui l’intéressait le plus: le dessous ou le dessus? Le passé ou le présent?” (Maspero 16). Memory can be dangerously illuminating, much like a burning candle that lights up the darkness but can cause a house to catch fire. However, the author finds a sense of urgency to overcome his initial fear of what he may discover in the suburbs: he feels the need to give the world that he is about to visit a new meaning, and establish the historical significance of the suburbs.

Les passagers du Roissy-Express is aimed at exposing the inner world of the Parisian suburbs to an indifferent French society. The idea is to record everything possible, and thereby recreate the historical truth of spaces that have often been overlooked in French history and written off as a space for undesirables. Maspero wishes to thus pave the way for a better and more complete understanding of French history and identity. Maspero’s journey and account, illustrated by photographs taken by Anaïk Frantz, his travel mate, presents information about a part of France and Paris that is still unknown to the majority of the French. The empathetic photographs taken by Frantz illustrate some of the distinctive impressions that the text communicates about these “lieux de mémoire”: the countless cityscapes, people and situations encountered. The photos help Maspero’s narrative by capturing not only places and people but their stories and emotions as well. They bring us face to face with victims of neglect and discrimination. Many pictures humanize the residents in the suburbs by giving faces to what are too often portrayed by the media only as statistics about undesirables. Maspero himself, though voluntarily opting to include pictures taken on his journey, admits that they risk causing damage to France’s image by forcing readers to confront the shameful reality of the suburbs. His illustrated narrative might then appear too true to reject anymore. It would be as naked and unpolished as a family photo album:

Peut-être aussi y avait-il en elle [i.e., Frantz] quelque chose qui disait non, qui refusait au dernier moment de livrer son travail à la publication, aux regards anonymes, de même qu’on n’ouvre pas devant n’importe qui son album de famille? (Maspero 19)

In addition to revealing the unseen reality of the suburbs, the photographs help safeguard and preserve the evidence of the journey for the sake of memory. Maintaining the integrity of material that documents the history of the banlieues is important, because little attempt is made otherwise to maintain or present historically significant sites there as “lieux de mémoire.”<sup>2</sup> Maspero’s narratives about the places and people portrayed in the photographs provide a fascinating account of the present and the past of the banlieues.

Discovering and interacting with these suburban spaces and their inhabitants prove to be effective in redefining not only the national identity of France but that of the author as well: “knowledge of places is closely linked to knowledge of the self, to grasping one’s position in the larger scheme of things, including one’s own community, and securing a confident sense of who one is as a person” (Basso 34). Keith W. Basso, an anthropologist, argues that self-knowledge and personal identity cannot be defined if they are detached from places and spaces in which they exist. Nora, the historian, takes this further by stating that the collective experience of various groups of individuals is what establishes lieux de mémoire, which could be “material, symbolic, and functional” (Nora 639).

Maspero starts his travel narrative by discussing the crucial issue of the divorce between the capital city and its suburbs. Our conception of Paris starts to change as the author redefines the city and helps us reexamine its “sites of memory” by taking the reader with him into spaces that are not usually seen as national or heroic symbols. These spaces become an important stimulant of public memory, for they directly portray a suburban history of which many French men and women might not be conscious. The true reality of the suburbs is finally revealed by stories that Maspero tells. In interacting with the suburbs and their inhabitants, Maspero shows his readers that it is in those spaces that today’s generation should grasp the past. There the missing parts of French identity can be found by anyone willing to look. Moreover, only through this process of interaction do we have a chance to understand the true significance of spaces (Tilley 33).

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<sup>2</sup> In France many historical spaces have been either abandoned or destroyed to make space for economic development. For example, numerous buildings from World War II were not preserved as historical spaces of memory. This destruction is probably due in part to their association with a shameful past.

The timing for the journey could not have been better: the suburbs made headlines in the 1980s, when violent confrontations between suburban youths and the police took place in a number of the suburbs surrounding France's major cities, such as La Courneuve, near Paris, and Vaulx-en-Velin and Vénissieux, near Lyon. Because of the newsworthy confrontations, the suburbs became the theme of numerous newspaper and magazine articles. Distorted reporting by the media on what took place in the suburbs fed the fires of xenophobia and racism throughout France and helped boost the popularity of extreme-right groups such as the Front National, headed by Jean-Marie Le Pen. Unlike many reporters, who often see "les banlieues" as only a place of violent confrontation and crime, Maspero looks at all elements of these spaces. He thereby transforms them from something apparently repulsive, dull or obscure into something valuable. He documents a part of society that is not usually central to public interest, compared to the constantly publicized social and spatial center of Paris. Besides focusing on the space of the banlieues, Maspero gives its residents, who have been forgotten until now, a chance to be heard. One group to which Maspero pays special attention is that of the immigrants. This is important because, until recently, France has been reluctant to call itself a land of immigrants, and remained for a long time an "unconscious host country" -- one that disregarded any history that did not fit into its traditional national myths: "Just as immigrant minorities are located on the topographical periphery of contemporary society, so they have been relegated to the 'banlieues' (periphery) of French history'" (Hargreaves\* 249).

In the absence of an alternative, immigrants in France adopted the suburbs and accepted the reality of their "exile" from mainstream society. They started to build a new identity for themselves as they formed small communities and stayed close to other groups who shared their culture, religion, language, and country of origin. This process helped most immigrants ensure a less painful "transition between two worlds, the country of origin and the host country, by attenuating the shock of transplantation" and facilitating escape from the "daily aggressions of an unfamiliar world" (Noiriel 134-5). The suburbs therefore became a part of the immigrants' history, and a focal point of their lives. In return, these spaces became charged and responsive to their interactions: "[e]vents, whether contemporary, historical or mythical, that happen at a certain point in the local area tend to become integral elements of those places" (Nuttall 54).

Since space plays an important part in shaping the identity of those who interact with and in it, it is not surprising that Maspero provides us with a fragmentary but insightful history of the French suburbs and shows how they have had an impact on the lives of immigrants.

### **Growth of the suburbs**

Au sortir de la guerre, le paysage de l'habitat dans les grandes agglomérations de France est particulièrement sinistré. 500 000 logements ont été détruits, autant dégradés. Le nombre d'immeubles vétustes est estimé à 3 millions et demi [...] Dès 1945, devant l'ampleur du problème, le gouvernement encourage la transformation de casernes, d'usines, d'entrepôts, de fortins pour aboutir à la création de 100 000 habitations provisoires [...] En 1992, il faudra réactiver ce droit pour héberger des familles sans logis. (Lallaoui 13)

The crucial years of the suburbs' growth in France occurred during what is known as "les trente glorieuses."<sup>3</sup> These years witnessed a rapid growth in the construction of many housing projects designed to help France meet its housing demands. Due to the destruction of WW I and WW II, France faced an acute housing shortage, which was aggravated by the baby boom of the 1950s and 1960s. In addition, the rise in the number of French immigrant workers, many from North and Sub-Saharan Africa, also contributed to the housing shortage. France's post-war immigration policy was stipulated in a government ordinance issued on November 2, 1945: "One of the most important aspects of the regulations laid out in this ordinance was the separation of residence and work permits" (Hargreaves 10). During the reconstruction years, there were more workers with only working permits than those who had residency permits. Those who had residency permits were entitled to government housing, whereas those who had only permits to work did not qualify for such housing since they were not residents. For many of the latter, this situation created a desperate need to find another place to live. Since they could not afford high rent, they were forced to accept substandard housing. The construction industry worked overtime to build

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<sup>3</sup> The "trente glorieuses" (thirty glorious years) is the era of economic growth and betterment that started in the late 1940s under the Fourth Republic. It was a time in which France started to urbanize rapidly and develop new technologies, which transformed the lives of many ordinary French, who, in turn, started "to think in terms of future opportunities rather than past difficulties" (Stovall 28).

the high-rise housing projects now known as HLM (Habitations à Loyer Modéré). The living conditions of immigrants would deteriorate once they were housed in these housing projects, for they were overcrowded and poorly maintained.

A decade later, the economic downturn and the rise in production and living costs, triggered by the oil crisis of 1973, would have a direct impact on the lives of immigrants in the suburbs. This crisis increased the rate of job loss and plant closures, leading to a sharp rise in general unemployment. These unexpected changes affected directly and forcefully the social cohesion and living conditions of the people in housing projects. The one known as “les 3,000” (referring to the number of housing units) in Aulnay, which was one of Maspero’s stops on his journey, proved to be a concrete example of the link between the economic recession and the living conditions in a particular space: “le premier problème des 3 000, leur malédiction originelle, n’a pas été la drogue, la délinquance, l’intolérance, l’illettrisme, le racisme. Le vrai problème des 3 000 a eu nom Citroën” (Maspero 52). Maspero tells us that in 1971 the French automaker opened a factory in Aulnay, for which it desperately needed a significant number of unskilled workers for assembly line work. North Africans and Turks were just what the company was looking for. Immigrants took those jobs, which became the main, if not the only, source of income with which they supported their families. For the French government, economic interests came before immigrants’ rights to suitable housing. Suburbs were not properly managed: for example, when the housing in Aulnay could not accommodate the new migrant workers, officials allowed the housing project to be occupied beyond capacity. The 3,000 project was also an overflow for those people of color or different origins who were refused housing elsewhere (53). From the experience of Aulnay it could be argued that immigrants’ lack of access to proper housing, their low salaries and the high living expenses in the cities, where the jobs were usually found, made it difficult for them to locate a suitable and affordable place to rent or lease. Therefore they joined others in the housing projects. In addition, discrimination on the part of the landowners was another major factor that kept these immigrant workers from renting suitable housing (Hargreaves 84). When they felt the need to justify their discriminatory actions, landlords might argue that immigrants would not pay rent on time and that their children would create problems for other residents because they were uneducated and delinquent. Immigrants from Africa were living in extremely poor conditions. Although the government took steps to create new kinds of housing for them, these provisions,

such as workers' hostels, were only suitable for single males. This was deliberately done to discourage the wives and children of immigrants from joining them in France, in order to slow down, if not to prevent, family reunification among former colonial immigrants and migrant workers (Hargreaves 15-18). Nonetheless, some family reunification was happening. Immigrants found few alternatives to living in substandard housing and lived often out of public sight, so that they rarely made contact with mainstream society.

In the 1970s, Citroën and other companies started laying off workers: "En 1978--9, Citroën supprima 1 132 emplois. Et continua les années suivantes" (53). Immigrants often found themselves without jobs or other means to provide for their families, so became poorer, more marginalized and more vulnerable to discrimination. This is not because they were ignorant, illiterate or even lazy; rather, their situation could be explained, to a certain extent, as the normal functioning of the capitalist economic system, which functions on the basis of supply and demand. Consequently, when the demand for factory workers was not there, the immigrants became the collateral damage of the economy. They are often the last hired and first fired. However, economic downturns were not the only factor when it came to the mistreatment of immigrants in France. Political and social issues also dictated the fate of these minority groups.

### **Politicizing immigration and the rise of racism**

The theme of "foreigners inassimilables," which developed in the 1920s around Russians and Armenians with "foreign tongues," Jews "deceitful and dangerous to society," and Latinos "threatening the quality of the French race," is used today against Muslims allegedly threatening French culture and identity. The xenophobia of crises always has its political translation, from legislative measures of control and exclusion to persecution (as in the case of the Vichy regime). (Blanc-Chaléard 3)

One general dictating element in the treatment of immigrants is often the reaction to what is happening at the time in mainstream society, and France is no exception to this general rule. Intense economic, social and political changes and crises in the society at large can greatly disrupt a previously implanted immigrant community. For example, when France was fighting

the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) in Algeria in the 1950s and early 1960s, Algerians living in France were targets of discrimination and violence by both the police and ethnic French.<sup>4</sup> This violence reached its peak on October 17, 1961, when a group of peaceful Algerian demonstrators, who were protesting police violence and the curfew imposed on them by Maurice Papon, were met with extraordinary force, which suppressed their peaceful demonstration and resulted in the death, disappearance and deportation of hundreds of Algerians<sup>5</sup>:

Ce fut une soirée de matraquages et de tuerie. Peu de manifestants parvinrent à se former en cortège. [...] On n'a jamais su le compte exact des morts sous les coups de la police parisienne. En faisant le compte des cadavres repêchés dans la Seine les jours suivants, de ceux recensés dans les morgues des hôpitaux, on donne, comme Le Monde en 1982, le chiffre de 200, auquel il faut ajouter 400 disparus. (Maspero 257)

The mistreatment of, and racist acts against, immigrants touched groups of different origins. In one of their first encounters with a native of the suburbs, our travelers meet a Frenchman, whom François jokingly describes as a Gaul. He tells the story of his experiences in the suburbs during bygone days and how things have changed since then. He talks about how he once owned a factory named La Perle de Verre, in which he employed many Italians. They were a good group of people, according to him. Yet he recalls the horrible treatment that they faced after the outbreak of war in Europe:

Et puis de nouveau la guerre, finis les Italiens, les gens leur en voulaient à cause de Mussolini, le coup de poignard dans le dos, comme s'ils y étaient pour quelque chose les pauvres, alors ils ont dû rentrer chez eux, c'est dommage ils étaient bien ici. (35)

The Italians employed by this man were not victims of French reprisal because they had failed to integrate into mainstream society or because of their different cultural heritage, (e.g.,

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<sup>4</sup> According to Hargreaves, in 1982, the Algerian national population in France had reached 805,000, making this group the “largest national group among the foreign population in France” at the time (Hargreaves 13). The Algerian population was only about 22,000 in 1946 (12).

<sup>5</sup> The massacre of 17 October 1961 will be discussed in detail in the second chapter of this thesis.



religion). Instead, they became targets because of political factors, specifically, the branding of all Italians as Fascists. The French blamed the Italians for a “stab in the back.” This meant that the former were angrily searching for a scapegoat to bear responsibility for Italy’s decision to participate in the war on the side of the Germans.

More recently, many mainstream ethnic French have seen immigrants as a significant threat to their identity. For example, “two-thirds of those questioned in a 1985 opinion poll said France was in danger of losing her national identity if nothing was done to limit the foreign population; by 1989 that view was shared by three-quarters of those surveyed” (Hargreaves 151). This type of resentment and fear of immigrants and ethnic minorities is widespread, as becomes evident as Maspero’s journey progresses. Unfortunately, with many immigrants, the fortunes of time and space always dictate the nature of their fate. Therefore, it is important to provide here a brief overview of immigration history in France to better understand the significance of the marginalized immigrant groups that Maspero discovers and interacts with during his journey.

### **Post-colonial immigration history and memory.**

Throughout recent history, immigrants have come to France from all over the world. In the early 1900s, immigrants came from neighboring European countries such as Belgium, Germany, Poland, Spain and Italy. Italians formed the largest group of immigrants to France during the period between the two World Wars. Thanks to this migratory flow, the number of foreigners tripled in France, from 1 to 3 million “in the short time between 1919 and 1931.” This wave produced “the first massive process of integration, completed when the second generation reached adulthood during the 1960s” (Blanc-Chaléard 1). The French government, facing an acute labor shortage for the reconstruction of the country’s infrastructure devastated during World War II, decided that it needed to implement an immigration policy to bring in migrant workers and their families from neighboring European countries, such as Italy (Weil 53--62). This time, however, Italians and other Europeans were less attracted to France than French officials had hoped: “At the same time, the gap in living standards between European and Third World countries had grown, making migration” to Europe an increasingly attractive prospect to those from “states... characterized by relatively low levels of economic development,” especially

former French colonies (Hargreaves 15). Thus, a later wave of immigrants with the hope and desire for a better life came to France from its former colonies, searching for jobs. The big boom, from 1955 to 1973, was comprised to a large extent of Algerians and immigrants from former colonies that had just gained independence from France. The living conditions in their native countries were unpromising. However, these working-class immigrants found conditions in France worse than what they had expected before leaving home. This is illustrated in the conversation that Maspero and Frantz have with some immigrants from Mali who reside in Aubervilliers:

Les gens s'imaginent que ceux qui reviennent de France sont riches. C'est normal, parce que c'est tellement pauvre, le Mali: ils ne peuvent pas comprendre que c'est très difficile, de vivre en France. Ils croient qu'on vit comme des Français. (Maspero 252)

The Malian speaks here of the true reality of immigrants who are marginalized in French society and not treated as equals, yet are stereotyped by their countrymen back home as rich and enjoying the fruits of the French dream. Immigrants usually transfer a portion of their salaries to their families back home. Even though the sums sent are generally small, they allow the members of the family to buy things that they could not afford to purchase with their own income. In addition, from time to time immigrants send extra money to be saved for them because they hope to go back one day to their native countries. Both of these factors give the impression to their countrymen that they are rich, thus triggering the eagerness of other family members and former friends to join them in France.

For both the French and the immigrants, immigration was supposed to be simple and temporary. For the French, these immigrants were there merely as manpower to rebuild France after WW II. Young and ambitious workers from the former colonies, especially North Africans, represented just what many French industries were looking for: cheap and abundant manual labor. These immigrant workers -- who were eager to head north to France, where they hoped to accumulate wealth and where job opportunities were abundant -- were confident that once they had earned enough to satisfy their needs they would go back home. They viewed their employment in France as a short-term exile from Africa, forced by the economic realities of their

native countries. However, the French public and some politicians viewed European immigrants quite differently from those from the former French colonies of North, and Sub-Saharan, Africa. The European migrants were much more favored and accepted than the latter (Blanc-Chaléard 2).

As the influx of immigrants continued, many migrant workers arrived illegally, especially after immigration was declared suspended by the government in 1974 (2). These clandestins endured the same hardships as legal immigrants, but they also lacked basic social protection, such as access to government-administered medical programs. In addition, their salaries were often much lower than those of legal immigrants, and they were overworked by unscrupulous employers. During recessions and economic difficulties, the illegal migrant workers were the first to be let go. Also, once in France, these immigrants, legal or illegal, worked in jobs that were usually refused or abandoned by the French, jobs that were referred to as “emplois sales,” or dirty jobs. The jobs mainly consisted of dangerous or menial factory, construction, janitorial or farm work. These were the only occupations the immigrants could acquire, largely due to their lack of education and the color of their skin. These workers found themselves exploited to the fullest by their French employers. In fact, their salaries were only a little bit higher than what they would have been in their native countries. The economic prosperity and abundance of jobs in the construction and automotive sectors in the 1960s helped attract illegal immigrants. At the time, the French government saw in the flow of this new wave of immigrants the positive sign of a booming economy, so it eased its immigration laws and took several steps to “regularize” the status of many illegal immigrants, by issuing residence and work permits to a substantial number among them. This process helped provide the manpower needed to offset the acute labor shortage France faced before 1974. Today, illegal immigrants who cannot adjust their status are afraid of being deported, so agree to work for employers who take advantage of their illegal status and exploit them: “...for the fear of deportation prevents undocumented workers from complaining about poor wages or working conditions” (Hargreaves 7--8).

### **The challenge of integration**

And yet are we justified in speaking of the French on the threshold of a so-called history of “France,” and in

continuing to discuss them throughout history? Shouldn't we ask ourselves who, in each period, these "Frenchmen" were – and specify whom we call French at a given time, whom we exclude from France and how the excluded, the separated French, felt about these issues?

Lucien Febvre, 1953 (quoted in Noiriel 227)

The French have long worried that their culture would be diluted or submerged by those of their (former) colonies, such as Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. Discrimination in housing and employment served to keep immigrants and their families outside of mainstream French society as much as possible. Paradoxically, the French, who first rejected the immigrants, later unfairly accused them of failing to integrate into French society and of rejecting French culture and values. Ethnic French do not wish to accept the fact that they themselves had refused to fully accept anyone who was not ethnically "French." This mistreatment of immigrants from former colonies could be attributed to the historical collapse of the French empire and the humiliating end to France's domination overseas – an end that cost many French lives. Thus, treatment of this group of immigrants could be seen as revenge against their former enemies, especially against Algerians, who played a pivotal role in supporting the struggle to liberate their country from French colonization. The Algerians in France were accused of supporting the violent actions of the FLN, which fought a long, bloody war both in Algeria and in France in the pursuit of independence. Many French still hold the humiliating defeat and the loss of a major part of their empire against Algerians and others from former colonies. Instead of accepting the reality of immigration, and their colonial history, the French have refocused their energy and efforts on building a new identity and a different kind of empire within Europe, by taking a leadership role in building the European Union. Nonetheless, the French will not be able to avoid the painful memories of the past as long as so many immigrants in the country today are from former colonies. The harder France tries to avoid dealing with its colonial past by marginalizing immigrant groups the more these groups become determined to remember and revive the same past, which could be seen as a counter-effect to the denial strategy.

It is certainly true that many North African immigrants, especially those who were adults when they arrived, have found it difficult to completely integrate into the French mainstream, because of their cultural, linguistic and religious background. Yet, the question remains: what

about their offspring, who are born in France, often live their entire lives in France and may know little about the distant land their parents call home? These youths, referred to in French society as “Beurs,” frequently find themselves in a no-win situation. They have been thoroughly exposed to and conditioned by French culture, yet they are rejected by both the culture of their parents and that of France, the only country they know well:

...they were suspect. Suspect in the eyes of “real” French people, of course, but not just them. On the other side of the Mediterranean, they were equally suspect in the eyes of the peoples their parents were descended from; suspect; and even traitors to the Arab cause. Rejected by the French, who refused to let them be French; rejected by the Arabs, who refused to let them be Arabs. Humiliated. With no way out. That scar won’t heal in a hurry. (Maspero\* 266)

The second or third generation of Maghrebis in France may not feel the same as the ethnic French do about the achievements of De Gaulle and Napoleon, share the same opinions regarding the war in Algeria, or agree on the necessity and desirability of going to war in Iraq or in Afghanistan, yet this does not mean that they are not French. In fact, these people carry French passports and regard France as their home. Problematically, a very different perspective is shared by many ethnic majority French, who do not envision France as a country whose modern history, culture, and identity are founded, to a large extent, on the recruitment and absorption of foreigners from different parts of the world, including people from its former colonies. On the contrary, they usually see France as a nation formed and preserved by ethnic majority French, and view immigrants as intruders.

This sensitivity greatly reduces the options available to immigrants, especially those coming from North Africa. It also hinders their successful integration and that of their offspring, which highlights the failure of the French to recognize immigrants as equals and as contributors to French history and identity. When African immigrants try to integrate under such conditions, the process is slower than for immigrants from neighboring European countries. As mentioned previously, the prevention of family reunification among former colonial immigrants was also significantly detrimental among Maghrebis, causing them to long remain invisible to mainstream

society. Until recently, the Maghrebis, especially Algerians, have struggled to obtain the same “gender balance” that other groups have attained in a relatively short time (Hargreaves 18). This is one of the major factors that have contributed to the slow integration of immigrants into mainstream society. Another factor is the religious background of most Maghrebis, who made news again at the end of 2003, when President Jacques Chirac pushed for laws to prevent the wearing of any religious symbols, especially the Islamic headscarf (Hijab), in public schools. This recent move by the government shows that France is staying firm and does not want to adjust to the needs of its new immigrant citizens. Rather it seeks to force minority groups to adjust to France’s traditional secular values. Many French perceive the headscarf to be a threat not only to national identity but to national security as well. Some leading intellectuals, such as Régis Debray and Alain Finkielkraut have compared the surge of Islam and its threat to France to that of “Nazi Germany” in the first half of the twentieth century (Hargreaves\* 252). This xenophobia about Islam could be attributed to two factors. One is the memory of the Algerian war and the struggle of other Muslim nations, Morocco and Tunisia in particular, to gain independence. Islam has been a unifying factor in their struggle and is viewed today in the same context by many young immigrants, who identify themselves not solely as French, but also as Muslims. This frightens many French who are worried about the spread of radical Islam. Secondly, xenophobia has been high since the tragic attack of September 11, 2001, and has been fueled by the last two wars in Iraq (1991 and 2003). These events deepened the distrust and unease of the French, who had feared that their country might be targeted by Muslim extremists during the buildup to the first Gulf War:

We saw a remarkable self-indoctrination of public opinion. The argument was simple: we were waging war against the Arabs (or the Muslims: standard politician-speak makes no distinction between the two), and the suburbs were populated by Arabs, or children of Arabs vulgarly called Beurs... (Maspero\* 266).

These Muslim immigrants and their descendents, who are French citizens, were conjointly identified with the regime of Saddam Hussein and extremist groups accused of

terrorist acts. In fact, the first Gulf War took place with the support of the majority of Arab countries. Nonetheless, the North Africans in France, because of their names and religion, became the prime target of French distrust and suspicion. Even so, they remained law-abiding and accommodating, despite their symbolic exclusion from the French national community and even daily discriminatory acts that portrayed them as fundamentalist: “The exclusion of immigrant minorities from the construction of French national identity has been strengthened by the legacy of the colonial period, which has helped create an image of Muslims as fundamentally hostile to mainstream French values” (Hargreaves\* 255).

It is not hard then to see that the indifference toward, and poor treatment of, various immigrant groups by majority ethnic French make it increasingly difficult for the former to view France as their home. Even when some do consider France home, they are denied this by many French. The concept of ethnicity is problematic in France. The French have been afraid to recognize and accept the idea that different ethnic groups exist in their country and seem to believe that ethnicity is an American concept that has no place in France (Schnapper 88--92). This denial persists despite the fact that 14 million people in France, from a total population of almost 60 million, are either immigrants, or children or grandchildren of immigrants (Tribalat 43). The rejection of the concept of ethnicity is related to the French fear of recognizing groups that are different from the indigenous majority: “There is unwillingness at the highest level officially to recognize immigrants and their descendants as structurally identifiable groups within French society” (Hargreaves 4). Consequently, this rejection has created an identity crisis for the offspring of immigrants, who already had to resolve the integration issues posed by their foreign origins and lack of familiarity with the parental culture and homeland.

For their part, French historians long gave slight attention to the contribution of immigrants to French national achievements. Only when France is threatened with issues regarding its cultural identity or economic prosperity do French historians acknowledge the presence of immigrants amongst the French on their soil. An example of the shortcoming of historians could be seen in their relatively recent documentation of “the history of xenophobia. A latent xenophobia that leads to distrust (and to ridicule) of foreigners in general, manifests [itself] in times of crisis” (Blanc-Chaléard 3). The neglect – especially until the recent past – by French historians of the importance of immigrants and immigration to France is evident in many key areas: “The absence of immigration is even more remarkable in studies of local or regional

history [...] School textbooks display an even greater degree of collective amnesia” (Noiriel 3--4). Alec G. Hargreaves goes even further, saying that immigrants seem to be nonexistent in French school curricula, especially in “general histories of France.” He provides an example of the marginalization of immigrants in the writing of French history: Nora’s monumental seven-volume collection Les lieux de mémoire mentions immigrants only in the last volume, and does not go into detail about their contribution to French history and identity (Hargreaves\* 249--50).

The cycle of rejection and blame, including ethnic frictions and racist acts, has been a common experience not only for Maghrebis but also for European immigrants and various ethnic minorities in general. Italians, Poles, Turks and Jews have all been, at one time or another, victims of racism in France. The issue of immigrants is usually only brought to the surface when politicians try to exploit it for political gain. Most of the time, they use immigration as propaganda to boost their popularity ratings. Hargreaves argues that many politicians have tried to promote their agenda through the slogan of “zero immigration.” Though the idea is unattainable it is nonetheless appealing to many French men and women, since “it carries a promise of somehow ridding the country of all the problems linked in the public mind with people of immigrant origin” (Hargreaves 1). This attitude only proves that many French believe that immigrants and their offspring do not belong to French society.

As Maspero continues his journey through different parts of the suburbs, the reader learns that racism affects various groups of immigrants. For example, near the suburb of Aulnay, Maspero meets Gilles, a postman with a graduate degree in geography. His university studies and job enable him to determine the significance of the suburban space around him. It is this knowledge that leads him to find inconsistencies and discrepancies in official documents. He is quick to point out to François that maps are biased and should not be entirely trusted:

Car Gilles se méfie des discours: de tous en général et du discours géographique en particulier. Il préfère dresser des cartes, même s’il ne cache pas que les cartes elles aussi sont piégées, que leur subjectivité, donc leur partialité, est déjà présente dans le moment même où le géographe décide de les dresser. (Maspero 101--3)



Gilles believes that space tends to be viewed by mainstream society as insignificant when its inhabitants are considered to be outsiders, outcasts or simply do not fit the criteria set by officials who decide what is significant and what is not. For certain spaces to reclaim their significance, the outsiders must be forced out, and any traces of their existence erased: “Or ce qu’il constate, lui, facteur, au fil de ses tournées, c’est que petit à petit les noms arabes et africains disparaissent: à Saint Denis dans la cité des Francs Moisis, à Aubervilliers aux Cortillières, ou ici” (Maspero 120). Gilles believes that this is the result of administrative discrimination against people of color in public housing: “On fout dehors tout ce qui n’est pas blanc.” He tells Maspero that this is the essence of what is officially called the “humanisation des cités” (Maspero 118). By incorporating Gilles’ critical comments into his travelogue, Maspero draws attention to governmental policy designed to eliminate foreigners from public housing, and to do away with any traces of the shameful historical memories associated with these groups, especially those of the collapse of their empire. Instead of coming to terms with their colonial past, the French are trying to erase or rewrite it. One of the most sensitive issues is the loss of Indochina in 1954 and Algeria in 1962, which provoked a great crisis of French nationalism. These losses are still painful and humiliating to the French. Gilles’ comments also invite a comparison with research by Hargreaves on post-colonial suburbs. He confirms the fact that officials renamed most institutions and places associated with France’s colonial territory to remove any recollections of that embarrassing past:

The Musée Colonial became the Musée des Arts Africains et Océaniens, the Académie des sciences coloniales turned into the Académie des sciences d’outre-mer, Nord-Africains and Arabes (words which resonated with the polarity between ‘natives’ and colonizers) were transformed into Maghrébins, the Colonial Ministry gave way to a Ministry of Cooperation, and la francophonie gained currency as a seemingly depoliticized label for the global space whose contours had once been those of the French colonial empire. (254\*)

Eliminating sites of memory and changing their names shows that France is still not processing its colonial past in a way that would allow it to reach closure. Hargreaves argues that

if France is to resolve “its current problems relating to immigration,” a better understanding of the colonial past is key to establishing the starting “framework” for both parties, since there exists “a mental block among the majority of ethnic population vis-à-vis the relationship between immigrant minorities and the founding myths of the republican tradition” (256--62\*).

The vicious cycle of violence and hopelessness in the suburbs creates tensions between immigrants as well. Gilles, the postman-geographer, introduces a man named Benoît to Maspero. Half-Vietnamese and half-Chinese, Benoît is highly educated (he has a law degree) but works as a postman like Gilles. One might expect Benoît, as an immigrant, to side with other immigrants. On the contrary, Benoît holds immigrants responsible for their own misery. According to him, one should respect and adopt the norms of the host society: “Benoît a un principe: un proverbe chinois dit que le fleuve doit s’adapter à son lit. Si on vient en France, on adopte la manière de vivre française, c’est élémentaire” (Maspero 125). Benoît goes on to accuse some immigrants around Aulnay and elsewhere in France of lacking responsibility:

Il ne comprend pas que l’on n’essaie pas de vivre intelligemment: partout il se heurte au refus du dialogue, à la barbarie. L’absence de respect de l’autre. Que celui-ci soit blanc, noir, jaune ou violet. Ce n’est pas une question de couleur, c’est une question de responsabilité. Pourquoi tant de gens dans ce pays n’ont-ils pas le sens des responsabilités? (Maspero 125)

Benoît’s behavior and attitude toward other immigrants arise from his belief that, in order for him to be accepted in French society, he should abide by its rules and accept the norms. It would appear that in order to be accepted by the dominant group, Benoît disassociates himself from those other immigrants whom he views as irresponsible. This allows him to move closer to the ethnic majority in order to fully assimilate into the mainstream. Benoît’s beliefs and behavior are influenced by his cultural background and personal history, which differ from that of many other immigrants around him.

Whereas Benoît sees the immigrants' behavior as irresponsible, others, such as a social worker mentioned by Maspero, see it as a way of showing their frustration at the system that failed them. Many children of immigrants in the housing projects are extremely disillusioned, because their fathers, who worked so hard to provide a better life for them, are now "chômeur[s], écrasé[s], vaincu[s]" due to the economic downturn and deindustrialization (55). Hence, some of the youngsters refuse to be like their parents. They see in their fathers' identity an obstacle to their future. This could also explain why many of these youngsters disregard the advice of the social worker on how to make an honest living: because it seems that working hard did not help their parents improve the quality of their lives.

However, despite the difficulties and the challenges of living in the suburbs, certain ethnic minority families and individuals have been able to surmount many obstacles. One example that Maspero presents to his readers to humanize the suburbs is that of Madame Zineb. An Algerian woman from Tlemcen who lives in the Aulnay 3000 housing project, Mrs. Zineb has been successful in raising and educating her children: "un fils qui a fait sept ans de guitare classique et du piano; une fille, qui travaille à Paris dans un ministère et qui aimerait tant faire un travail où elle serait libre, photographe, par exemple; une fille, qui n'a pas d'emploi et veut être hôtesse d'accueil ou de tourisme, ou interprète" (49). Mrs. Zineb fears for the youths in the suburbs, who are vulnerable to the social plagues of drugs and violence, yet this did not stop her from living up to her responsibility for raising her own children. This contradicts the accusations made by Benoît and shows that not all immigrants are irresponsible. The conversation with this Algerian woman also raises another important issue, that of women immigrants, who often remain unnoticed. In this sense, women are the minority of the minority. Their position is often more fragile than that of men in the same marginalized groups. Maspero appears to invite his readers to think about the role that immigrant women played in French society and in the lives of their families. He invites the readers to see immigration not only as a man's world but as a woman's universe as well, emphasizing the struggles of these women, who attempt to raise their children with the hope that they one day may become model citizens and be accepted as equals in mainstream society, despite the daily discrimination and violence that they face in the suburbs.

Immigrants might argue that despite their hard work to earn an honest living and their respect for the culture and norms of French society, they still do not receive reciprocal respect from the French. As Maspero and Frantz continue their journey, they are confronted with this

very issue. Frantz carelessly takes a picture of a group of Malians, without first asking for their permission. Suddenly, she is hailed by one of the men. When Frantz approaches him to see what he wants, the Malians strongly admonish her for having acted disrespectfully: “quand on prend les gens en photo, on leur demande d’abord l’autorisation. Un thème élevé à l’état de principe de vie: le respect avant tout.” They add to the moral lesson by referring to colonial memory: “Au Mali, on a toujours eu le respect de la France. Mais en France, aujourd’hui, ce n’est plus comme avant, on a perdu le respect des autres. Et pourtant mon père s’est battu pour la France” (Maspero 127). These Malians, quite unlike Benoît, blame the French for lacking in respect for others. This is particularly galling because not only do they try to act respectfully towards the French, but they also helped France throughout its history. These Malians cannot forget that their fathers fought for France in its wars. They consider that for France to forget this enormous contribution is disrespectful to memory, and a denial of history<sup>6</sup>. Contrary to the negative image that Benoît has of some immigrants, the one that Maspero presents of the Malians is of people who are polite, educated and respectful (127). The French “forgetfulness” of law-abiding immigrants and their contributions can be best illustrated through the experience of Jews in France during World War II.

### **The Jewish experience**

En 1942, après la grande rafle des 16 et 17 juillet par la police française, conséquence de la décision nazie de mettre en œuvre la solution finale de la question juive et de déclencher l’opération *Vent printanier*, Drancy devint le point de départ unique, la tête de ligne pour Auschwitz. (Maspero 184)

One of Maspero’s stops is “La Cité de La Muette,” which can be translated as the “Housing project of the Voiceless.” It was the setting of one of the darkest and most unspeakable events in

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<sup>6</sup> Another example that shows a disrespect for colonial history is the poor treatment received by the Algerian auxiliary force known as “Harkis”, who fought side by side with French soldiers against Algerian nationalists. Those Harkis, who live today in France are still subject to discriminatory acts. A young Harki told one journalist: “We are not Algerians but neither are we considered to be French... Whenever we go out in a group we are always stopped by the police who ask to see our residence permits. But we do not have them; our papers are either our identity card or a French passport” Quoted in Silverman (173).

French history. Although for many years most French were unaware of or unwilling to admit to this part of their history, French Jews have never forgotten what transpired in the Cité de la Muette, which still exists in the town of Drancy, a suburb of Paris. The events are still vividly etched in their collective memory. The housing project could never be seen as or turned into a heroic national symbol because it is the site of a bad memory and an unwanted and shameful past. It can never be celebrated because it contradicts the myths of the French resistance to the Nazi occupation. Maspero reminds us that, at the time, non-Jews had rejected their fellow Jewish citizens in an unforgettable manner:

Vous êtes juif français. Vous êtes juif français, c'est-à-dire que vous êtes juif tout court. Il peut arriver d'ailleurs que vous l'ayez complètement oublié: la République était laïque. Mais on va vous rafraîchir la mémoire, et si jamais vous en sortez vivant, vous ne l'oublierez plus. (Maspero 177)

It is ironical that although many French non-Jews insisted on reminding the Jews of their ethnic heritage, the former would now rather suppress this part of French history. The Jews, on the other hand, have never forgotten the collaboration of the French with the Germans, which led to the deportation and massacre of many Jews who had been living in France. Jews had settled in France and accepted it as their own newfound home, yet had been targeted by the French after the defeat by Germany. They were targeted because they were seen as a danger to society and to French identity. The French administration ignored the contributions of Jews and the positions that they had held in society prior to the outbreak of the Second World War:

Vous êtes allé vous faire enregistrer au commissariat de police. Sur votre carte d'identité, le secrétaire a mis un tampon : JUIF. Vous étiez fonctionnaire, vous ne l'êtes plus. Vous étiez commerçant, avocat, médecin, vous ne l'êtes plus. Vous étiez ancien combattant (et même tout prêt à combattre encore), c'est un peu plus compliqué mais, en gros, vous ne l'êtes plus non plus. (Maspero 176)

One question, however, bears consideration: how were Jews identified when they looked unlike Arabs or Africans, but instead had the same physical features as other Europeans? To answer this, it is necessary to briefly describe some key laws and regulations that had been introduced and adapted by the French administration to control immigrants and foreign workers at the time.

According to Gérard Noiriel, the French increasingly became suspicious of all foreigners during the First World War. This suspicion became a perfect political tool for certain legislators to introduce policy and legislation that required all non-resident foreigners in France to carry identification cards: “This card will mention very obviously, the nationality of its holder, his civil status, his photographic description, his profession and it will carry his signature” (Noiriel 61). Noiriel’s research shows that, for some French, the laws requiring an identification card to track foreign residents were not adequate and did not reach far enough to satisfy their mistrust of immigrants. Therefore, stricter amendments were introduced later. The new laws made significant changes to the certificate of registration of all foreigners. The new card came with complete information about the card-holder. These laws meant that a foreigner was traced and tracked everywhere. If he/she changed anything in his/her status, the card had to reflect that change in order to be valid.

Jews, however, had to deal with a more humiliating experience. Under the collaboration between the Vichy regime and the Nazis, an identification card and a badge in the form of a yellow star of David were given to Jews for easy identification, which consequently facilitated numerous police raids and round-ups (61--3). Jews were shipped to concentration camps. The very fact of demarcation was psychologically destructive. It symbolized a tragic change in the course of their lives: “Jadis, écrivait Max Jacob, personne ne me remarquait dans la rue. Maintenant les enfants se moquent de mon étoile jaune. Heureux crapaud! Tu n’as pas d’étoile jaune” (Maspero 176). The yellow star became a symbol of persecution and humiliation. It helped the French visually label the Jews, and restricted their freedom: “The badge made a distinction. One day there were people on the street, and the next day there were Jews and non-Jews.”<sup>7</sup> It also created fear. Wearing the star meant that the Jews were the target of individual

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<sup>7</sup> [www.jewishpeople.net/yellowstar.net/yellowstar.html](http://www.jewishpeople.net/yellowstar.net/yellowstar.html)

acts of discrimination. Clearly, anti-Semitic behavior and attitudes were not something that France was trying to hide at the time. The Vichy regime enacted laws and regulations that helped deal with “the Jewish Question,” as Maspero reminds us:

Nous Maréchal de France, Chef de l’Etat Français

Décrétons :

Art. 4. Il est ouvert au ministre secrétaire d’État à l’Intérieur, en addition aux crédits accordés par la loi de finances du 31 décembre 1939, un crédit de 32 millions pour [...]: Frais de surveillance des camps d’indésirables.

Fait à Vichy, le 17 novembre 1940

Philippe Pétain. (176--7)

As Maspero contemplates Drancy and reflects on the present condition of the housing project, he makes the reader realize that although it functions today as the setting for the social and economic interaction of the current residents, it also provides a stage where part of the Jewish memory is still waiting to be revived. This space does not hold the same meaning for the present residents as it does for Jews, since it is not their past. Through historical memory, this particular place is transformed into a landmark in a psychic geography for not only the Jews who survived the horrors of the past, but also other Jews in France who did not go to the camps and non-Jews who remember the role Drancy played in the genocide:

Comme la cité est vieille et mal bâtie, sa population actuelle est composée de gens modestes qui sont, dans une grande proportion, des immigrés. Cette histoire-là n’est certes pas leur histoire. Heureusement pour eux, car qui pourrait vivre ici, s’il fallait à chaque moment entendre dans sa mémoire résonner tant d’abjects échos? (Maspero 188)

Maspero suggests that a new wave of working immigrants has occupied the Cité de La Muette because the poorly built housing is cheap. He supposes that they either do not know much about the horrific past or must not be troubled by it, because its past is not theirs. The only thing these new residents know is that they have been exiled there. This arrangement works particularly well for the French majority, because it helps ease some of the housing shortage while also concealing the historical reality of the Cité de la Muette. As long as it remains standing the Cité de la Muette will remain a challenge to French history. What Maspero might be suggesting by his visit to Drancy is that, in order for the French to understand and come to terms with their true identity, they need to explore all their sites of memory, famous and infamous ones alike.

Many French may always turn their backs on the Cité de la Muette and other historical sites of a similar nature. They may choose to ignore the historical significance of France's darker past, and enthusiastically focus instead on preserving such glorious monuments as the Eiffel tower or the Notre Dame Cathedral. All the same, to at least one group, Drancy will always be a space of intense and painful memories. Some, through simple means, are keeping the memory of the Cité de la Muette alive. This is clearly illustrated in the example of Monsieur Durin, the headmaster of the Lycée Eugène Delacroix, located only 200 hundred yards away from the former camp. Mr. Durin made a monument of paper rather than stone -- he had his pupils write a "book-album" commemorating the people who perished: "C'est le monument le plus simple, le plus émouvant et le plus efficace contre l'oubli. Mais le vrai monument, c'est la cité de Muette tout entière" (189). Mr. Durin's gesture is symbolic. By having his students write a "book-album" in memoriam of the now shameful past, he helps a new generation face up to its history and commemorate the bad along with the good. Most importantly, the experience helps fulfill the school's mission to accurately teach future generations how to remember the past.

These kinds of monuments help to keep the Jewish memory alive. Drancy remains one of the most significant spaces in Jewish history in France. As long as Jewish memory is alive and Jewish victims and their descendants continue to insist on preserving that past, France's historical identity will be questioned. In an interview with Radio Free Europe, Benjamin Stora, a well-known and respected French historian, confirms that it is what he calls "the Jewish



memory” that remains primarily responsible for changing French attitudes toward the Résistance. According to him, it is the movement of “the children of those deported to Nazi death camps” who overturned the traditional French view of the wartime era<sup>8</sup>. Their questioning helped destroy the Résistance myth, similar to the ways that the offspring of the French soldiers who served in 1954--62 in Algeria, of the Harkis, and of other Algerians, question and dispute the official version of the Algerian war.

History thus repeats itself. Decades ago, the targets of discrimination were European Jews, Italians, Poles and others. Today the focus seems to have been shifted toward non-Europeans, particularly Africans. France has repeatedly tried to find a scapegoat to blame for its economic, social and political crises.

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<sup>8</sup> quoted in <http://www.rferl.org/nca/features/2002/07/19072002155826.asp>

## **Part II**

### **Memory and History in Meurtres pour mémoire**

Meurtres pour mémoire ne naît pas de la volonté de révéler un scandale, mais d'une part de la sensibilité à des événements du fait de raisons précises et extrêmement intimes, et d'autre part du constat qu'on ne peut pas continuer à vivre tant que certaines choses ne sont pas dites, ni nommées. Dévoiler de tels événements n'est pas facile, mais, pour moi, c'est de l'ordre de la prise de responsabilité, et c'est une histoire de dignité. Je crois que je n'aurais pas pu vraiment continuer à vivre si je n'avais pas dit ce que j'avais sur le cœur. (MPM\* 22)<sup>9</sup>

### **Moral and intellectual obligations**

Analysis of Didier Daeninckx's detective novel Meurtres pour mémoire reveals in many ways how it raises, and attempts to answer, concerns and questions similar to those that Maspéro discovered and discussed in Les passagers du Roissy-Express. Daeninckx uses the detective novel not only to question the objectivity of official French history, but also to deconstruct, correct, and recreate the historical narrative, thereby clarifying problems of French identity. His work brings a haunting past back to the surface so that the French reader can confront it, thus putting traditional French history into question. Daeninckx believes in the importance of recalling sensitive times in history, whereas certain French officials would prefer to forget and hide them.

The detective novel is generally written in the past tense because it deals with crimes already committed: "on a tué quelqu'un, alors on revient en arrière pour découvrir l'assassin et pourquoi" (Declercq 4). This return to the past enables Daeninckx to unearth certain controversial social and political issues from French history. Through its construction around the need to solve a crime, this literary genre is designed to keep the reader interested and absorbed in the unfolding events, even if they have negative implications for the reader's own image and identity. Although the reader must follow many twists and turns, he or she feels pulled toward

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<sup>9</sup> Meurtres pour Mémoire will be referred to in the thesis as "MPM." I will be using two different editions. An "\*" by the title refers to the edition of 1989, which is accompanied by extensive notes, analyses and an interview of Daeninckx.

the end of the book, as though the end carried more weight than the preceding chapters: “In a contemporary detective novel, one can almost assume that there will be more than one death. In the classic formulation of the genre, these deaths are related, so that all the threads of detection can be gathered up at the end” (Charney 14). Throughout the book the reader remains engaged and becomes a participant in trying to solve the crime(s) committed. Daeninckx successfully takes his reader on a ride in multidimensional time and space, while keeping him or her captivated and immersed continuously. He skillfully exploits the suspense of the detective novel as a means of disinterring historical memory: “S’il fallait définir son oeuvre d’une formule, on pourrait dire qu’il écrit le thriller de la mémoire historique” (Provost and Lebrun 83).

French readers today are led to uncover the connection, or disconnection, between the reality and the historical myth of French identity in Meurtres pour mémoire, in which Daeninckx deals with French amnesia about the Occupation and the crimes against humanity committed by officials of the Vichy government. Daeninckx demonstrates the need to be able to return to a crime in the past, interpret it, and judge it in its full context, with reference to subsequent crimes for which the same person bears responsibility. His book recounts a historical story about acts that were extraordinarily disruptive to the existing social order and are still. By directly confronting a past that was distorted, Daeninckx challenges the foundation of French collective memory and identity. He attempts to goad French society into facing questions regarding its past and thereby reevaluate its present and future states, especially regarding the existence of racism and the extent to which people are treated equally in France. Daeninckx’s endeavor to restore historical memory requires a substantial intellectual and moral commitment, especially because he deals with two eras of French history that are anything but glorious: the police massacre of Algerians on October 17, 1961, and the earlier deportation of Jews, during the Vichy regime.

## **The Massacre**

En définitive, c’est l’action policière sous les ordres de Papon qui a été mise en accusation. A mon sens, donc, il y a eu crime contre l’humanité: en octobre 1961 à Paris, il y a eu une véritable chasse à l’homme. Des gens ont été blessés, très gravement, des gens ont été tués, des gens ont été méprisés, en fonction d’un critère, celui de

l'apparence physique, c'est-à-dire en fonction de critères racistes, et en fonction de leur appartenance réelle ou supposée à une communauté humaine, en l'occurrence la communauté algérienne. Alors je dis que ça entre dans le cadre des crimes contre l'humanité. (Einaudi b)

In Meurtres pour mémoire three of the main characters are historians, of whom two are killed in mysterious ways. Both homicides suggest that historical inquiry can be dangerously troubling. The book's title provides the first clue about the theme of the story: the correlation between crime and memory. It suggests that people are murdered for trying to reveal or even to remember the past. In the first chapters of the book, Daeninckx presents a fictional story based on an actual event: a peaceful demonstration held in Paris on October 17, 1961. It was organized by Algerians to protest against the curfew<sup>10</sup> recently imposed by the French government on Muslim Algerian workers ("les Français Musulmans d'Algérie"). The demonstration was also organized to legitimate the FLN and to strengthen its negotiating power. The peaceful demonstration met with a violent response from the French riot police, the Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité (CRS). The demonstrators were viciously beaten, shot and even drowned in the Seine by the police; those not killed on the spot were rounded up and taken in buses to a city stadium, police stations, and other detention centers around the city, where many of them later died.

It is important to note that Daeninckx based his historical fiction on genuine eyewitness accounts collected shortly after the actual massacre. FLN leaders encouraged French supporters and Algerian victims to write down descriptions of everything they had seen or experienced during and just after the demonstration. Copies of these documents were later given to Daeninckx as he was writing his book Meurtres pour mémoire: "Il y avait là deux cents lettres poignantes qui ont été les principales sources d'émotion et de vérité de Meurtres pour mémoire" (MPM\* 21). Some of the same or similar documents were consulted and used by Jean-

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<sup>10</sup> The following is an excerpt from the communiqué by the Chief of Police in Paris, Maurice Papon, that created the curfew on October 5, 1961 (quoted in <http://17octobre1961.free.fr>): "Dans le but de mettre un terme sans délai aux agissements criminels des terroristes, des mesures nouvelles viennent d'être décidées par la préfecture de police. En vue d'en faciliter l'exécution, il est conseillé de la façon la plus pressante aux travailleurs algériens de s'abstenir de circuler la nuit dans les rues de Paris et de la banlieue parisienne [...] Il est très vivement recommandé aux Français musulmans de circuler isolément, les petits groupes risquant de paraître suspects aux rondes et patrouilles de police. Enfin, le préfet de police a décidé que les débits de boissons tenus et fréquentés par les Français musulmans d'Algérie doivent fermer chaque jour à 19 heures."

Luc Einaudi, an educator and specialist of the history of the October 1961 events, when he was writing his important study La Bataille de Paris.

In the novel, the scenes preceding the description of the demonstration reveal the hopes and aspirations of the Algerian working class who participated in it. The novel includes an unflinching description of the Parisian shantytowns that most of the demonstrators called home<sup>11</sup>. The reader of Meurtres pour mémoire follows some of the Algerian characters in their daily life, only to see them brutally killed by the CRS. Daeninckx suggests – even in humorous ways – that most of the victims may have adopted French lifestyles, while still trying to hold onto their own culture. Some of their dreams might seem insignificant to the casual observer but are nonetheless important to them. For example, upon seeing a poster for the movie Paris nous appartient by Jacques Rivette, Saïd, a young Algerian who works in a publishing company, turns to his friend Lounès and describes his dream: “Tu te rends compte Lounès, Paris nous appartient.” Lounès does not hide his sentiments either, and replies, “[p]our un soir ...Si cela ne tenait qu’à moi, je leur laisserais Paris. Paris et tout le reste, pour un petit village du Hodna” (MPM 15).

Daeninckx’s choice of the word “Hodna,” the Arabic word for tranquility, reveals the inner struggle that Lounès, like the majority of the Algerians, faces.<sup>12</sup> Saïd wants to feel that Paris belongs to him in the same way that it does to a French person. This is his dream. Lounès, on the other hand, would rather return home to his quiet village back in Algeria. Paris, with its beautiful lights and glamorous attractions, does not give him the inner peace that he longs for. In this passage, Daeninckx reveals the homesickness and alienation that the French Algerians suffer in a society that fails to recognize them as equal citizens.

In another passage, the reader is invited to share the aspirations of Kaïra, who refuses to be a stereotype of her gender, as a submissive Algerian woman. Instead, she struggles to create her own sexual identity in France: “Le jour de sa mort [celle de sa mère], Kaïra s’était juré de ne pas être une simple hypothèse de femme” (21). Kaïra also expresses her nationalistic aspirations in an ironic comment about the upcoming demonstration: “Nous allons peut-être débaptiser la place de l’Etoile, et l’appeler place du Croissant et de l’Etoile!” (25). By just adding a few words

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<sup>11</sup> Maspero described similar working class and multi-ethnic neighborhoods in Les passagers du Roissy-Express.

<sup>12</sup> Hodna is also a region in Algeria. In North African countries, the word Hodna is frequently used to refer to peace and tranquility when one is struggling emotionally.

to the name of a famous French landmark, she profoundly changes its meaning. The famous plaza in Paris is transformed into a symbol of Islam and Algeria, represented by the Star and the Crescent. This linguistic transformation is significant because it gives the reader a general idea about the cultural multiplicity that exists in the suburbs. The renaming of places by members of marginalized groups living in the shantytowns allows them to re-appropriate French spaces as their own. Another example of this linguistic transformation is the changing of the letters OAS (Organisation Armée Secrète) painted on a water tower, from the acronym for a colonialist and racist military organization into “OASIS”, which suggests the yearning for a better life.

However, all these hopes and aspirations are crushed on October 17, 1961. This linguistic transformation in the novel may remind the reader of a similar, well-known play on words by De Gaulle, which suggests how he viewed the idea of a true Algerian integration into French society. Toward the end of the Algerian War he told his colleagues that France had only two choices for ending the Algerian crisis:<sup>13</sup> either to grant independence to Algeria, or to fully integrate Algerian Muslims into the French Republic. Independence, he claimed, was a bitter choice, yet it was considerably better than the alternative:

If we integrate them, if all the Arabs and the Berbers of Algeria were considered French, how could they be prevented from settling in France, where the living standard is so much higher? My village would no longer be called Colombey-les-Deux-Églises but Colombey-les-Deux-Mosquées. (Quoted in Shatz 4)

In the novel, Daeninckx takes his readers through the events of the massacre, involving them as witnesses and inviting them to judge the legitimacy of the use of brutal force by the CRS against unarmed civilian demonstrators. In addition, he exposes the plight of the Algerian marchers, who encounter the apathy of many French onlookers. Through the critical comments of Roger Thiraud, the first main character and victim in the story, Daeninckx invites his readers to condemn the indifference of French bystanders towards the distress of helpless Algerians. In the novel some French join forces with the police by pushing frightened demonstrators into the

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<sup>13</sup> The Algerian War has often been referred to as “la guerre sans nom”, because France regarded FLN members not as legitimate combatants, but rather as outlaws and terrorists.

streets and pointing out their hiding places, leading to their arrest and even death. A vivid example is the case of a theater director who summons the police to evict terrified demonstrators hiding backstage. He worries that they are delaying his show: “Venez vite, il y en a au moins cinquante qui sont entrés dans la partie technique et dans les coulisses. Notre première débute dans dix minutes, il faut que vous interveniez” (34). Comments and acts like these serve as an indictment of the collective indifference or even outright antagonism of the French, who refused to protect the freedom of assembly of the Algerians or recognize their right to national self-determination.

The general apathy and even antipathy of the French public could be explained by the fact that most willingly agreed with the official narrative about the Algerian crisis, and the events that were unfolding both in Algeria and in France:

-Ils l’ont bien cherché, lui dit un passant. Roger Thiraud le fixa.

-Mais ils ont besoin d’être soignés, il faudrait les transporter à l’hôpital. Ils vont tous mourir!

-Si vous croyez qu’ils ont pitié des nôtres, là-bas. Et d’abord ce sont eux qui ont tiré les premiers. (34)

The statement by the unnamed French onlooker raises important questions regarding the accuracy of the information that French officials provided to the public. For example, after the massacre, government officials claimed that Algerians started the violence and that the police only responded in self-defense and to protect France from terrorist attacks. This distorted governmental narrative linked the massacre only to the struggle in Algeria and concealed a primary purpose of the protest: to denounce the discriminatory curfew imposed on the Algerian French in Paris.

From the description of the demonstration, the reader knows that the demonstrators were peaceful and unarmed: “Pas un ne portait d’arme, le moindre couteau, la plus petite pierre dans la poche” (33). Benjamin Stora, a well-respected French historian, in his book La gangrène et l’oubli, confirms that from its conception, the demonstration of October 17 was designed to be



peaceful in nature, contrary to official governmental claims at the time. The plan, according to Stora, was for the marchers to assemble at various points around the city and then march toward public places: “Pour cette manifestation dans Paris, il s’agissait de se concentrer, ou de se diriger, vers des endroits publics tels que la Concorde, les Champs-Élysées, les grands boulevards” (Stora 95). Roger Thiraud, the history teacher in the novel, confirms this fact for the reader, when he responds to the French onlooker who blames the Algerians for having started the violence: “-Non, ne dites pas ça. Je suis ici depuis le début, je rentrais chez moi... Ils couraient comme des lapins, les mains nues, ils cherchaient à se cacher, se protéger quand la police a ouvert le feu” (MPM 34).

Furthermore, participants in the demonstration were urged by the leaders of the FLN to ignore all forms of provocation. To ensure the success of this peaceful new method that the FLN was trying out, instead of terrorism, to achieve its goals, FLN members searched participants for weapons prior to the start of the demonstration. The FLN wanted to obtain support from the international community for its negotiations with the French government. Ali Haroun, one of the organizers of the march, explained later that the demonstration was designed to take place in the main streets of Paris to maximize publicity: “Pourquoi sur les grands boulevards? Parce que les Parisiens, les étrangers, les journalistes, seraient là...” (Levine 83).

In the novel, Thiraud is killed soon after he makes his sympathetic remarks. The killer, dressed as a CRS, is calm and assaults his target by design. The commotion of the confrontation between the police and the demonstrators creates the perfect conditions for the slaying of the history teacher. The reader immediately faces the problem of solving this crime. He or she must try to understand the motive for this murder of a seemingly innocent bystander who, while returning home, witnessed the bloodbath. Presented with limited facts about Thiraud, the reader may have many questions: for example, why was he killed? Was the killing an accident? Was it because he witnessed the massacre taking place, making it necessary to eradicate him? Was it because he sympathized with the Algerian cause? Or, was there a mistake? Thiraud seems to be such an unlikely victim. Moreover, Daeninckx initially provides no more clues as to the motive and precise identity of the murderer. The reader is left wondering about the meaning of the killing. Finding out who did it and for what reason becomes the goal of the detective as well as the reader.

The mystery surrounding the killing of Thiraud enables Daeninckx to keep his French readers interested and involved in the historical material that he uncovers. Making the victim a Frenchman of European descent may encourage empathy in the French reader and encourage him or her to further investigate the crime by reading the rest of the novel. By mixing historical facts with fiction, Daeninckx avoids confronting his reader directly with a shameful event of French history. To have done so in a completely factual and didactic manner could have alienated his readers and caused them to stop reading.

Daeninckx cleverly ends his chapter right after the murder, leaving the mystery intact. He skips twenty years ahead in his next chapter to the death of Bernard Thiraud, the son of Roger. Intriguingly, Bernard is a historian as well, and is killed in similarly mystifying circumstances. We also know that Bernard, on his way to Morocco for a vacation, makes a quick stop in Toulouse to consult the archives in the town hall and prefecture. He tells his fiancée that he is getting close to wrapping up his research and to making major discoveries: “-Claudine, cette fois je suis extrêmement sérieux. Je tiens le bon bout” (MPM 42). At the prefectural archives, Bernard asks the archivist for permission to look at files beginning with the letters DE. As Bernard leaves the prefecture, he is gunned down.

Again, the identity of the murderer is unknown. Bernard’s death adds greatly to the aura of mystery and appears to reduce the possibility that Roger’s murder had been a mistake or an accident. Other important questions inevitably surface: who killed Bernard and why? Does this killing have something to do with the murder of his father? If so, what? Does the fact that both victims were historians have anything to do with their violent deaths, or is this fact a mere coincidence? Do the files that Bernard consulted have something to do with his death? What is in them? Daeninckx stokes the curiosity of his reader by supplying tantalizing clues about their content: “DEbroussaillage... DEdommagements... DEfense passive...” (63).

### **The detective becomes a historian**

History begins where justice ends. Long after the judge finishes a case and sends its record off to gather dust in the archives, a historian reclaims it for his or her own purposes. Few concern themselves so long after the

crime with the contested issues of guilt or innocence, since the value of criminal records for history is not so much what they uncover about a particular crime as what they reveal about otherwise invisible or opaque realms of human experience. Nevertheless, it has long been fashionable to compare historical and judicial methods, typically by assigning to the historian a judicial role such as witness, detective, or judge. (Muir and Ruggiero vii)

Understanding that readers will now want to learn more about the connection between history and the crimes, Daeninckx is selective in shaping and profiling the character of the detective to lead the investigation. His inspector Cadin is intelligent, full of energy, and knows what to look for, but most of all is stubborn and unwilling to overlook the past. He is not a bureaucrat; instead, he is a man of principle who is ready to take on the challenges of a dangerous job that could endanger his career as well as his life. The narrative encourages the reader to accept the need for Cadin to explore the events of the Algerian massacre in order to explain the murder. Cadin will thus assume the historian's role while investigating the two crimes: his work will not only point towards the failures and the shortcomings of mainstream French historians, who, until recently, did little to document certain crimes and mistakes of the past, but will also reconfigure the historical narrative. Daeninckx's decision to have an inspector solve what appears to be an isolated crime will set the stage for revealing crimes against humanity committed by French officials. The investigation repeatedly leads the readers through events to show them from different angles and provides a prism through which they can gain a clearer understanding of the origins, nature, and impact of forgotten or hidden events:

Qu'est-ce que fait un enquêteur sinon comprendre pourquoi la catastrophe est advenue à partir des traces. C'est toujours un travail sur les traces: celles laissées par l'assassin, par la victime, par les indifférents. C'est toujours une remontée dans les traces. [...] Le travail sur les traces est actuellement au coeur du roman policier, ce qui explique la fascination qu'il exerce dans le monde littéraire. (Daeninckx<sup>14</sup>)

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted in <<http://www.sunderland.ac.uk/~os0tmc/occupied/mpm.htm>>

Looking for clues to help him solve the murder of Bernard Thiraud, Cadin makes an intuitive link between the murders of the father and the son. He eventually realizes that Bernard was killed as he was trying to understand the importance of his father's research, which uncovered the wartime history of his childhood home, Drancy. While tracing Bernard's last movements in order to map out the crime sequence, Cadin finds himself looking into the same archives and documents examined by the Thirauds. Consequently, Cadin adds the role of historian to that of detective. His pursuit of the truth takes the readers virtually through time and space in search for clues, and allows them to encounter new witnesses who observed the same event from different perspectives, therefore giving a plurality of voices to fill in the historical narrative. Some committed these crimes or acted as accessories to their commission. While opening up buried memories and penetrating the realms of private recollections and public histories, Cadin questions the records of official institutions and challenges the validity of the official narrative of the past.

Daeninckx tries to show that gaining access to official archives is no easy task, even for a representative of law and order, and thereby raises the important issue of the need to obtain historical documents to produce an accurate narrative. In the novel, Cadin faces challenges as he tries to search the official archives. The access to some files is limited, dangerous and may be linked to the death of the Thirauds. There is secrecy surrounding the files that implicate state officials. This impedes Cadin's investigation. His struggle in the fiction is similar to actual difficulties experienced by many intellectuals who seek to establish the truth about French history and urge the government to admit responsibility for crimes committed in the name of national security. For example, Jean-Luc Einaudi was denied access to state archives during the research for his book La Bataille de Paris. Recent controversy over the role of government officials, especially Papon, in the suppression of the protest should encourage a responsible historical examination and a better understanding of the event and its meanings. This could produce a fuller comprehension of all facets of France's responsibility for the Algerian War and could save that past from what Benjamin Stora calls "la gangrène et l'oubli." The access that Daeninckx gained to unofficial archives – the documentation produced by Algerians just after the massacre – illustrates the importance of suppressed material and as yet unheard voices to the production of historical knowledge.

Meurtres pour mémoire came to exist in its present form thanks to a crucial shift in the author's perspective. Daeninckx originally set out to write about a demonstration that took place near the Charonne subway station in 1962, when eight people died during a brutal police attack on French demonstrators. During his investigation of the Charonne incident, Daeninckx uncovered an even more horrendous massacre that had taken place about four months earlier in Paris. The victims were Algerians this time. Even though the number of casualties was much higher, the Algerian massacre had become masked for many on the French Left by the memory of the Charonne killings. This unexpected discovery compelled Daeninckx to change his focus to the events that had taken place on October 17, 1961:

Et puis, en commençant à écrire sur Charonne, je me suis aperçu que six mois auparavant, c'est-à-dire en octobre 1961,<sup>15</sup> il y avait eu une autre manifestation, d'Algériens cette fois, où la répression avait été dix fois, voire vingt fois plus forte encore que celle de février 1962. Et donc le sujet du livre s'est décentré: il n'a plus été question de Charonne mais du 17 octobre 1961. (MPM\* 20)

The parallel between this decentering and the shifts in Cadin's investigation is striking. He finds himself increasingly interested in Roger Thiraud's death. The deviation of his investigation, away from an exclusive focus on the death of Bernard Thiraud, leads him to reconstruct the events of October 17, 1961, which compels the reader to reexamine the horrors of, and responsibility for, the massacre. By carefully interweaving the past and the present, Daeninckx cultivates the interest of the reader in the events described in the first chapter of the book. It becomes the reader's goal – as a kind of detective – to uncover the relevance of those events to the murder investigation. Thus, the reader of Meurtres pour mémoire is bound to find clues that lead to the progressive revelation of historical atrocities.

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<sup>15</sup> The Charonne massacre took place approximately four months after the 17 October massacre and not six months, as Daeninckx states.

Like Daeninckx, Cadin does not compromise his ethics.<sup>16</sup> Having a strong sense of personal integrity, he does not hesitate to show where he stands, even in apparently insignificant, everyday situations. For example, at the end of a trip to a Paris suburb, Cadin refuses to tip the driver because he made racist remarks about Arabs, West Africans, and Jews. Nor does he hesitate to express his opinions even when they are unpopular. When told that there is nothing in the classified files about the October 1961 massacre, Cadin exclaims: “Ce que j’essaie de souligner c’est qu’il s’agit d’une histoire importante. Un Oradour en plein Paris; personne n’en sait rien! Il doit bien exister des traces d’un pareil massacre...” (MPM 81). Daeninckx, through Cadin, purposely compares the killings of Algerians by the French police during the Algerian War to a well-known massacre of French civilians by the Nazis during WW II in the small village of Oradour. This suggests that the Algerians were innocent victims and indirectly accuses the French of acting like the Nazis. Moreover, it could be seen as a reminder to the French about the myth of the Résistance during the Occupation, when Germans received unconditional collaboration from high-ranking French officials and many others. The deeper Cadin gets into his investigation of the murder of Bernard Thiraud, the more apparent it becomes to him how dangerous and thorny his work is. Little by little, Cadin finds himself on the opposite side of the establishment, as he learns when he is urged by colleagues working in the Renseignements Généraux to drop his investigation. One of them even suggests that the case is closed (“Classé sans suite”) on the Algerians found dead after the massacre (83). The officials do not want to remember what had happened: “L’heure est à l’oubli sinon au pardon” (82). This emphasis on forgetting is a deliberate occultation that should be seen as part of the wider process of structured amnesia that conceals the massacre of October 1961 and the Algerian War as a whole. It also helps reveal the kind of language produced by government officials to respond to accusations from their critics.

However, Cadin, unlike his colleagues, is not willing to forget the past. Through the fictional investigation of Cadin, Daeninckx carefully highlights the discrepancies between the demonstration and the official account of the event. He asserts that the latter is invalid and presents readers with an alternative description. From this point on, the novel suggests that

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<sup>16</sup> Daeninckx is an intellectual who has often spoken out publicly against crimes, and who, despite controversies and taboos regarding certain periods of French history, has never hesitated to tell what he believes is the truth, and to make clear where he stands on sensitive issues. See below, the quote from him given as the epigraph to the section subtitled “ ‘J’accuse’ Maurice Papon.”

governmental actions helped purge the memory of the events of 17 October 1961 from public consciousness. Paralleling the novel, in reality, the existence of a scheme to cover up the crimes has been corroborated by statements from members of the police force who had helped suppress the demonstration. Some of them disagreed with the official version about what had happened on that fateful day (Mathúna 5). The silence and cover-up are still actively maintained. In 1998, French authorities seized the Algerian edition of the newspaper Liberté, which contained an article about the massacre. The officials did not want the article to circulate in France (5).

### **Silence over the Jewish experience in Drancy**

L'autre volet du livre, c'était Drancy, sous l'occupation: je suis allé à la cité de la Muette, j'ai lu les livres qui avaient été écrits sur la manière dont elle avait été construite, comme une cité radieuse consacrée à l'avenir du prolétariat, pour comprendre comment elle avait pu devenir ça: une caserne pour les gardes mobiles et un camp de concentration pour les Juifs. Personne n'a encore vraiment fait un travail là-dessus, sur ce malheur des cités. Il y a, chez les architectes, une volonté de tabou, de ne pas établir le lien. (Daeninckx<sup>17</sup>)

Cadin is the main instrument the reader can use to determine the real criminals in French history, by following his investigation of the deaths of the two historians. Cadin connects the dots when he reads a monograph by Roger Thiraud, which Bernard had intended to complete. He realizes then that Roger had been writing the history of Drancy, a suburb of Paris that had housed a notorious transit camp for Jews who were to be transported to Auschwitz and other German extermination camps under the Vichy regime. This suggests that the killings of both Roger and his son were designed to cover up that shameful past, by hiding France's wartime activities. The investigation of the murder of father and son leads to the discovery of crimes against humanity committed by the French state. The deportation of Jews by the Vichy regime and the horrendous repression of the Algerian demonstration on October 1961 have important ramifications for the

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<sup>17</sup> The following is an excerpt from an interview of Didier Daeninckx by François Maspero. Quoted in [www.editions-verdier.fr](http://www.editions-verdier.fr)

French. They bring to light personal and communal tragedies and expose public indifference. In addition, the carnage of the 1961 massacre – the rounding up, torture and murder of Algerians – invites a comparison with the fate of Jews during the Nazi occupation. Coincidentally, the majority of the Algerians detained were herded into Palais des sports after the demonstration, just as the Jews had been taken to Vel'd'Hiv stadium<sup>18</sup> prior to being sent to Drancy and then deported to death camps in Germany. This ominous parallel was drawn by some observers over forty years ago. In an editorial published in Témoignage Chrétien on 27 October 1961, Hervé Bourges wrote:

En 1936, dans l'Allemagne hitlérienne, Himmler expliquait aux juifs que les ghettos avaient été créés de manière à assurer leur protection. En 1961, M. Papon assure les musulmans que les mesures du couvre-feu ont été prises «dans leur propre intérêt». Nous avons connu le temps où les juifs étaient tenus à porter, en signe distinctif, l'étoile jaune. A quand l'étoile verte sur les poitrines des Algériens? (quoted in Einaudi 235)

The representation of the Jews in the novel is not direct: they are not characterized through personal stories as is the case for the Algerian demonstrators and the Thirauds. Instead, the experiences of the Jews are presented in the novel as a lost narrative that surfaces from French history almost by accident. It is only when Cadin consults documents in the archives of the Toulouse prefecture, where both Bernard Thiraud and his father had previously done research, which he finds himself unearthing damning information regarding one of France's darkest eras.

The historical material that is presented as the most shocking is the inhumane treatment of Jewish children. Their internment at Drancy and subsequent deportation are depicted as constituting a mere business transaction:

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<sup>18</sup> The Vélodrome d'Hiver was a stadium in Paris designed for bike races. It was destroyed after the Second World War, instead of being preserved as a "lieu de mémoire".



En réponse à votre note du neuf courant, nous avons l'honneur de vous communiquer les renseignements suivants:

- |   |                  |
|---|------------------|
| 1) Enfants de moins de 9 mois:                      | 347              |
| 2) Enfants de 9 mois à 3 ans:                       | 882              |
| 3) Enfants de 3 ans à 6 ans:                        | 1 245            |
| 4) Enfants de 6 ans à 13 ans:                       | 4 134            |
| 5) Quantité de lait perçue actuellement (par mois): | 3 223,50 litres. |

En raison des “sautes d'effectifs” très fréquentes, les renseignements ci-dessus ne donnent qu'une idée approximative et le nombre d'enfants peut varier de + ou – 50 unités d'un jour sur l'autre. (MPM 179)

Daeninckx emphasizes the significance of this document and uses it to enhance the novel's credibility in reconstructing the facts about this episode of French history. Through Cadin's shocked reaction the novelist suggests his own revulsion to the extreme cruelty toward innocent children who are not old enough to begin to understand the tragedy that strikes them. These children appear in a nightmare that Cadin has after reading the document. They shout “Pitchipoï,” the word that their parents used when discussing the camp at Drancy in order to hide the horrible reality from them: “Une musique lancinante recouvrit le fracas du train, en adoptant le caractère saccadé. Des milliers de voix enfantines rythmaient la disparition du convoi: ‘Pitchipoï, Pitchipoï, Pitchipoï ...’” (182). No conclusive answer is available to the question of why children were sent to their death by the Vichy regime. However, one suspects that officials at the time wanted to do away with these children following the slaughter of their parents to avoid any possible retaliation in the future and to eliminate potential witnesses should outrage at these crimes surface later.

Cadin's nightmare provides the reader with a surreal glimpse of a historical fragment that existed until recently only in the subconscious part of French memory. The horrified reader now must decide whether or not he or she will become an accomplice after the fact by denying the reality of the horrendous past: “Inviting the participation of the reader as an accomplice is an act which has very different connotations in terms of power, according to the location within

existing power structures of the person doing the inviting and the person who is being invited, as well as the form in which the invitation is made” (Hanne 28). Daeninckx invites the reader to examine his or her conscience to see whether he or she would rather face the facts just revealed, or continue to forget.

### **Forgetting and pardoning**

... pour moi, le roman noir est une sorte de lutte avec l’histoire. Je considère ainsi que ce sont souvent les figurants anonymes et apparemment anodins qui font l’histoire.[...] Ma conception du roman noir est donc la suivante: essayer de faire redescendre l’histoire et certains événements de la France contemporaine au niveau des sensations et du parcours d’un simple individu, d’un personnage.[...] On y voit la rencontre d’un individu sans importance avec le fleuve tempétueux de l’histoire, j’essaie ainsi de montrer comment cette personne va résister à la vague énorme de l’histoire. Comment, alors qu’elle devrait être emportée comme un fétu de paille, et devenir partie intégrante de la masse anonyme des gens sans mémoire... (MPM\*10 --11)

Amidst all the mysteries and seeming conspiracy, one victim seems extraordinarily silent. Roger Thiraud’s wife witnessed the murder of her husband, yet never revealed what she knew about it to anybody, nor was she questioned about it. In the novel, Cadin intuitively realizes the significance of the silence of Mrs. Thiraud: “Vous étiez là, n’est-ce pas? Vous étiez là à l’attendre quand il a été tué ? Dites-moi ... personne ne vous a jamais demandé de témoigner?” (MPM 117-18). Mrs. Thiraud’s silence raises serious questions regarding her husband’s murder: for example, why wasn’t she interviewed and why isn’t her testimony in the archives? Cadin makes Mrs. Thiraud relive the painful past that is buried in her memory. Once she starts to disclose what she remembers, the events vividly unfold in front of the reader: “Je m’en souviens, comme si ça se déroulait à présent” (118). Mrs. Thiraud was waiting for her husband, whom she suspected of having an affair with another woman. She was looking through her window, and thus witnessed the massacre against the Algerians and the murder of her husband. All these factors must have contributed to her silence. In the novel, Mrs. Thiraud represents

those who have painful personal memories about shameful episodes of French history and were victims of crimes committed by state officials, yet who chose to remain silent. Their inability to speak or be heard was due primarily to the suppression of all evidence by the government and its falsification of history. This is what a former police photographer named Marc Rosner tells Cadin:

Toute la garde de la Cité a été dirigée contre les prisonniers. Résultat, 48 à 0! Un beau score. A côté de chiffres pareils, les bavures d'aujourd'hui paraissent bien mesquines! Je vous raconte tout ça, Inspecteur, bien que ça n'ait jamais existé officiellement. Aucune preuve. Aucune trace de ces 48 cadavres: l'Institut a trouvé une cause réelle et sérieuse pour expliquer chaque décès. Direction les oubliettes de l'Histoire. (97)

To understand how historical amnesia was produced, it is important to know that French officials have passed four amnesty laws intended to wipe out any incriminating memories of the Algerian conflict and to protect the perpetrators from prosecution of all crimes committed during the Algerian War.<sup>19</sup> The first amnesty law was amended to the Evian treaty which marked the end of the war, on March 19, 1962. The terms of the amnesty specify that no one can be subjected to disciplinary or judicial measures, or to any discrimination, because of acts committed during the French-Algerian war, before the official cease-fire (Stora 281). The treaty was signed just five months after the massacre, and made it impossible to prosecute those responsible.

To help reveal the criminals behind the crimes, Daeninckx needs to expose them through Cadin's investigation. After Cadin has learned the identity of Roger Thiraud's killer, he quickly arranges a meeting with him. The killer, Pierre Cazes, was a member of the 'Brigades Spéciales,' a secret force that specialized in covert operations, such as assassinating members of the FLN. Cadin is surprised by the fact that official documents indicate that Roger Thiraud had

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<sup>19</sup> The four amnesty laws were passed by the French Parliament in 1962, 1966, 1968 and 1982. They were intended to exonerate and pardon all those who had been involved, directly or indirectly, in crimes against Algerians or others during the Algerian conflict (Stora 281--2).

been affiliated with an Algerian terrorist group (the FLN), because nothing else in his investigation indicates that this might be true. When confronted by Cadin and asked about the killing, Cazes does not hesitate to admit responsibility for the assassination even though he is under no obligation to do so, because he is protected by the amnesty legislation: “Ah, on a beau prendre toutes les précautions, si c’est écrit, il n’y a rien à faire. Que voulez-vous que je vous dise? C’est sûrement moi!” (MPM 152--3). Cazes’ answer could be seen as an admission that no matter what measures criminals take to conceal their crimes, the truth will surface one way or another.

In the story, Cazes is not comfortable about revealing a period of his life that has been invisible and only existed in classified files until now. He is surprised, since he does not know how Cadin obtained this information, which is supposed to be kept hidden in the official archives. His physical reaction when confronted about the assassination shows a man who is in turmoil and great pain, because he does not want to remember:

Pierre Cazes planta ses mains dans les poches de son bleu et serra les poings. Ses épaules fléchirent. Il ferma les yeux et aspira longuement, les lèvres entrouvertes, puis il se courba. Il s’assit difficilement sur l’une des grosses pierres qui délimitaient le cheminement. [...]

-Allons, asseyez-vous, Inspecteur. Vous remuez des souvenirs très douloureux. Je ne m’attendais pas à un coup pareil. (152)

After some hesitation Cazes describes his job as merely taking orders from his superiors and executing them without question: “Je n’en sais fichtre rien. J’avais des ordres. Je me devais d’y obéir” (153). From his statements, we know that Cazes never wanted to question his superiors because he knew that by doing so he could jeopardize his job and even his life. Cazes is portrayed in the novel as someone in the armed forces who felt that he simply had to follow orders and believed that he was protecting France against terrorist attacks by killing dangerous suspects: “Il fallait le faire. Je me rassure en me disant que mon geste a peut-être permis d’éviter un attentat ou d’écourter la guerre d’une heure, d’un jour...” (154). Interestingly, today some

French officers who were involved in the torture and massacre of Algerians are starting to speak out, even if their revelations are embarrassing and sometimes self-incriminating. In 2001, retired army general Paul Aussaresses published his memoirs, Service spéciaux, Algérie 1955-1957, which has now been translated into English as The Battle of the Casbah. Aussaresses stunned France by confessing that the government at the time knew and approved of the tactics used by the army. He charges, in the same way that Cazes does, that acts of torture and killing were done in the name of the French state: “The action that I was called upon to do in Algeria was for my country, and I did it as well as I was able, even if I did not like it.”<sup>20</sup> Like Cadin in the novel, Aussaresses was professional in his work. He also hid his activities and so was able to remain invisible for a long time: “I had learnt how to bust open locks, to kill without leaving traces, to lie, to be indifferent both to my suffering and to that of others, to forget and to be forgotten<sup>21</sup>, and to do all of this for France.” Confessions like these help prove Daeninckx’s point, that officials at all levels were responsible for heinous war crimes, and yet, unfortunately, many of them were promoted instead of being prosecuted.

In the novel, Cazes tells Cadin that the execution of Roger Thiraud was ordered by André Veillut, then Acting Director of Criminal Affairs at the Paris prefecture. He had also been one of those responsible for the persecution of Jews in France during World War II, as Cadin explains at the end of the novel:

En fonctionnaire zélé, Veillut a suivi les instructions du gouvernement de Vichy. Il a scrupuleusement organisé le transfert des familles juives vers le centre de regroupement de Drancy. Ni par conviction politique, ni par antisémitisme, mais tout simplement en obéissant aux règlements et en exécutant les ordres de la hiérarchie.... jamais il n’y aurait eu un tel massacre si les nazis n’avaient pas bénéficié de la complicité de nombreux Français. (210--11)

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<sup>20</sup> This quote from Aussaresses’ book and the ones to follow are from Al-Ahram Weekly Online No.538, June 2001, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2001/538/bo1.htm>

<sup>21</sup> Translation modified to reflect the exact statement by Aussaresses: “à oublier et à me faire oublier.”

Cadin goes on to describe how Veillut switched alliances from the Vichy regime to the Résistance toward the end of the war, when it became apparent that the Nazis were losing. Veillut, whose hands were stained with the blood of innocent victims, nonetheless was promoted to the position of director of the Brigades Spéciales. The novelist presents this fact ironically, through Cazes's comments that the government knows how to reward its best administrators: "Le gouvernement sait récompenser ses meilleurs serviteurs" (156).

Cadin realizes that in order to prevent Roger Thiraud from discovering and publishing an historical account of the crimes that Veillut had committed while serving in the high ranks of the Vichy government, Veillut had ordered his subordinate Cazes to kill the history teacher under the pretense that Thiraud was a French terrorist. When Bernard Thiraud was making the same discovery twenty years later while consulting the archives, Veillut made a special trip to Toulouse. He executed the young historian in a desperate attempt to again conceal his Vichy-era crime. Moreover, Veillut not only engages one subordinate (Cazes) to kill for him, he engages another one as an accomplice in preserving the secret of his guilt. A Toulouse archivist, Lécussan, informs Veillut about the progress of both Roger and Bernard in their research. Lécussan also tries to kill Cadin, after the latter had searched through the deportation files at the prefecture. We may believe that archivists have a responsibility to provide access to historical truths; however, Lécussan's role is to monitor and, if necessary, kill those who search the archives for evidence of a crime, and also those who hope to reinterpret history, and reconstruct a truer narrative. In the novel, Cadin kills Lécussan in self-defense. The detective's action is symbolic, because it represents the triumph of memory and history over state forces that try to suppress both. It is actually a protective measure that confirms the need for access to sensitive historical records in order to begin the healing process for the victims. This triumph continues when Cazes kills his former boss Veillut. The assassination seems to liberate Cazes from the burden that he had felt all along. It also helps protect Cadin, who represents the hope for the discovery of historical truth and symbolizes a desire to unveil and own up to wrongs of the past.

### **"J'accuse" Maurice Papon**

Non, Meurtres pour mémoire est vraiment un livre  
auquel je ne toucherai jamais, car ce livre-là a acquis un

poids symbolique. J'y ai réglé des comptes avec ma propre histoire en disant : « J'accuse Papon. »[...] depuis cet ouvrage, j'ai cette responsabilité et ce point de vue moral. (MPM\* 25)

Veillut in Meurtres pour mémoire is clearly modeled after Maurice Papon, who was tried in 1997--8 for his role in crimes against humanity committed during the Vichy period. Daeninckx wrote Meurtres pour mémoire to unveil the truth about Maurice Papon, and to settle the score by bringing the former chief of police to justice, even if it is through a work of fiction. When one changes Toulouse to Bordeaux in the novel, the picture becomes clear. Like Veillut, Papon was able to cover up his crimes for a long time. As the general secretary of the Gironde prefecture from 1942 to 1944, Papon was one of those responsible for the deportation of 1,690 Jews to concentration camps. He is also the one who oversaw the massacre of peaceful Algerian demonstrators in the streets of the French capital while he was 'préfet de police' from 1958 until 1966. Just days before the massacre, Papon addressed his police officers, and assured them that whatever extreme measures they undertook, they would be covered:

Vous serez couverts, je vous en donne ma parole. D'ailleurs, lorsque vous prévenez l'état-major qu'un Nord-Africain est abattu, le patron qui se rend sur les lieux a tout ce qu'il faut pour que le Nord-Africain ait une arme sur lui, car, à l'époque actuelle, il ne peut pas y avoir de méprise. (Einaudi 84)

This clearly shows the extreme measures that Papon took to conceal his crimes, and how he continued to hold important administrative positions after the end of the Vichy regime. For Daeninckx, the main question and concern are how someone who committed crimes against humanity was allowed not only to keep his official titles, but was also promoted within the government bureaucracy.

During his trial in 1997--8, Papon still used tactics to mislead people and refused to come to terms with his past. When questioned about the massacre of Algerians on October 17, 1961, he exonerated the police entirely, claiming that the deaths did not exceed twenty and that

they were due to a settling of scores between rival Algerian factions (Boulanger 207).

Daeninckx disagrees and accuses the former chief of the Parisian police of lying. He so had hoped that his countrymen would do their part by breaking the silence and thereby fulfilling their moral obligations as he did.

### **Media: censorship or failure?**

Dans toute guerre, l'État exige de ses citoyens le maximum d'obéissance et de sacrifices, tout en faisant d'eux des sujets mineurs par un secret délibéré, et une limitation des communications et des expressions d'opinions. La guerre suscite ainsi des restrictions importantes de la liberté de la presse, d'édition, de représentations visuelles [...] pour éviter de dire ce qui est authentique. (Stora 25)

Through the historical research that Daeninckx carried out in order to write his novel, he confirmed for himself the fact that the official narrative is distorted and inaccurate. In addition to presenting the archivist as a collaborator in the suppression of evidence, Daeninckx plausibly suggests the extent to which officials tried to cover up their crimes. In the novel, crucial testimony is provided by a Belgian TV station that was in Paris on the day of the demonstration. The images from the film become more powerful than words and speak for the silenced victims: “Les images défilèrent, toutes plus insoutenables les unes que les autres . . . . L’absence de son donnait plus de poids encore aux scènes de violence” (105). The French secret service tried to purchase the tapes from the Belgian TV station, but without success: “Les services de sécurité de votre pays ont tenté de racheter l’original et les copies à la R.T.B.F., mais la direction a tenu bon. J’imagine que les responsables de la tuerie ne souhaitent pas qu’on fasse trop de publicité concernant les conséquences de leurs ordres...” (103). Failing to acquire these tapes, French officials persuaded the Belgians not to air the film, fearing that their crimes would be exposed and their narrative about the massacre questioned. Daeninckx highlights the censorship and repression that the state tried to implement to prevent the widespread dissemination of credible evidence that compromised the official version. He emphasizes the lack of any real public outcry about this massacre involving hundreds of fatalities, contradictory to the official report, which



claimed only three deaths. The French media paid little attention to this massacre. Several media networks, mostly controlled or influenced by the government through ownership or censorship, paid little attention to the historic demonstration and massacre. The government-owned French television showed news segments of Algerians being deported from France, but no footage of the massacre or the brutal force used to break up the demonstration. Journalists were warned against covering the massacre and were kept away from the detention centers (Napoli 36). Both French and foreign journalists in Paris seemed to agree tacitly that nothing should be done to further destabilize the French government or endanger de Gaulle, who was widely seen as the last and best hope for navigating France out of its troubles. The story quickly died, drowned out by fresh news on other topics (36). Nonetheless, a petition was drawn up and signed by many intellectuals who, after learning about the massacre, condemned the inhumane treatment of the detained Algerians. It warned about the consequence of keeping silent in the face of such carnage:

En restant passifs, les Français se feraient les complices des fureurs racistes dont Paris est désormais le théâtre et qui nous ramènent aux jours les plus noirs de l'occupation nazie. Entre les Algériens entassés au palais des Sports en attendant d'être «refoulés» et les juifs parqués à Drancy avant la déportation, nous nous refusons à faire la différence. (Einaudi 225)

The issue of Les Temps Modernes in which the petition was published was seized by Maurice Papon, then the head of the Prefecture of Paris (225).

Journalists for mainstream outlets, for their part, failed to write accurately about these events. Most reporters relied mainly on information provided by the officials who were behind the massacre. According to James A. Napoli, the challenge for politicians and officials was to make sure that the truth about the brutal repression of the demonstration did not reach the public: “If the politicians fail to tell the truth about their actions, then the challenge for journalists and historians is how to resist becoming their accomplices” (Napoli 36).

For a long time most French civilians did not realize that massacres such as those committed against Algerians and Jews were part of their history. Because the October 17

massacre was hushed up at the time, it did not even constitute an event in the public record. Consequently it was not immediately inscribed in the French collective memory (Halbwachs 48). According to Anthony Smith, “by the use of symbols, including monuments and ceremonies, a community is reminded of its common heritage and cultural kinship” (Smith 16--17). For example, the ruins of Oradour, near Limoges in southern France, where the Nazis massacred French civilians, were maintained as a monument, so the event is therefore inscribed in French memory. In 1945, De Gaulle visited Oradour and ordered that it be preserved for posterity as a memorial to Nazi aggression. On the other hand, the Vélodrome d’Hiver and many other concentration camps for Jews and Algerians were demolished. The camp at Drancy was transformed back into apartment buildings. Some historians point to the absence of a single unifying memorial either in France or Algeria, or of any clearly definable commemoration date for either Algerians or Jews, with which victims of both groups could identify. The October 17, 1961, massacre did not enter French public memory for many years. The fact that there is no official commemoration of this event is an example of the unbalanced, incomplete, and inaccurate narrative of French history. On the other hand, a full acknowledgement of the massacres of Algerians and Jews would mean admission of guilt and responsibility, which in turn would create a problematic situation for French identity because it could weaken French pride in the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Accurately remembering the past is undeniably a challenging task for French society because it risks destabilizing national identity and unity.

Recently, however, troubling events from the French past are starting to occupy an important place in the French “collective memory”, and manifest themselves often in various products of French culture, such as in fiction, on television, in cinema and even in history books, the courts and official records. The “haunting past,” as Rousso calls it, is no longer confined to the memories of those who lived it, but is affecting new generations in France. Many youths have come to understand that France’s glorious past is a myth, and, therefore, they question the official narrative. When, in a recent poll by the French daily Libération, a group of French respondents were asked about the use of torture during the Algerian war, more than half blamed the government of the time for the crimes committed. They favored an inquiry into the matter and supported the idea of bringing the perpetrators to justice. The poll also shows how the

majority of the French favor an apology from official government leaders to the Algerians (Jelen 1).

Daeninckx tries to expose the real disorder of history and to create an alternative narrative instead of relying only on the distorted official one. He gives a voice to various characters to reconstruct the historical truth and facts about France's past, encouraging French readers to become better aware of their true history. Daeninckx insists on facing France's past and shedding light on its collective memory, sometimes by deriving this alternative memory from the victims of French colonialism who have long been denied a voice. He thereby allows them to participate in the reconstruction of French history and identity.

## **Conclusion**

In recent years, there have been highly publicized trials of French officials -- including Klaus Barbie (1987), Paul Touvier (1994), and Maurice Papon (1997--98) -- who had collaborated with the Nazis in the persecution of Jews. These trials would not have taken place if it had not in part for the work of a number of intellectuals: from Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir to Jean-Luc Einaudi, Henry Rousso, and Benjamin Stora, to name a few. They not only questioned the records of the Vichy regime and the Algerian War, but also provided a different narrative that contradicted the official version of certain historical events.

Their works have helped create a dialogue among intellectuals, and provided the framework for academic debates. However, academic scholarship work did not reach far enough, to the mainstream, because of the limited circulation of such books, mainly among academics, nor did it attract a mass audience due to the direct nature of their revelations of the shameful past. A substantial percentage of ethnic French remained either ignorant of the intellectuals' attempts to deal with the issues, or preferred to ignore the dreadful past.

It is this broader audience that Daeninckx and Maspero tried to reach. The more popular literary genres of their work -- a detective novel and a travelogue -- helped the authors introduce shameful aspects of the past to new generations in an indirect way. Although Daeninckx and Maspero may not have told the French reading public something they had not already been told by the aforementioned intellectuals, their books are easy to understand, and thus could potentially have a broader impact. Their work helps empower French society to deal with the untold history.

Both Daeninckx and Maspero helped discredit the official narratives about the myth of the French "Résistance" and about the Algerian War, which, until recently, was not called a "war" in France. Both authors wanted to fulfill their moral duty by uncovering the truth about the past despite the limited resources at their disposal, and thereby encourage their countrymen to do the same. The crimes committed against Jews and Algerians are part of French history; therefore, these crimes should not be overlooked if the French are to construct more accurate representations of their national past. Both authors want to preserve this past before all of its eyewitnesses disappear. Maspero does so by visiting the true "realms of memory" and putting on the map those who were first victimized by France and then later marginalized because they

reminded the French of shameful events. Daeninckx cleverly presents two historical atrocities committed by the French state on its national soil.

What their work has proven is that France has not yet fully come to terms with its past. Even though in recent years there have been sporadic official acknowledgements of this shameful history, complete accountability has yet to be demonstrated. In July 1995, President Jacques Chirac offered an apology for the crimes committed by the state against French Jews. Nonetheless, the Algerian victims have not received the same recognition. Most French are probably unaware of the truth about the massacre of peaceful demonstrators and the atrocities committed against Algerians during the war. How much longer will it take for French society to face the issue? Given the fact that the atrocities against the Algerians took place about twenty years after the purge of Jews, the lesson is clear: when a society has not admitted responsibility for its past crimes, similar ones are bound to be committed. It is horrific to think what may take place if French society continues to disregard the crimes against the Algerians. This possibly is not without foundation: the Far Right movement in the past thirty years has increasingly moved into mainstream politics and influenced the French government's policies. Under pressure from the popularity of Far Right propaganda against immigration, the French state and politicians have repeatedly introduced policies that hinder the integration of immigrants into French society. Thus a bad tendency to foster dangerous social divisions along ethnic lines continues. What will happen when these conflicts reach the boiling point? Persecution of North African minorities is certainly possible, while genocide is a horrendous but potential prospect.

Although European countries have owned up to unsavory aspects of their past, France appears unable to accept its responsibility. In order to move forward without repeating its historical mistakes, the entire French society will need to confront its past, no matter how shameful it is. France should stop glorifying the Résistance and glossing over the truth about the Collaboration and the Algerian War. Past history might be uncomfortable, yet it needs to be discussed and debated. If Daeninckx and Maspero, with relatively limited and controlled access to official historical documents, could unearth so much truth regarding the past, then the French state, with all its classified documents in hand, could and should take the lead in correcting the image of the past to prevent future crimes. Both Daeninckx and Maspero find and demonstrate substantial discrepancies between the official records and the official truth. Schools should be the first field where the true past needs to be introduced. Revisions need to be made in the textbooks

used in the national school system. The first step to take is to correct the Résistance myth and introduce an accurate account of the Vichy period. Meanwhile, the truth about the Algerian War needs to be publicly acknowledged and incorporated into the education system as well. Because a hidden past will always haunt the present, the French society might as well deal with it today rather than tomorrow. France is how it is today because of what it did yesterday. To understand the present, we must go deep into the past and dig up the shameful events of French history. Much important information remains confined in the archives, in the memory of the victims who are not sought out or listened to, and in the memory of the perpetrators of crimes committed during the Algerian War, who are protected by amnesty. These memories should be invoked in order to correct the official historical account. Moreover, we should not only reexamine the atrocities but also recognize the contributions of ethnic minorities to French society as a whole. This could begin a process of reconciliation among all members of French society. Today French identity needs to provide a legitimate place to Africans and other immigrant communities that are a part of French culture and society.

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