

# Multidirectional Memory Connecting the Holocaust and French Decolonization

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## ABSTRACT

Memory studies have grown rapidly around the world since the late 20th century. Past memory studies in history assumed that politics of memory is a struggle of different collective memories over limited resources. In the past, they have mainly assumed that competitive memory models, namely memory politics, represent a competition among victim groups over limited resources (social recognition and compensation from the state). In particular, as the memories of the Holocaust have been highlighted intensively internationally, it was considered that Holocaust memories were given a privileged status compared to other memories. However recent studies such as Michael Rothberg's multidirectional memory attempts to illuminate the interconnections of different memories of wars and violence for the sake of new mnemonic solidarity. Based on his memory theory, this article focused on the memories of the Holocaust and those of decolonization (in particular the Algerian War context). By engaging the case of the Affaire Maurice Papon (1997-98), this essay offers the implications of multidirectional memory theories for today's politics of memory and the relationship between history and memory. The rationale is that the Papon trial is considered one of the best examples of the connection between the memories and history of World War II and the decolonization war in French West Africa. In the conclusion, this paper examines the limitations and possibilities of multidirectional memory theory through the above process.

## **Introduction: The Globalization Era and The Politics of New Memories**

Widespread violence has left a long mark on every era, but the trauma of the 20th century, which Eric Hobsbawm called the "Age of Extremes," made the final years of the century very memorable. In France, the politics of memory dominated the public sphere, as various memories that had been suppressed since the 1980s were revived. World War II and the Algerian War were at the center of the memory politics map. With its surrender to Germany in 1940, France had complex and contradictory memories of defeat, occupation, requisition, subordination, and resistance to the war. When the strong belief of patriotic and nationalist resistance broke in the 1970s and 1980s, the French had to face their own fascist past. It was revealed that the pro-German Vichy government and its officials participated in the massacre of Jews in France. A series of crimes against these French officials occurred in the 1980s and 1990s. These crimes resulted in the so-called "Vichy Syndrome." French historian Henry Russo coined this term to indicate how the obsession with memories of World War II had become a widespread social phenomenon in France.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the French wanted to erase another memory after the 1990s: the memory of the Algerian War (1954-1962). Following the Algerian War, not only memories of other decolonization wars, but also memories concerning Atlantic slavery, the slave trade, and colonial conquest surfaced. Consequently, as it entered the 21st century, France found itself battling several omnidirectional "guerredes mémoires" or memory wars.

Many French historians have expressed concern about these memory wars. They claim that (1) "over-memory" or "obsession to memory" covers over urgent issues and promotes social division according to collectivism – a view that says (2) that "memory obligations" can be a tyranny that hinders the exploration of

facts by historians, and (3) that repentance and justice dichotomize history. One thing they are particularly wary of is the spread and convergence of memories that began in earnest during the Papon Affair in 1997-98. Not only were memories of the Algerian War revived during the more recent trials of Nazi war criminals after World War II, but the memories of World War II were used as an important comparison with the Papon Affair, and the most successful political war criminals were scrutinized to understand state violence during the Algerian War. In addition, in 2001, the French Tobira Act ("Loi Taubira") defined the Atlantic slave trade as a crime against humanity. The historians have questioned if it is reasonable for the Algerian War or slavery to be compared to the Holocaust or expanded to crimes against humanity. Many of them emphasize that there is a line of division between memory and history and maintain that the comparison of different historical events dilutes the historical specificity of each event and atomizes the historical context.<sup>2</sup>

However, the phenomenon of the convergence of memories is based on the background of modern times as the political aspect of memory changes with the acceleration of globalization. Globalization has made us realize that the history of violence, such as the Western War, the Holocaust, colonial conquest, and decolonization, was a shared experience beyond national boundaries. This realization changed the way collective memory was formed. If the politics of memory, which have prevailed since the late 20th century, mean a struggle for recognition to transfer each collective memory to public memory within the framework of a national state. Here, the memories of individual wars and violence are connected to each other, redefined in the framework of transnational memory, and transferred to groups other than their own. Simultaneously, by joining with civil society organizations across borders, previously suppressed memories have gained a new public sphere to challenge the framework of national and nationalistic memories. As wars and terrorism become globalized, these memories are becoming more desperate and connected to current experiences. In this context, this study aims to shed light on the multidirectional memory of a leading theorist, Michael Rothberg, the validity and implications of these theories are investigated in "Section 3 using Maurice Papon's trial as an example. The Papon trial is considered one of the best examples of the connection between the memories and history of World War II and the decolonization war in French West Africa. It was also an opportunity for the memory of colonialism to be mediated by the universal struggle against current racism.

## **The 'Tangled Intersection' Between World War II and The Algerian War: The Papon Trial and The 1961 Massacre**

It is well known that the memories of the Algerian War have long been silenced in France.<sup>3</sup> Before and after World War II, the issue of Algeria's independence arose, of independence arose. It caused fierce conflict not only in various local resident groups but also in the French political and military sectors. The Algerian War eventually ended after eight years with hundreds of thousands of casualties on both sides. It drove France to the brink of civil war and the Fourth Republic. Particularly problematic was the fact that French troops and police slaughtered, tortured, and raped Algerian fighters and civilians. Most of the French were ignorant of this situation, but others were already working on creating multidirectional memory. Those who had vivid memories of the Resistance struggle sympathized with the fight of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN, National Liberation Front) and were astonished that the French and the police hired by them acted like Nazis in their suppression of the Algerians. Claude Bourdet, a former Resistance leader, continued to call attention to the "Gestapo of Algeria" or torture committed by French troops in Algeria, in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>4</sup> However, unlike World War II, there was no punishment for war crimes after the Algerian War. Considering the Algeria's anti-France sentiment, the French government made it impossible to punish the war criminals of the Algerian War after the war by granting amnesty.

One of the decisive moments when the memory of this "War Without Name" was publicized in France was the trial of Maurice Papon, which was dubbed the "Last Vichy Trial."<sup>5</sup> After entering office in

1931, Papon rose amid continued cabinet changes and rapid political changes. However, in the 1980s, he became the Minister of Budget and faced a crisis. The reason for the crisis was that it was revealed to the media that during the Vichy administration, Papon worked as secretary-general of Girondins, one of the political factions in Southwest France, and cooperated in transferring the Jews in Bordeaux to death camps. However, it took more than a decade for Papon to be prosecuted, and it was not until 1997 that he was prosecuted in a French court for crimes against humanity. Interestingly, an unexpected turning point occurred in the middle of the trial, which had been expected to end the "Vichy Syndrome." The examination of Papon's history highlighted the Algerian migrant massacre that occurred when he served as the head of the Paris Metropolitan Police Agency at the end of the Algerian War.<sup>6</sup> At that time, there were more than 350,000 Algerian migrants living in Paris, and armed conflicts between the FLN members and police were frequent. Papon, who was appointed head of the Paris Metropolitan Police Agency in 1958, imposed a ban on night traffic to cut off the FLN's funding, and he and his force arbitrarily arrested and detained numerous Algerians. On October 17, 1961, a large-scale protest by the migrants was organized. Hundreds of people were slaughtered and thrown into the Seine as police violently suppressed the protest. After the incident, the police arrested and detained more than 10,000 migrants. When these revelations emerged in the middle of the Papon trial, which was receiving tremendous media attention at the time, it became a "trial within a trial." After the 1961 massacre surfaced during the trial, it became a focus of the media, who mobilized the memories of the Algerian War, and furthermore, the memories of colonialism and racism. In addition, from this time on, the practice of comparing the memories of colonization and decolonization with the occupation period and the Holocaust became widespread.

Papon's history dramatically highlights the multidirectional connection between memory and history. He was a typical example of the high-ranking bureaucrats of his generation. Papon and his colleagues traveled back and forth between Paris and the French colonies as they built their bureaucratic and police careers. In the crisis before and after the Algerian War, he worked as a colonial official in North Africa and honed his all-round surveillance, punishment, suppression, and torture skills to root out resistance to the colonists. In 1958, he returned to Paris with revolutionary tactics and the political spirit of the far-right to protect French Algeria by any means.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Papon brought in Section Administrative Spécialisée employees from Algeria who specialized in "pacification" work. Also, more than 700 harkis (Muslim Algerians who served as auxiliaries) were used as the Force de police auxiliaires (auxiliary police force), which was a force more feared than the French police force.<sup>8</sup> There is no clearer example of the "boomerang effect" of colonialism mentioned by Hannah Arendt and Aimé Césaire. Memory bonding occurred immediately after the 1961 Paris massacre. French radical leftists, journalists, and some French Jews tried to understand the 1961 incident by comparing it to the Holocaust. Of course, as historians point out, the context and aspects of the two events are very different. However, at that time, there was little recognition or information about French colonial racism or colonial state violence in France. In the case of the political left wing, they were reluctant to think of the republic as the subject of racist violence. In this situation, Jewish persecution, which was still a vivid memory for some people, became a framework for "translating" colonial violence imported back into Paris. After witnessing illegal arrests, assaults approaching torture, and collective detention, many French people recalled the oppression of Jews during the occupation period, especially the Vel d'Hiv arrest in Paris in July 1942. At that time, the French police arrested more than 13,000 Jews, detained them in bicycle camps, and transferred them to German camps (killing most of them). It was no coincidence that the terrible photos of the night taken by Jewish photographer Eli Kagan became symbols of the 1961 incident. He stated that he seemed to have returned to his childhood when he was hiding from the Nazis that night.<sup>9</sup> An example of a more in-depth perception of reality rather than anachronism through the convergence of the two events is "The Two Ghettos," an interview released immediately after the incident by Marguerite Duras.<sup>10</sup> This article combined interviews with Warsaw Ghetto survivors and Algerian workers to highlight the experience of the racist ghetto, but it drew a sharper perception of the situation of Algerians through raising points where they

were wary of easy identification and so the memories of the two events did not overlap. Furthermore, William Gardner Smith, an African-American who lived in Paris at the time, shed light on Paris' "Three Ghettos" - Jews, Algerians, and African-Americans - through his first novel *Stone Face* about the 1961 massacre. This novel promotes a sense of solidarity between groups hurt by racist violence while allowing their experiences to connect like chains to understand each other's asymmetric experiences and historical specificities.<sup>11</sup>

Multidirectional memory also created a new civil and social solidarity. *Mouvement contre le racismisme, l'antisémitisme et* (the Movement Against Racism and for Friendship between Peoples or MRAP) was formed by radical leftists angry at the silence of left-wing parties against racism and anti-Semitism. They opposed racism against Algerians in light of the experience of anti-Semitism during the occupation period. Through this, MRAP recognized various forms of racism and pursued solidarity among those who were persecuted. These included French from old colonies such as former Resistance, Jews, immigrants, and Césaire. The warning they issued from these ill historical experiences and memories was that society entered a "slippery slope" toward fascism when neglecting state violence against minorities, whether Jewish or colonial.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, this aspect also presents a new interactive hypothesis regarding occupied memory. Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem in 1961 was an opportunity for the Holocaust memory to be publicized internationally, but in France, the Algerian War may have renewed recognition of the occupation period. The echo of the Algerian War resonates in the literature of Charlotte Delbo, who was taken to Auschwitz by the Communist Resistance. Her *Beautiful Letters* depict how the present (Algerian War), which invaded the peaceful daily life of post-war France, forces dialogue with the past (Auschwitz). She describes how the indifferent faces of the public as they see the prisoners being dragged to Auschwitz overlap with their indifference toward Algerians who were quarantined and discriminated against.<sup>13</sup> As Rothberg asked, "What if the bloody events that took place in Paris on October 17th, which reminded contemporaries so clearly of the Vel d'Hiv incident, also sowed the seeds of belated perception of French conspiracy during World War II?"<sup>14</sup> If so, not only did the Holocaust memory carry the memories of decolonization later, but the Holocaust memory was also formed in dialogue with the decolonization struggle.

However, as French society tried to forget the Algerian War itself and in the absence of social conditions that would allow groups who experienced the events of the war directly to testify, the 1961 massacre became an "underground memory."<sup>15</sup> The French Communist Party celebrated the Charonne accident (the Paris massacre), which took place shortly after the 1961 massacre. The Charonne case occurred on February 8, 1962, when the French Federation of Labor (CGT) and the Communist Party protested in Paris under the slogan of "opposition to fascism" and "Peace in Algeria." Nine people were crushed and died on the subway at Sharon Station. On the contrary, the Algerian government and its official immigrant organization (L'Amical des Français d'Algérie) celebrated the victims of the 1961 incident as martyrs in a global struggle for the independence of Algeria. In the end, only a few radical leftists and artists preserved the memories of 1961 amid the silence in French society, and historians.

Social change in France since the 1980s brought this memory out of the basement. Since the 1970s, racist violence and terrorism against Algerian migrants have been frequent, and anti-immigrant sentiment has prevailed since the 1980s. In particular, the far-right party (Front National) advanced in the national election and promoted colonial nostalgia. In addition, in the suburbs where migrants were gathered, social movements to publicize socioeconomic issues, racism, and forced migration were heightened. Since the 1980s, this has emerged as a voice calling for social integration and justice in French society in association with a new generation of anti-racist civic movement organizations. In the process, the 1961 incident was revived as a memory of resisting racism in French society. Interestingly, the second and third generations of Algerian migrants were the main memory transmitters, not from the older generation who remained silent about the memory. Thus, in the 1990s, this memory was reconstructed as a demand directed at the French government to eliminate discrimination and social integration rather than a way to strengthen the collective identity of migrants. This expanded to the discourse of citizenship and human rights, as it was linked to memory struggles against

state violence around the world, including South America after the military dictatorship in South American and South Africa after apartheid. Yet, at the same time, it referred to the Pieds-Noirs (Black Feet) or Algerian-born European French, which is a group of more than one million refugees that settled in southern France after Algeria's independence. As they and the descendants of Archi, who were the Algerian local supplement soldiers, fought for memory and claimed to be victims of each other, the battle between conflicting memories of the Algerian War intensified. This proves that it is difficult to unilaterally apply the Holocaust's victim-suicide dichotomy to the complex situation of the Algerian War, which was an omnidirectional civil war.

In France, trials for crimes against humanity took place in the 1980s and 1990s, and the Vichy government's national responsibility for the massacre of Jews was partially recognized, creating a new possibility to publicize the 1961 incident. The 1997 Papon trial became a decisive moment in which the 1961 massacre emerged as connected to Holocaust memories. Jean-Luc Einaudi, a historian who studied the case independently, became a witness, and Pierre Vidal-Naquet caused a stir by claiming that the massacre of Algerian migrants was also a crime against humanity.<sup>16</sup> Einaudi testified about multidirectional memory by emphasizing the confluence of three different cases (the Holocaust, the 1961 Massacre, and the Sharon Incident) in court. The colony-designed anti-terrorism suppression technology was introduced in Paris when Jews were arrested and detained during the occupation period and when racist Parisian police treated Jews and North Africans alike. Paris now became a space where history and memories overlapped. Enodi concluded his testimony by citing the last line from the movie *Jacques Panijel*, which begins with the 1961 massacre and ends with the Sharon incident. He cited, "In the end, won't we understand that everyone is 'youpin' (deprecating words of Jewish) and everyone is 'bicot' (deprecating words of Northern African)?" Panel's documentary film *Octobre à Paris*, which was about the October 17, 1962 massacre, was banned from screens at the time.<sup>17</sup> Papon later sued Enodi for slander for calling the 1961 incident "a massacre," but this only had the adverse effect of adding more testimonies about the 1961 incident to the public discourse. Newly emerging memory activists and civic groups defined the Papon trial as a trial against the universal anti-racism struggle and an infringement of national citizenship. The revamped MRAP, which took the form of a multiethnic demanded that the 1961 massacre be recognized as an anti-human and national crime. After a long period of denial, the French government's official recognition of state responsibility for the massacre of Jews during the occupation formed the strategy and basic framework of colonial memory politics. Henry Rousso maintained that the "trial within a trial" had accidentally left the overly complex Papon trial in a labyrinth. The memories of the Algerian War, including the massacre in 1961, were successfully revived through the junction with the Holocaust, but at the same time, the war crimes within the Holocaust memory limited the framework in which these memories were defined. Moreover, the multidirectional pathogenesis of memory was not always productive. A kind of comparative criminal argument to cover up a particular crime by comparing different war crimes ('Who killed more, more brutally? Who on earth can blame whom?') was repeated. In the *Black Book of Communism*, which was published in time for the Papon trial and sold quickly, Stéphane Courtois argued that violence in communist countries is also a crime against humanity.<sup>18</sup> Papon's lawyer was rejected when he tried to present the book as evidence, saying the left wing, which only mentions the sacrifices of Jews and migrants, was hypocritical.<sup>19</sup>

However, the combination of memories made it possible to publicize the Republic's national violence (and the violence of colonial states), which had long been a taboo subject for both left and right wings, and challenge the silence of the nation that had covered it up. The true criminal revealed in the seemingly repetitive history was not an evil individual, but the state system that made it possible, and the implicit conspiracy and silence of French citizens toward national crimes. The network of occupied and decolonized memories enabled the solidarity of different groups within them by giving insight into the larger historical structure that connected these events without isolating individual cases into "any unfortunate event" or "any evil crime." However, since these memories bring into question France's identity as a universal human rights republic, the reaction to them remains strong on both the left and the right sides. As a result of the Papon trial,



the two main goals of the memory movement camp were achieved: (1) the social recognition of the massacres in 1961 and (2) the opening of the documentary library. Historical studies and doctoral papers based on the new materials poured out, and a space was provided for various testimonies and more reflective reflections on the 1961 massacre. At the same time, the expansion of new memories began with the "Algerian Syndrome." Along with this, as the violence of the colonial state was highlighted, which had been taboo thus far, violence in other decolonization processes such as the Indochina War, the Madagascar Massacre, and other memories of colonialism, including slavery and the slave trade, became controversial. As revealed in the 2005 suburban riot, the memory of democracy/decolonialism is strongly reviving as a new "political present" in the social context where social alienation and cultural conflict between immigrants and their descendants are on the verge of explosion. New colonial memories are emerging amid multilateral interactions and networks of diaspora and transnational memories across borders, exposing the racism of the republic that the republic seeks to deny, and redefine French national memories as decolonized and transcultural.

## **Conclusion: The Limitations and Possibilities of Multidirectional Memory**

Unlike after World War II, the memory of the Holocaust today cannot be separated from the justification mechanism of Israeli nationalism (and the so-called "Holocaust Industry" in the United States). The widespread slogan "Gaza Earth is a new Auschwitz" shows the sharpest paradox of multidirectional history and memory. Therefore, the democratic solidarity of memory requires the work of decentralizing the Holocaust memory. Here, the connection with colonial/decolonial memory poses a new challenge to the memory of the Holocaust. One of the reasons for historians' antipathy to this work is that Holocaust denials have often used tactics to relativize and ultimately reduce the Holocaust through simple comparisons with other slaughters. However, the new theories discussed earlier emphasize that the encounter with colonial/decolonial memories does not relativize the Holocaust, but rather allows a deeper understanding of its historical specificity through comparison. This could provide an opportunity to revamp the network of memories surrounding the Holocaust and avoid another problematic phenomenon (that is, the situation in which the Holocaust memory reigns as an absolute criterion over all slaughter).

Consequently, as Rothberg said, even if historians' boundaries on anachronism are correct, it is virtually impossible to build a wall between historical events.<sup>20</sup> This is because "Memories move, and history is intertwined." Today, when supporters of Palestinian refugees in Paris recall the 1961 massacre and the memory of the Holocaust reaches toward the memory of the Armenian massacre or the Australian Aboriginal massacre, the cross-reference of memories have become the major political and cultural grammar of the globalization era. In this situation, it is questionable whether history will still be able to "lead" the public in the subject of memory. Therefore, it would be possible to find a new path in history by actively attracting these mechanisms to the analysis of history and seeking a new relationship between memory and history.

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