

Abstract

From May 7-9, 1954 the ninth anniversary of the German surrender was celebrated through ceremonies and commemorations throughout the city of Paris. That Friday, May 7th and the first day of ceremonies, the French army suffered a crippling defeat in their Vietnamese colonies at Dien Bien Phu. Meanwhile, other political tensions brewed: the proposed European Defense Community, the future of a strengthening West Germany, and the continuous failure of the Fourth Republic to form a coalition government. These concerns about the future of France, as well as questions about the very nature of the war being celebrated are evident throughout the ceremonies. I argue that this weekend took place at a unique period in both French politics and in the negotiation of post-WWII commemorative practices. By studying and analyzing the ceremonies of this weekend, it becomes clear that they demonstrate the construction inherent in commemoration as a practice.

**Remembering and Forgetting:
French Politics and Ceremonies of May 8, 1954**

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Honors Thesis Submission
April 26, 2018

Acknowledgements

This project started with my healthy obsession with reading plaques and has come further than I knew was possible. I am so grateful for all the people who have supported me in this process and made it a success. It has been a pleasure challenging myself to work, think, and write harder than ever before.

First and foremost, to my advisor Desmond Fitz-Gibbon, who took me on as an advisee and thesis student sight unseen. Our many long and thought-provoking conversations this year have been one of my greatest joys and your support and encouragement have been invaluable.

To the many other professors who helped me along in this project: Chris Rivers, Adi Gordon and Karen Remmler for serving on my committee and offering many insights throughout this process. And special thanks to Professor Rivers for mentoring me for so many years in the French department.

To the Mount Holyoke History Department for giving me a community, an Almara Grant for this research, and an incredible education in writing and thinking.

For my many friends who made this project possible: Alicia, Ruth, Hannah, Elise, Maddie, Abby, Elaine, Sam, Kim, Hugo, and so many more.

Finally, to my family for fostering my love of French and history from the beginning (inevitably leading me to study abroad and write a thesis about it!) Especially to Joyce for hosting me during my trips to Paris, GG for our regular talks, Amy for inspiring me in so many ways, and my parents, Catherine, and Timothy for being my greatest support system.

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Maps of Paris



Fig. 1: Map of Paris

Source: ParisMap360, "Paris Sightseeing Map," *ParisMap360*, 2016.
<https://parismap360.com/carte/pdf/en/paris-sightseeing-map.pdf>

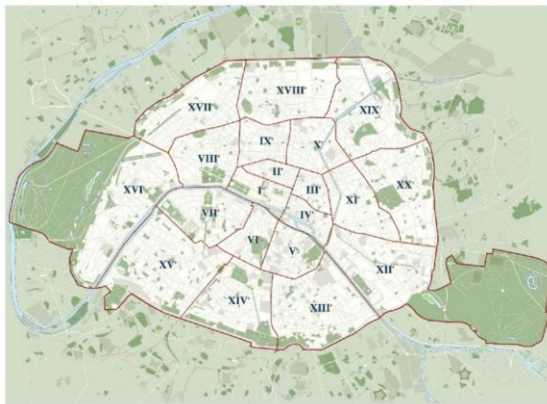


Fig. 2: Map of Parisian Arrondissements

Source: ParisMap360, "Paris Arrondissements & Neighborhoods Map," *ParisMap360*, 2016. <https://parismap360.com/paris-arrondissement-map>

Introduction

When the Liberation of Paris drove the Nazis from the French capital in late August 1944 the war still had eight months left, but the battle over its memory had already begun. After four years under Nazi Occupation, French frustration and anger bubbled over into an *épuration sauvage*, or savage purge, in which French collaboration was dealt with violently and impulsively. Mobs roamed the streets of Paris and towns across France, torturing and killing known or suspected collaborators. Women believed to have had relations with Nazis – everything from sleeping with them to cleaning their apartments – were marched through the streets, often with shaved heads and swastikas painted on them. Scholars corroborate that following D-Day in early June 1944 about 5,000 people were executed either without “trial or other legal authorization.”¹

These violent acts were brought to halt when Général de Gaulle consolidated power and instituted legal proceedings that autumn to deal with collaborators. Trials for the major Vichy leaders, such as former head of state Phillipe Pétain, began in the spring of 1945. The legal proceedings posed another problem, for aside from those suspected of killing there was little legal precedent for bringing charges of collaboration. And in fact, many claimed innocence on the basis of having worked for the French Vichy government rather than directly for the Nazis.² The collaboration of the Vichy government complicated the trials in

¹ Henry Rousso, *Vichy Syndrome*, 8.

² Tony Judt, *Postwar*, 44-45.

other ways. Tony Judt notes that “three out of four judges at the trials of collaborators...had themselves been employed by the collaborationist state.”³ In the end, within a country with widespread collaboration and complicity, nearly half of all cases were dismissed or acquitted and less than 0.1 percent (94 people in every 100,000) went to prison for wartime offenses, most of whom were released in 1947 under a partial amnesty.⁴

These modes of “justice” – both the violent purge and trials – characterized French collaboration as taking place on an individual level and did not recognize either its scale within society or the silent complicity of many French people. Collaborators were treated as anomalies, and the charges of “national degradation” levied against them served to reinforce the idea that they had somehow shamed the French state, but that it was in no way responsible itself. So, in the aftermath of the conflict, France did not atone or reflect upon what had occurred during these “années noires,” and thus, neither the mobs, nor the trials successfully dealt with the legacy of the occupation of France.

A single understanding of World War II was impossible for the French, because the experiences of its citizenry had been too varied. While the death toll of the preceding conflict, the first World War, was brutal, the results had been a fairly uniform experience for nearly all parts of French society. During WWII, on the other hand, far fewer soldiers died in military conflict, some people were

³ Ibid, 46.

⁴ Rousso, *Vichy Syndrome* 8; Judt, *Postwar*, 46.

deported for political or religious reasons, and many citizens lived under occupation. The country was also split roughly in half, the north occupied by the Nazis and the south run by the collaborationist Vichy government, producing differences from region to region. Despite later claims, during the war the vast majority of the French continued with their lives, often silently complicit in the occupation. However, de Gaulle's presence as head of state of the provisional government after liberation provided the possibility of a new national narrative: that of the heroic *résistant*.⁵ Pétain's Vichy government was passed over as the legitimate French war government for that of de Gaulle's in exile, as history was rewritten.

The new allegiance to the Résistance claimed by many during this period has been termed "resistancialism" and is used by Henry Rousso to mean the construction of an ideology around this history, particularly linking this mythical resistance with the nation as a whole.⁶ The number of resisters and collaborators is estimated to have been 170,000 at most (in a country which had a population of roughly 35 million) which demonstrates what a small minority either group was.⁷ In reality, a great many average citizens, uninvolved in either group, were silently complicit in the Occupation. Judt notes that only 1,500 Nazis and 6,000 civil and

⁵ Translation: resistance fighter. The French word, as well as associated Résistance will be used.

⁶ Rousso, *Vichy Syndrome*, 10.

⁷ Judt, *Postwar*, 33; *Ibid*, 39.

military police administered the occupation of France, demonstrating how heavily they relied upon such collaborators and complicit civilians.⁸

Both the *épuration* and lack of acknowledgement of French collaboration or complicity established untruths about WWII before the conflict was even over and have haunted France ever since. It took 50 years, until the presidency of Jacques Chirac in 1995, for the French government to publicly acknowledge French collaboration with the Nazis. This demonstrates the shame associated with this history and how deeply the conflict's narrative had been rewritten on a national scale to deny it. These French narratives of WWII, including denial and forgetting, were constructed and reproduced in significant forms including legislation, official proclamations, and commemoration.

Commemoration is a particularly significant tool in the construction of memory and nationhood. To understand the ramifications of it, particularly its political usages, its normalization in contemporary society must be problematized. We must recognize that it is planned, carried out, and experienced by individuals, members of the government or private organizations and everyday citizens. Commemorations rely upon narratives, and a complicated conflict, such as WWII in France, posed many challenges for the organizers of commemoration as well as participants and civilians. As a practice, commemoration is a mosaic rather than a monolith. It is varied and complex and tenuous and negotiated. This

⁸ Ibid, 39.

understanding is essential to recognizing its significance and usage around the memory of World War II.

First, even the specific date for commemorating WWII took time to be decided and finalized. According to Gerard Namer, during the first year after the war the date was not yet determined.⁹ In addition to the German surrender on May 8, de Gaulle's inspiring 1940 speech had memorialized June 16, and the Liberation of Paris made the end of August – generally the 25th – of national importance. These debates were put to rest with the law of May 7, 1946 which designated May 8th, if it fell on a Sunday, and if not, the Sunday following it, as the official date of the “victory won by the French and allied armies.”¹⁰ The usage of language is in and of itself a form of constructing the memory of WWII. The fact that it was required to fall on a Sunday (which would be changed eight years later) is interesting and may suggest an attempt to either grant it a greater religious character or else work around making it a *jour férié*, or an official public holiday. The law designating November 11th as the official date for commemorating WWI, that of October 24, made it a *jour férié*, so there was certainly precedent for it.

The law's description of the commemoration also assigns a specific characterization of it. Labeling it a victory by the French and Allied armies, which is at mildest a simplification of facts, situates it as a wholly military conflict. This

⁹ Gerard Namer, *La Commémoration en France*, 6-9.

¹⁰ Loi no. 46-934 du 7 mai 1946, Folder: Loi fixant la date de la commémoration de la Victoire, Archives de la Préfecture de la Police, Le Pré Saint-Gervais, France.

neglects the reality of many French citizens during the war and suggests that there may not have been a recognition of civilian involvement much less the experiences of deported peoples. In any case, it suggests that there was little room for multiple understandings or experiences of the war. Aside from these laws concerning when the war was remembered, the very act or practice of remembering was significant. These commemorations were opportunities for the nation to grieve a brutally difficult conflict, but also for the government and other groups to attempt to exert control over how the war was described and understood.

In addition to the complexities with remembering WWII, the post-war decade was full of political strife throughout France and its colonies, as well as Europe and the world at large. The Fourth Republic, established in 1946 after de Gaulle resigned, continuously struggled to form an effective coalition government. According to Alistair Horne, 20 different governments were formed in France between 1945 and 1954 alone.¹¹ These domestic challenges were exacerbated by geopolitical turmoil. By the early 1950s, the post-war order had changed dramatically. The Allies and western Europe were engaged in a delicate geopolitical balancing act over Cold War alliances. Stalin's death and the end of the Korean war in 1953 suggested the possibility of a more peaceful co-existence, but many questions about the future of Western Germany remained. France was

¹¹ Alistair Horne, *Seven Ages of Paris*, 379.

wary of Germany gaining back any military power or political legitimacy and was particularly skeptical of the proposed European Defense Community (E.D.C. for short – C.E.D. in French) which would create a pan-European army to serve as a counter balance to the Soviet Union. Both in conjunction with and due to the geopolitical turmoil, domestic politics in France was marked with tensions and instability.

In early May 1954, France found itself unsure of the nature of WWII, much less how to remember or commemorate it. They also faced a volatile political situation which called into question its future as a nation. This complicated moment was only exacerbated when the French army in Vietnam suffered a crippling defeat at Dien Bien Phu on May 7th, the day before the ninth anniversary of the German surrender. In this thesis I seek to understand how World War II was understood, remembered and communicated in the post-war period through commemoration. What struggle was there to reckon with a conflict which shocked French society and politics? Where do these commemorations exist between celebration and mourning?

For my study I will be concentrating on a single weekend of commemoration: May 7-9, 1954, the 9th anniversary of the German surrender. It is of particular significance due to the political circumstances and the distance from WWII. Temporally speaking, the closeness of 1954 to 1945 is significant. It means that most participants or spectators had personal experiences of the conflict – the actors were still alive and participating. Nine years is also very little time in

the grand scheme of things and thus the memory of the war was still being negotiated. Rousso terms these first nine years “the mourning phase” and writes that the legacy of Vichy was particularly challenging during this time.¹² I believe that the political circumstances during this post-war period, as well as the troubled legacy of the war in the French public, culminate and are made explicit in the commemorations of this period. They are particularly chaotic due to the political situation, but also expose the political apparatus and negotiation of narratives, voices and memory which is at the core of commemoration.

To first build an understanding of commemoration, I will trace commemorative practices, particularly in France, from the Revolution through WWI. This important context explains many of the norms and practices of commemoration, including its complex negotiation of different elements, political and otherwise, and sets the stage for the weekend of ceremonies that would mark the occasion of May 7-9, 1954.

In a second chapter I break down the three days of commemorations. To do so, I draw on the work of Clifford Geertz. His concept of “thick description” in the first chapter of The Interpretation of Cultures serves as a model for critically interpreting the minutiae and details of ceremonies, essential for a close case study such as this one. The usage of this concept by Robert Darnton for historical analysis in The Great Cat Massacre was of particular influence on me for his

¹² Rousso, *Vichy Syndrome*, 10.

rendering of a seemingly abnormal culture normal. For my own purposes, I have sought to inverse this by presenting commemoration, which we take to be “normal,” as a practice whose normality is itself constructed. By breaking down ceremonies through thick description, the culturally constructed aspects of it become clearer. Like Geertz and Darnton I do not seek to reach single, final conclusions but give context and ask critical questions to understand them as a cultural phenomenon.

Finally, I engage with scholars within the field of memory studies and related disciplines and put my case study in conversation with theorizations of commemoration as a ritual and practice. This case study promotes ceremony as a highly important and theoretically interesting type of commemoration, furthermore suggesting that spatial context is a significant, but often overlooked aspect of commemoration.

My project combines history, anthropology, and theory. I employ them for both a multidisciplinary approach, which I feel has inherent value, but also because they best support my historical argument and add greater depth of analysis. Breaking down the ceremonies anthropologically allowed me to study them more critically, questioning not just why certain groups were involved, but also understanding them as a cultural phenomenon. Furthermore, it throws into relief the active engagement of citizenry in cultural work and helps me question *why* and *how* that took place. Theory is a crucial tool alongside history for me because it allows for an engagement with the essential nature of commemoration.

In other words, through recognizing the significance of this moment in French history, I believe broader conclusions for how commemoration should be understood and studied can be drawn.

Paris has long served as the national, political and cultural capital of France, and thus its significance as a setting cannot be understated. For literally hundreds of years it has served as a space of national gathering and memory-making, and this legacy is very present in these ceremonies and acts of remembering. In fact, I argue that the spatial context plays a central role in these commemorations. From the establishment of certain locations as sacred spaces to the act of collectively mourning and celebrating as French citizens crowd the streets and commune together. Through the material space, history and memories can be present even across different periods or years, and this makes Paris a significant, as well as a far from neutral space, for remembering World War II.

Throughout this weekend commemorations took place on different scales across France. Groups of citizens gathered, from 20 people in front of a local *Monument aux morts* to thousands lining the Champs-Élysées.¹³ From villages to towns to the capital city, in private and public, official and unofficial ceremonies, everyone was remembering the same series of events. But who decided which

¹³ A type of monument established during and after WWI to commemorate the dead, present in most French towns and cities, but also in individual Parisian Arrondissements.

memory or memories were most valid and what narrative did the government seek to promote?

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This study of the events of the weekend in 1954 is based in materials from the Parisian Police Prefecture archives. Because these documents come from a single archive and one with a particular lens, an understanding of the institution of French police will contextualize and enrich interpretation. It will also elucidate the political perspectives and concerns of the police by explaining how its structure and organization influenced its directives.

The French police trace their roots back to 1667 and Louis XIV's Finance Minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert. While this force was abolished during the Revolution and changed in many forms throughout the 19th century, the Parisian police – the Prefecture of Police – has existed since it was founded by Emperor Napoleon in 1800. Like many French institutions, the police are intensely bureaucratic. Since 1870 they have been divided between the *gendarmerie*, policing the countryside and overseen by the Ministry of War and Defense, and the police, overseen by the ministry of the Interior and present in cities and towns. In addition to the police, the Minister of the Interior oversaw the Prefecture of the Police, in charge of Paris, and the *Sûreté nationale* or National Police (known as the *Sûreté générale* until 1934) with jurisdiction over the provincial police.¹⁴

¹⁴ Benedict Anderson, *In Thrall to Political Change*, 442-443.

Between 1870 and 1941 there were some attempts to centralize and better organize the force, culminating in the April 23, 1941 Vichy reform which integrated all municipal police in towns of over 10,000 inhabitants into a newly established national police force, save for the Parisian police. This remained in place until 1966 when the *Sûreté nationale* was combined with the Prefecture. Therefore, during the mid-1950s there were four main services: police, gendarmerie, *Sûreté nationale* and the Prefecture of Police.

According to Anderson, this structure has proven to be far from efficient and has given way to rivalries between the groups. This is in part due to the lack of cooperation facilitated between them and, historically, their different foundations (the gendarmes, for example, being far more organized due to their military roots). Anderson writes,

Even the most important single police institution, the Prefecture of Police, was never a coherent entity; for most of its history it was a battleground between more or less autonomous services. The compartmentalization of police services is a quasi-inevitable result of centralized organizations with long hierarchies, reaching from the centre to the localities.¹⁵

Although many claims and theories about the police's political leanings have been purported, Anderson is inclined to take a cautious stance. Citing the

¹⁵ Ibid, 207.

lack of evidence as well as the enormous diversity in ranks and divisions among the service, he argues that it is very difficult to reach a conclusion about any single political consensus. Furthermore, Anderson takes a great deal of inspiration from Dominique Monjardet's multiple studies of the French police which have also challenged the concept of a monolithic culture within them.

Despite a lack of overt political beliefs, the police's directive did shape its perspective and how it interacted with the public. Above all else the police have been and remain committed to maintaining public order. While this standard has been dependent upon the current government and has undoubtedly changed overtime, the maintenance of the authorities in power has resulted in the police being very concerned about dissenting and subversive groups or individuals and being rather conservative. Regardless of the police's personal leanings, political extremists of both sides were considered dangerous and disruptive to public order.

However, one common theme according to Anderson, has been a strong anti-Communist sentiment since the 1920s. At the time, the government and politicians strategically entrenched it within the police force, and events during the late 1930s and under German Occupation with the repression of Communists only served to antagonize these beliefs.

The wartime experience encouraged extreme right-wing views of some police officials which survived the Liberation period. Among the most notorious police officers of the Fourth

Republic was the collaborator *commissaire*, or police chief Jean Dides who helped (after his reintegration into the police) with the purge of suspected communists in the Prefecture of Police in the early years of the Cold War.¹⁶

The constantly changing governments of the Fourth Republic in the post-war period hindered the ability of the police to think past the short term. Rivalries and distrust between military intelligence and the police also created dysfunctional relations during this period, while they were attempting to address many different political challenges. For example, all branches and levels of the police in major cities, especially Paris, were involved in the fight against Algerian political groups. According to Anderson, “the difficulties of the decolonization period undoubtedly encouraged racist, extreme Right attitudes within the police, which were fiercely opposed by the mainstream rank and file police union, the SGP.”¹⁷ The Prefect of Police in 1954, Jean Baylot, was known for his vehement anti-communism and under his command police suppressed a July 14, 1953 political protest by an Algerian political party, the French Communist Party and the CGT, a national trade union closely aligned to the Communists, resulting in seven deaths.

The Prefecture was headed by the *Préfet de la police*, or Prefect, who answered directly to the Minister of the Interior. This means that the Prefecture

¹⁶ Ibid, 201.

¹⁷ Ibid, 202.

worked largely on its own (i.e. generally not in tandem with other police forces) and that its directives were informed by domestic political concerns. It also has a longer history (by over 50 years) than any other police body which demonstrates the central importance of Paris – and its surveillance – to the French state. The singling out of Paris shows its significance as the continuous political, cultural and social capital of France; it required an entirely different institution to run it. Paris's centrality to the events of the Revolution established it as a potential center of subversive, and indeed revolutionary, activity which naturally made security and maintenance of order a top priority of those in power. The Parisian police continued to be a method of control and surveillance during the 1950s and while they were tasked with the general running of Paris, they were always conscious of possible radicals or troubling groups. This is clear in their documentation of events, for while they are there to supervise and assist, all are also on the lookout for dangerous actors.

With a better understanding of this archive's institution, the ramifications of these sources become clearer. In this era, the police represented a direct branch of the Ministry of the Interior but had a fair amount of autonomy. Therefore, their concerns can be interpreted as indicative of those of the government at large, but not necessarily as acting upon direct orders. The police were considered an important force of "social control," and, in terms of public surveillance, the most

“constraining form...exercised by public authority.”¹⁸ This manifests itself in their close attention to the public, particularly their movement, and meticulous records of the size and nature of crowds throughout the weekend of commemoration.

The Prefecture’s documents trace the different stages of the May 8, 1954 commemoration from planning, to the events themselves, and finally in summary reports. The inclusion of the Police in the planning of the ceremonies, including intense organization of the distribution of officers throughout the city, demonstrates the serious security concerns commemoration prompted. It was not just about what symbols and people would be evoked, but also how order would be exercised, and the carefully controlled spectacle successfully carried out.

The main documents concerning this weekend originate from the Prefecture’s Cabinet or the governing body. The papers themselves all seem to fall into two categories: internal communication and external coordination. Their origins in the “affaires générales” or general business suggests they provide a good cross section of documents related to the weekend and most communication is present. The latter category tends to be more official communiqués, generally letters with formal headers and addresses. Some of these are summaries of planning meetings and were distributed to other bodies, whereas others are letters between individuals, a 5th arrondissement “Commissaire de Voie Publique” and

¹⁸ Ibid, 439.

the director general of the municipal police for example.¹⁹ The internal communication documents are more challenging because there is very little context for their usage. Many are overviews of the planned ceremonies for the day with strict details of meeting and procession times for different groups. Their lack of headers and contextual information suggests these were not necessary, possibly because they were used within the Police and widely distributed as the overview of the events, but not officially released.

Other sets of small memos describe what the police encountered on the day of, such as the size of crowds, their reactions to events (such as shouted slogans), or when dignitaries and organizations arrived. They offer details from every ten or fifteen minutes, or every hour, and generally mirror the planning documents with the exception of any unplanned activities or reports on the sizes of crowds. In addition to this blow-by-blow, there are some summary documents including reports which detail ceremonies around Paris and the suburbs. This demonstrates how the police surveillance of the events was a full undertaking which involved advance planning, careful scrutiny the day of, and official reports afterwards.

The information on the ceremonies is limited in terms of the personal perspectives of police and participants, but the essentially real time reporting of events provides a rich narrative of the events. The documentation of movement

¹⁹ Letter: transmission de tracts..., 7 May, 1954, Série B, Box BA 2133, Folder 8 mai 1954, Archives de la Préfecture de la Police, Le Pré Saint-Gervais, France.

has been essential to my study of spatial elements of commemoration, and the tracking of possible subversive groups and individuals offers a greater understanding of the concerns of the police. In order to successfully study this topic, I must use these documents to construct an understanding, though take care to read *through* them for what is not said and who is left out. This means studying and thinking critically about the language used, reconstructing a narrative of events based on their descriptions and most of all, not considering any of the documents hard truths. The police's portrayal of the events is rich, but I am still constantly reminded that there are many voices, such as the "average" people attending the ceremonies, who are silent. On the other hand, dissenting or concerning behavior as interpreted by the police, is blown out of proportion because it was of such concern, and the police miss things. We cannot assume that they observed and recorded every part of the weekend, nor should we take their notes at face value. But, we can appreciate the enormous amount of records they kept, which have lifted the curtain, so to speak, on the organization, practice, and control of commemoration.

In many senses the Police Prefecture can be considered "in thrall" to changes in politics, as Anderson's title suggests. Through the shifting politics of the early 1950s they did their best to maintain order and security, but were hampered by bureaucracy, instability, and political circumstances. However, they remained of central importance to the government in both maintaining order and carrying out these ceremonies. Their inclusion in planning and organization

demonstrates the high degree of control being exercised, or sought, by the government in this weekend of commemoration. Finally, their careful recording of events has been a wealth of information for this case study and allowed an incredible degree of closeness and detail to how they were planned, carried out, understood, and experienced.

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All French documents and sources, unless stated otherwise, have been translated by myself. To make them accessible while also maintaining a degree of closeness, I have done my best to strike a balance between translation and using original French terms. Because there are some which do not have direct equivalents, or the English term would not communicate it properly, some French remains. I hope that this will not inhibit readers, and first usages of such terms will appear in italics with translations or explanations in footnotes.

Most locations and Monuments will remain in French (i.e. Place de ___ or the Hôtel de Ville) and the names during this 1954 will be used. Notably, this means that the location of the Arc de Triomphe is not Place Charles de Gaulle but Place de l'Etoile.

I will also be using the French style of the 24-hour clock, with 'h' appearing in place of the colon (i.e. 4pm will be written 16h) as both a stylistic choice and to stay true to the documents.

Chapter 1: A History of Commemoration

Historicizing commemoration is an important step in challenging our understanding of it. By demonstrating how new practices and symbols have appeared and emerged, and how they have done so in different periods, it is clear that commemoration is far from a static or monolithic practice. Instead, we should consider it a language which changes over time and is influenced by contemporary circumstances and needs.

Furthermore, understanding commemorative practices around the First World War sets up the historical context for the 1954 weekend of commemoration. The manner of commemorating this preceding conflict directly influenced understandings of how to remember the preceding conflict. World War I has been cited as a major moment of commemoration in Europe by many scholars for being the first truly modern war and as well a conflict which had lasting effects throughout most western countries.

In the introduction of Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity, John Gillis sets up a timeline of commemoration outlining three periods: pre-national, national and post-national.²⁰ During the first, leading up to the French and American Revolutions, commemoration was less regimented, with practices generally divided between the aristocracy and lay folk. This makes sense due to the hierarchical structure of society, a remnant from the feudal period, and the fact that the modern, democratic nation state had not yet been conceived of. These

²⁰ John Gillis, "Memory and Identity," 5.

revolutions changed this, and the nature of commemoration, particularly at the national level, leading to Gillis's second period.

The break with the old political system also shattered the symbols of the former regime. However, this only intensified the need for commemoration and new sets of sites and memory practices were established nearly immediately. Gillis cites Benedict Anderson's concept of "collective amnesia" in which the writing of new, national histories took place due to this change in leadership.²¹ In Mona Ozouf's *Festivals and the French Revolution*, the public gatherings and ceremonies take on a greater degree of importance than granted by most scholars. They were in fact, she argues, a "transfer of sacrality" from the old regime to the new.²² Public ceremony had played an important role in early eras for the symbolic acceptance of French kings, and while the political context had changed, the need for displays of power for legitimacy had not.²³

Ozouf's analysis is heavily influenced by Emile Durkheim's study of the importance of religion in some form to society, (which will be further discussed in Chapter 3). However, it also speaks to theories of civil religion. It is noteworthy that the motivations for commemoration came about in newly democratic, secular societies. While there were new, modern concepts of the "citizen" and equality among people, there was still a deep need for symbols and figures to unite, and even constrain, society. John Bodnar writes that democracy worked in duality

²¹ Ibid, 7.

²² Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, xi-xii.

²³ Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession*. See esp. chap. 2, "Ceremonies: The Theatrical Rituals of French Political Possession."

with tradition and that they needed each other. While the former asserted “greater personal freedom, [the latter] worked to constrain the individual and maintain the collective.”²⁴ Though these public rituals about revolutionary martyrs were in theory about breaking with the past, the need to exert a level of control over the masses was very real.

Shortly before the French Revolution, a new theory emerged with just such a problem in mind: Rousseau’s “civil religion.” Put forth in his 1762 *Du Contrat Social*, or *The Social Contract*, Rousseau discusses it with other theories of religion, particularly contrasting it with traditional religion of the church which is divorced from all political or law-making bodies. He lays out some basic dogmas for civil religion – based in Christianity – and suggests they be simple. They included, among others “the life to come ; the happiness of the just ; the punishment of sinners.”²⁵ Rousseau’s theory, though he did not know it at the time, was perfect for capturing the new language of symbols which these post-Revolutionary states were using in an attempt to general unity.

However, such unity was not easily achieved. In France, conservatives continued to observe Bourbon birth and death dates, and peasants protested the domination of local commemorative practices by the national government. In the decades and centuries following the French revolution, different myths about the “founding” of France pervaded, primarily divided upon the Right and the Left.

²⁴ John Bodnar, “Pierre Nora, National Memory, and Democracy: A Review,” 959.

²⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 186.

Despite these differences in opinion, there was little debate over the importance of commemoration. In fact, according to Gillis, the debates and uncertainty over commemoration and national symbols had the effect of *intensifying* these practices. This serves as evidence for the power of commemoration to exert and consolidate power.

Throughout the 19th century although commemoration was “for” the people in an official sense - it attempted to affect the general public - those celebrated were nearly always leaders such as monarchs or generals. The average citizen was not the subject, nor were the deaths of ordinary soldiers even necessarily recorded. During military conflicts, only officers or generals’ names appeared on memorials and the number of soldier’s deaths – much less their names – was barely recorded.²⁶ These practices shifted in a major way due to World War I. While it was a major military and political event in history, it also had many effects on commemoration. In addition to new military technologies, such as planes, machine guns, tanks, and flame throwers, involved in the conflict, the first war cemeteries in Europe and scores of local monuments sprung up as a result. And in addition to these, there was a new conception of sacrifice: the Unknown Soldier.

Like other forms of commemoration which emerged as a result of WWI, the Unknown Soldier was one born from necessity. The number of unrecoverable

Commented [CL1]: Bit more elaboration here. Tell us some details about the unprecedented nature of the conflict (e.g. how many soldiers, how many casualties, industrial warfare vs. heroic warfare, etc.) Then say a bit more about these three new types of practices (cemeteries, local monuments, unknown soldier).

²⁶ Thomas Laqueur, “Memory and naming in the Great War,” 150-152; Gillis, “Memory and Identity” 9-10.

bodies combined with the scale of mourning across the country found in it a symbol which could negotiate this new context. In her book on the Unknown Soldier, Laura Wittman insists on this modernity. The French design – a flat slab – rejected the verticality of traditional monuments – and the anonymous soldier contained inside was very symbolic. This anonymity was also disruptive of traditional commemoration, on one hand for reflecting the new reality of war, which had now reduced the combatants to mindless numbers, or cogs within a machine, but also by valorizing an ordinary soldier. It could represent any and every husband or son who gave their life for the nation and thus had affects across classes and other societal divisions, touching nearly everyone. The soldier also served as a sort of democratization of memory which was central to the commemoration of WWI in its monuments – everyone was now deserving to be remembered.

Thomas Laqueur wrote that the British Unknown Soldier (who was entombed on the same day) was important because of its materiality of being "'so intensely a body' ...'it was all bodies.'"²⁷ It represented "all the dead who lacked an individual, denominated grave...the unknown soldier not only crystallized the rivalries over Great War commemoration but also represented their ultimate objective, unattainable in its entirety...: the bodies of the dead."²⁸ This is

²⁷ Daniel Sherman, "Bodies and Names," 464.

²⁸ Ibid.

powerful imagery and indeed the material aspect of the Unknown Soldier is central to it. That it is truly just an unknown body is deeply symbolic.

However, the narrative of WWI as a clear turning point in commemorative practices has been challenged by some scholars. Many of them cite monuments for common soldier originating in other conflicts - Daniel Sherman to the Napoleonic Wars and the first civilian armies, and Maurice Agulhorn and Jane Hargrove credit the Franco-Prussian war with the removal of sovereignty as the foci.²⁹ These different timelines demonstrate how messy the practice of commemoration is and suggest that there are no absolute hinge points, but instead a gradual change over time.

While some new practices (specifically the *monument aux morts* and the Unknown Soldier) were direct results of the conflict, the mourning of WWI was rooted in tradition and precedent.³⁰ Jay Winter argues that while Modernism and other movements emerged due to WWI, they were inadequate for mourning, and thus people used tradition to grieve³¹. Though there are new practices which were a direct result of the conflict – the monument aux morts or the Unknown Soldier – they drew from earlier forms, such traditional monuments or cenotaphs.

The proliferation of commemoration after the First World War manifested itself in new and shockingly universal manners, directly affected by the circumstances of the war. In addition to the scale of death, there were not many

²⁹ Sherman, "Art, commerce and memory," 187.

³⁰ Literally "monument to the dead," but translatable to "war memorial." Very culturally specific and significant, so it will remain in French.

³¹ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, 3-5.

possibilities to recover bodies, much less transport them back to families or hometowns. Sherman writes that this created a physical and emotional practical need to “bring order and resolution to the chaos of bodies that remained one of the most poignant legacies of the war” resulting in specific commemorative practices.³²

The lack of physical bodies led to the usage of names, particularly on monuments in individual towns. These literally evoked the individuals and took the place of a tombstone, but also acted as a claim on the part of the community to be directly involved in the commemoration of the WWI.³³ According to Sherman, this claim connects the town to the nation at large, and represented its loss “as its most essential link to the nation,” in a manner he terms “both poignant and troubling.”³⁴

These monuments became so ubiquitous in France that Monument aux Morts was coined for them. Winter believes that they situate “French war memorials within a tradition of suffering and sacrifice,” while Sherman purports that their explicit focus on the dead (as the name suggests) sets them apart from any equivalent memorials in other countries.³⁵ This reveals specific characteristics of French commemoration, at least since WWI, particularly the rhetoric present around the nation’s losses.

³² Sherman, “Bodies and Names,” 449.

³³ Ibid, 455.

³⁴ Sherman, “Art, commerce and memory,” 206-207.

³⁵ Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, 78; Sherman, “Art, commerce and memory,” 188.

Commented [CL2]: Can you explain what he means here? How did other countries express commemoration differently?

Though these Monuments aux Morts were primarily located in and specific to towns, they were also part of a larger national mourning of the war. Alexandre Niess's study of monuments in the "Red Zone," the region in Northeastern France saw fighting and/or occupation and was therefore most directly affected by the war, further demonstrates the localization of memory, even while it exists within a national narrative. The proximity to the battlefields and fighting led to specific expressions in monuments and memorials, stemming from the desire to demonstrate the sacrifice of the community. For example, images of civilians or female allegories of the nation are slightly more present in this part of France than the rest, likely due to the personal experiences of many local and civilians.³⁶ There is also a greater number of soldiers and *poilus* (literally "hairy one," meaning the average soldier) in the region, about 23% of monuments compared to 10% in France overall.³⁷

However, these depictions are nearly all censored representations which reflect little of the true horrors of the war. For example, there are nearly no dead or dying soldiers depicted and the few which exist do not accurately represent them. In Pontfaverger the dead soldier is hidden by a shroud and the dying soldiers in Urceel and Pévy are neatly groomed and appear to only be injured by a single bullet to their hearts, a far less traumatic death than in reality.³⁸ This shows the creation of a narrative. One which valorizes the community's sacrifices but

³⁶ Alexandre Niess, "From the Cemin des Dames to Verdun," 125.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid, 126-127.

also does not confront the reality of the war head on (even if many of these people likely faced it).

Sherman writes that the names of soldiers on monuments were furthermore part of a “civic pedagogy” in which values of military service were communicated, such as heroism.³⁹ The *poilu* was one symbol which demonstrates an attempt to communicate this. Both these names and the *poilu* imagery elevated the common soldier and honored them, even if one was on an individual basis and the other served as more of a symbol. But the inclusion of a *poilu* on such a monument could allow families to grieve and project their lost sons onto an anonymous, proxy body. They were also situated within a “ritual of continuity,” part of a lineage of French military history and glory.⁴⁰ Jay Winter writes that both “elevated and obscure [French] soldiers celebrated the Gallic military tradition.”⁴¹ There was also a tendency to “locate the men of 1914-18 in the long history of martial value.”⁴² Thus we see how the commemoration and mourning of WWI took place through and building upon a deep understanding of the French nation, established in earlier periods.

Such communing with the dead happened in specific spaces. Winter demarcates 3 distinct spaces, constructed in different periods. Prior to the 1918 armistice, memorials were “scattered” and primarily used heroic images.⁴³ The

³⁹ Sherman, “Bodies and Names,” 455.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, 82.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 79.

decade after Armistice emphasized the universality of loss and reaffirmed local sacrifices, as well as national politics and aesthetic tradition through “post-war churches and civic sites.”⁴⁴ Monuments aux Morts with the names of the local losses in towns across France are examples of this, and Winter writes that they were a result of the “postwar search for a language in which to reaffirm the values of the community for which soldiers had laid down their lives.”⁴⁵ Finally, war cemeteries embodied a “more universal language.”⁴⁶ This variety shows that there was no singular type of commemoration, but that it changed over time as the conflict was processed and understood in new ways. It also insists on the different spatial contexts of commemoration, something which will be a key part of our case study.

This spatial awareness is supported by Niess’s study of the specific locations of local monuments in the Red Zone. Most communes in the region chose to erect memorials in public squares (with varying degrees of neutrality depending on its proximity to the church or town hall) with a frequency of 77.79% compared to 32-50% in communes in the rest of France.⁴⁷ Within this, there was some variation between the northern and southern towns in his area of focus. Communes north of the Front (who had been occupied by Germans) erected memorials on public squares 85.8% of the time, compared to 68.9% south of the front, in which churchyards or cemeteries were more popular - therefore

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Niess, “From the Chemin des Dames to Verdun,” 124-125.

stressing the funerary aspect and mourning. Regardless of the exact details of the placement, their presence shows that, as he writes, “the duty to remember is present everywhere and with equal intensity, even if it is not always expressed in similar fashion.”⁴⁸

Although there was clearly a great deal of variation at the local level, the French national government had a heavy hand in the commemoration of WWI. In Monuments aux Morts Annette Becker characterizes this era’s memorials, which she calls the first large-scale commemoration in the 20th century, as derived from popular will, but supervised by the state. Neiss furthermore notes that the French government passed 42 laws concerning these memorials between 1918 and 1925.⁴⁹ One of the most significant of these was the July 2, 1915 law creating a new designation, “Mort pour la France” and detailing who it could be applied to. This was a literal control of sacrifice for the nation and institutionalized the valorization of war deaths from essentially the start of the conflict.

Despite attempts on all sides to make sense of the conflict, monuments could still be interpreted in a variety of manners. Sherman writes that they were easily appropriated:

even at their dedication or on subsequent Armistice Days, ceremonial occasions when monuments most ostentatiously signified unity...Where a leftist deputy might find in a monument, whatever its form, an exhortation to avoid senseless slaughter in the future, one of his conservative colleagues could, at the same ceremony, extract from it an endorsement of a strong defence and

⁴⁸ Ibid, 121.

⁴⁹ Neiss, “From the Chemin des Dames to Verdun,” 121.

an uncompromising foreign policy. Whatever the views of the commentator, the monument could be interpreted to suit them.⁵⁰ Although this example is specific to WWI, it hints at the mutability of commemoration. There are very real possibilities for the co-opting of monuments by different groups, and the usage for political means is a broader part of commemoration as a practice.

Commemoration of WWI was undoubtedly shaped by the extreme loss of life – 1.3 million French soldiers dead.⁵¹ In addition to the creation of monuments to accommodate the lack of bodies, they were a national phenomenon which to some extent united France through its mourning. However, Sherman reminds us that the sadness resulting from the loss of life should not be purported to be the sole reason for commemoration. While he recognizes the scale of loss affected nearly all French towns, this does not explain why they have a memorial.⁵² By questioning their materiality and production, he challenges our assumption that loss of life and sadness lead naturally to memorials and commemoration.

Martyrdom and dying for one's nation is a common theme in commemoration. However, it requires concepts which have only emerged in recent centuries, primarily that of the nation and one's membership in it. Rousseau writes that what he terms the "religion of the citizen," or civil religion, must make "the homeland the object of the citizens' adorations, [and] teaches them that...to die for one's country is to become a martyr."⁵³ The concept of

⁵⁰ Sherman, "Art, commerce and memory," 205-206.

⁵¹ Ibid, 187.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 181-182.

martyrdom therefore comes directly from the concept of the nation as a community. And this was important rhetoric, which was present in remembering the losses of WWI. Winter writes that from the beginning of WWI “commemoration was an act of citizenship. To remember was to affirm community...This form of collective affirmation in wartime identified individuals and their families with the community at large, understood both in terms of a localized landscape and a broader and more vaguely defined national entity under siege or threat.”⁵⁴

To this end, commemoration is also a deeply political too. Sherman cites Agulhorn and W. Choeun’s works, “La ‘statuomanie’ et l’histoire” and “Symbols of Power: Statues in 19th century Provincial France” respectively, which argue that the statues which proliferated in 19th century France were particularly concentrated in areas of political contestation.⁵⁵ This was spurred on by Revanchist nationalism in the last two decades of the century and was primarily present in Eastern France (such as in Alsace-Lorraine), headed by the group ‘Souvenir Français.’⁵⁶ This suggests that while the explosion in monuments to WWI was due to an enormous amount of grief, there were also spaces of contestation produced by the war which monuments sought to fill or resolve. Therefore, we clearly should not consider these monuments – or any others for that matter – as derived wholly from grief.

⁵⁴ Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, 80.

⁵⁵ Sherman, “Art, commerce and memory,” 188.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell write that to commemorate is “to combine memory and ceremony, to remind or be mindful again”⁵⁷ This definition is particularly helpful for its emphasis on the literal act of commemoration and the fact that it is a conscious choice and moment. Wale Adebani continues this idea, writing that the “recollection of the past is an active, constructive process, which is beyond simply retrieving information. To remember, therefore, ‘is to place a part of the past in the service of conceptions and needs of the present.’”⁵⁸ The memorials of WWI demonstrate some of the needs of the people: grieving and remembering bodies which were not present at the local level. A negotiation of the democratization of war losses with the symbols of the poilu and Unknown Soldier.

However, there was also an important cautionary character to memorials. They were meant to be places to reflect upon the conflict, but also for younger generations to learn. Symbols of valor and heroism used in monuments demonstrate this, but also the local nature of commemoration. Children were often involved in the annual ceremonies and this moment of memory-making was used to impress upon them the legacy of the conflict. Niess writes that commemoration was a duty to remember born from the “debt incurred by the living toward the dead.”⁵⁹ Winter echoes this theme of indebtedness and adds that schoolchildren were central to commemorations at the monuments.⁶⁰ These

⁵⁷ Wale Adebani, “Death, national Memory and the Social Construction of Heroism,” 436.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Niess, “From the Chemin des Dames to Verdun,” 121.

⁶⁰ Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, 97.

ceremonies were in fact moments of learning as they listened to lists of names and heard the stories of veterans.

This aspect of memorials was complicated by World War II. Winter writes that because they were “intended to warn” when it was not heard, “that message of hope of using the witness of those who had suffered during the war to prevent its recurrence, was bound to fade away.”⁶¹ Remembering WWII through the practices established by WWI was also complicated by the very different nature of the conflict and experience of the war, particularly in France. Due to these distinct characters, according to Winter, the same language could not be used for both. This begs the question, what language was used? And, if commemoration does emerge through and build upon past practices as we have seen, though with the shaping hand of the government, how did this take place?

⁶¹ Ibid, 9.

Chapter 2: May 7-9, 1954

Modern French history has been defined by its dates; July 14, November 11, and May 8 in particular, but others including September 4, February 6, June 16, and August 25. They are designated nodes around which memories of wars, regime changes, and other major events circulate. Their designation does not take place randomly or by popular demand, but rather through legislation. Thus, the French government has a direct hand in how history is remembered and celebrated, by determining both the date itself as well as the nature of celebration.

World War II's date of remembrance was not obvious or decided, nor was the nature of its celebration. While WWI had a single date - November 11 - the singularity of the WWII May armistice day was challenged by the liberation of Paris in August and de Gaulle's June 1940 call to arms.⁶² Less than a month before the 1954 commemoration of WWII, the act of remembering was still being negotiated and decided. Law #54-415 of April 14, 1954 designated the last Sunday in April as the date for remembering victims of the deportation and those who died in the Nazi concentration camps.⁶³ A new date, for a specific group, was therefore added to the calendar of WWII celebrations. Just a year before the ninth anniversary, the date for remembering the German surrender changed from the second Sunday in May (as established by law #46-934 of May 7, 1946) to the actual date of May 8th, regardless of what day of the week it fell on (law #53-225

⁶² Namer, *Commémoration en France*, 6-9.

⁶³ Légifrance, *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, pg 3642, https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jo_pdf.do?cidTexte=JPDF1504195400003642&categorieLien=id.

of March 20, 1953). Between this time and present day, the law would change another five times.

These changes, and additions, in the dates for remembering WWII demonstrates both the tenuous nature of the holiday – its date was not initially defined, and its designation changed many different times - and how the French government plays a direct role in these decisions, controlling when and how such remembering takes place.

Newspapers

Le Monde and *Le Figaro*, the two major French newspapers, had few articles on the May 8 weekend of commemoration. The banal details of the annual ceremonies seem to be of little interest, as the sole article about them only provided information about the presence of an organization, the Comité d'action de la Résistance, at both the official May 8th ceremonies and Général de Gaulle's visit the next day.⁶⁴ The tone of both articles suggests that they were prompted by the organization itself and were written for their publicity, rather than by the newspaper.

Only one major article in each newspaper discussed the commemorations at any length in the days leading up to it. *Le Monde's* was mainly focused on a discussion of the new 1953 law which had made "le 8 mai" a "jour férié legal," or

⁶⁴ "INFORMATIONS DIVERSES," *Le Monde*, May 6, 1954; "Les Ceremonies du 8 mai," *Le Figaro*, May 4, 1954.

a public holiday, but not necessarily a day off from work.⁶⁵ *Le Figaro*'s coverage of this change was even more brief, stating rather pessimistically in the headline that it was not "an obligatory day off" ("obligatoirement chômé,") and listing the different circumstances for employees of the French rail service, schools, and other enterprises.⁶⁶ The language used in both articles is very sterile and more informative than analytical. This suggests that the changing nature of the anniversary was not a shock to the public, and that they only cared about how it might affect their work schedule.

In addition to this short article, *Le Figaro* gives more details for the weekend of ceremonies. Again, no word is spared and they provide little more than the necessary information of organizations involved, starting times, and locations.⁶⁷ However, this demonstrates that the newspaper was a medium for citizens to get a sense of the events and plan their day around them. Thus, the Comité d'action de la Résistance would have known that one manner of advertising their participation and commemorative activities to the public was to use the newspaper.

The coverage of events on the days of and afterwards is far more in depth, which suggests that the planning and organization was not newsworthy, but the actual events were important to communicate to the public. While the articles maintain a restrained tone, there was some romanticization in the description of

⁶⁵ "LE 8 MAI JOUR FÉRIÉ," *Le Monde*, May 7, 1954.

⁶⁶ "Samedi ne sera obligatoirement chômé," *Le Figaro*, May 7, 1954.

⁶⁷ "Les cérémonies anniversaires de l'armistice de 1945," *Le Figaro*, May 7, 1954.

events. The May 8-9 edition of *Le Figaro* wrote that the ceremonies of the previous evening were “particularly moving” and, having just heard about the defeat in Vietnam, “many Parisians...were visibly filled with emotion by these short ceremonies of memory.”⁶⁸

The news of the battle, and eventual defeat, at Dien Bien Phu dominated news coverage in the weeks before and after the May 8 commemorations. It was clearly on the minds of many throughout the weekend. In between articles on de Gaulle’s visit and the celebration of the ninth anniversary in *Le Figaro*, was one on the glorification of the heroes at Dien Bien Phu by “many leaders” during the celebration of the German surrender.⁶⁹ This rhetoric was present in ceremonies throughout Paris over the course of the weekend, as recorded by the police.

Other citizens took even more direct action, and both *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* covered the numerous anti-communist demonstrations around France during these days. According to *Le Monde*, the combination of “emotion provoked by the defeat at Dien Bien Phu, on the occasion of the commemoration of the armistice.”⁷⁰ This suggests that the coincidence of the defeat falling at this time exacerbated the public’s reaction to it, and in some ways funneled their anger or grief into these commemorations.

The longest article in *Le Monde* recapping the weekend was on de Gaulle’s visit to the Unknown Soldier on Sunday the 9th. It was described as a

⁶⁸ “Les cérémonies anniversaires de l’armistice de 1945,” *Le Figaro*, May 8-9, 1954.

⁶⁹ “De nombreuses personnalités exaltent l’héroïsme de Dien Bien Phu,” *Le Figaro*, May 10, 1954.

⁷⁰ “MANIFESTATIONS ANTICOMMUNISTES,” *Le Monde*, May 11, 1954.

triumphant success on his part, with some brief activities afterwards by rogue groups - whom, it notes, disobeyed his wish that the “gathering take place in a dignified manner/in dignity.”⁷¹ Even the title of the article (“Several unimportant demonstrations took place after the ceremony”) hints at this characterization. *Le Figaro*’s coverage of the events used the exact description – “manifestations sans gravité” – and while they offered more information on what exactly took place, it is presented in a very formal manner with little judgement. When reporting that one of these groups gathered in front of their own office shouting political slogans, they make a single sly comment that they were not surprised to see their presence, rather than outside of the Communist-led newspaper *L’Humanité*.⁷²

However, the fact that both newspapers report upon these activities in some depth (and even devote a headline to, in the case of *Le Monde*) suggests that they were of some significance. Overall de Gaulle’s visit is highly romanticized by both newspapers and was clearly a big news item. The crowd and de Gaulle’s presence are described in almost literary manners, particularly how the cheers of the crowd swelled with his arrival and how strictly the moment of silence was followed.⁷³ *Le Monde* does their best to downplay any problems that may have

⁷¹ “Quelques manifestations sans gravité ont eu lieu après la cérémonie,” *Le Monde*, May 11, 1954.

⁷² “L’hommage du général de Gaulle au Soldat Inconnu,” *Le Figaro*, May 10, 1954

⁷³ Ibid; “Quelques manifestations sans gravité ont eu lieu après la cérémonie,” *Le Monde*, May 11, 1954.

detracted from the spectacle of de Gaulle, though they do admit that that “several scuffles broke out” or the few “unimportant injuries” and single arrest.⁷⁴

The summary above *Le Monde*'s article ends with a long sentence romanticizing the ceremony. “Thus, the people of Paris have once more given proof of their wisdom. He [de Gaulle] has shown that the honor he intended to pay to all who have fallen in battle during the last war as well as in the Vietnamese conflict cannot be exploited for political ends.”⁷⁵ This is highly nationalist rhetoric, but also shows an awareness that commemorations were dynamic moments with the possibility of appropriation by different interests. It is also an invocation of the power of the French nation and its dedication to properly celebrate their dead.

Although the articles covering this weekend of commemoration give details for the ceremonies, and cover some of the influence of current events – particularly the Dien Bien Phu defeat – they miss or leave out a lot. The way the ceremonies are presented shows that there was an expectation that they were an annual event, and there was little questioning of how the events took place. However, they do cover the changing legislation around commemorating WWII and how contemporary politics were referenced or influenced the events, two major pieces of evidence for the dynamic nature commemoration practices, particularly in this period.

⁷⁴ “Quelques manifestations sans gravité ont eu lieu après la cérémonie,” *Le Monde*, May 11, 1954.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

To better understand how this weekend of negotiation of memory took place, the details of events must be interrogated in depth. The police documentation and archiving of the events offer these details, and particularly the bureaucracy behind them.

Overview of Ceremonies

A variety of ceremonies took place during this important weekend of commemoration and the police did not attend or record them all. They were charged with attending to the official, government planned ones and smaller ones in Parisian arrondissements or municipalities outside of Paris, but not private gatherings by groups of individuals or organizations. All told the commemorations of this weekend had groups numbering from the tens to the thousands. They met at major sites of significance, city halls and other local government buildings, and at the many plaques and memorials scattered around Paris.

For the government planned commemorations, the most important site was the Arc de Triomphe and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier underneath it. Two official, standalone ceremonies took place there on May 8, one in the morning and one in the evening, but it was used as part of other ceremonies. Notably, the Cérémonie des Flambeaux, or Ceremony of Torches, started there on the night before, May 7. During the afternoon of May 8, a procession with the torches visited two spots in Paris – Place Stalingrad and the Hôtel de Ville – and had

small ceremonies there, before ending at the Arc de Triomphe in the afternoon.

Another ceremony, the *Cérémonie des Urnes*, or Ceremony of Urns which was in honor of victims of the Deportation started in the afternoon of May 7 and had a major public ceremony on May 8, as part of the *Cérémonie des Flambeaux*.⁷⁶

The weekend of commemoration ended on May 9th with the annual celebration of Joan of Arc, the *Fête de Jeanne d'Arc*, and a unique visit from Général de Gaulle to the Unknown Soldier.

Planning of the Weekend

The planning for this weekend of ceremonies took place over the course of several meetings at the office of the *Ministre des Anciens Combattants et Victimes civiles de la Guerre*.⁷⁷ While we cannot be sure of the exact number, there were at least two, held on April 24 and 29. The planning committee had 23 and 33 members on the respective dates, and these included representatives of the police, government ministries, the Parisian government, the military, and a few members of the press.⁷⁸ Its makeup speaks to the coordination required to successfully pull off the desired spectacle, as well as the intense bureaucracy involved in these events. Based on the documents, it appears this committee made

⁷⁶ Report: *Cérémonies commémoratives de la Victoire du 8 mai 1945*, 6 May, 1954, Série B, Box BA 2133, Folder 8 mai 1954, Archives de la Préfecture de la Police, Le Pré Saint-Gervais, France. Note: henceforth "BA 2133, 1954, PP" will serve as the shorthand for this batch of documents.

⁷⁷ While this loosely translates to Veterans Affairs, the institutions are not exactly the same and thus I will maintain the usage of "Anciens Combattants" as well as "Ministre des Anciens Combattants."

⁷⁸ Report: *Organisation des cérémonies*, 29 April, 1954, BA 2133, 1954, PP; Report: *Report: Organisation des cérémonies*, 24 April, 1954, BA 2133, 1954, PP.

the formal decisions including timing, procession, and organizations involved, before transmitting the information to higher political forces, such as the top French General. Even if they followed tradition and kept much the same from year to year, there was still a formal process to go through to finalize these decisions. While to the public they may have appeared to be an exciting show of pomp and circumstance, there was an incredible level of work which went into creating this impression.

Ceremony Close Reads

In all there were seven government sponsored ceremonies, of which four were “official.” Their diversity – focusing on the eternal flame, on deportees, and on the general victory – shows that there was not a single narrative about the nature of WWII. However, there are many common elements within them, from the organization of processions to the manner of commemorating through the offering of bouquets and wreaths. The Ceremony of Torches, and particularly its sub-ceremonies at Place Stalingrad and the Hôtel de Ville, offers rich examples of the minutiae of these practices, as well the intrusions of contemporary politics.

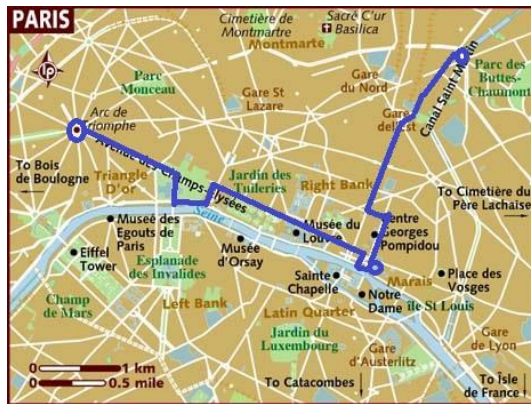


Fig. 3: Ceremony of Torches Route, Place Stalingrad to Place de l’Etoile
 Source: Lonely Planet, “Map of Paris,” *Lonely Planet*, 2018. [Edits by author]
<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/maps/europe/france/paris/>

The Ceremony of Torches took place under the auspices of the *Comité du Relais Sacré*, an association dating back to 1934 and designated with the task of the regular rekindling the eternal flame on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (which dates to 1923). They were likely in charge because this ceremony centered around torches lit at this very flame on the evening of May 7th. After a short procession at Place de l’Etoile, they were transported to sites around Paris including Place Stalingrad the headquarters of associated organizations, the *Ministre des Anciens Combattants*, and the tomb of *Maréchal Leclerc*, a WWII military hero, at *Les Invalides*.

The next day they were reassembled at Place Stalingrad for the first of three ceremonies. Afterwards, they would process down to the *Hôtel de Ville*, where the ceremony coordinated with the Ceremony of Urns, before leaving for

Place de l'Etoile for a final ceremony. Figure 3 shows the route of May 8, with the circles marking these three locations. Place Stalingrad is the uppermost circle and intersects the 10th and 19th arrondissements. It was created in early 1945 and originally named Place de l'Ourcq but was renamed later that year on July 7, 1945. A silver linden tree at the Place was planted on November 4, 1945 and named the "Arbre de la Libération," or Tree of Liberation, in honor of the liberation of Paris.

Preparations for the Place Stalingrad ceremony began in the surrounding neighborhoods. Several blocks south, near Gare de l'Est, on avenue de Verdun, Anciens Combattants gathered. Shortly before the ceremony, the 93rd Infantry Regiment's band took their places surrounding the grandstand erected at the Place. Then, three processions converged at Place Stalingrad at the same time. The Anciens Combattants from the south, preceded by about ten flags of different organizations, a police band and leaders of the Fédération Nationale des Combattants Républicains, a veteran's association. The President of the Comité du Relais Sacré leading a delegation of 40 flagbearers and about 100 people. And finally, the dignitaries presiding over the ceremony.⁷⁹ Their individual processions from nearby parts of the neighborhood likely gave the impression of continuous movement, or a continuation of the previous ceremonies, such as those begun the night before.

⁷⁹ Anniversaire de la Victoire Cérémonie des Flambeaux memo no. 3, 8 May, 1954, BA 2133, 1954, PP.

As the ceremony began, the police were watching. There were no particular concerns about this ceremony, aside from the constant possibility of rebellious groups and characters. It was up to the police to spot trouble before it began, and they carefully recorded and relayed movement of the groups and counted the crowds. As they took stock of the crowd present, which they estimated to be about 1,000 people, they were keeping an eye out for any elements which might disrupt the order they sought to maintain. This might be a radical faction or organization, a known troublemaker, or a group that might challenge the social order. In this instance, they focused on individuals who they labeled “Nord Africains,” or North Africans, of whom they counted 300.⁸⁰ During this period tensions in France’s North African colonies were brewing – and the Algerian War for Independence would begin just six months later, in November – so their concerns are logical. However, this example makes their preoccupations explicit and demonstrates the work taking place during these ceremonies – waiting and watching for trouble.

The police were also conscious of other forms of commemoration, or subversive protest through commemoration. A bouquet at the foot of the Tree with an “inscription against the C.E.D., European Defense Community, and against the Bonn-Paris conventions” was found and removed by the police.⁸¹ Its removal shows the existence of censorship within a space of commemoration and

⁸⁰ Ibid, memo no. 2.

⁸¹ Ibid.

that there was a judgement, by the authorities no less, of what commemoration should look like. The fact that this was recorded also demonstrates that the documentation of such activity was important – possibly necessary for the Prefecture to have a full understanding of any rebellion to better plan for future years.

As representatives of the government's interest, these concerns can be used as evidence for broader concerns present in this era. The fact that there is both a censorship of even silent dissidence, in the case of the bouquet, as well as preparation for possible subversive activity by political dissidents shows that the ceremonies and commemoration were about much more than remembering World War II and in fact functioned as sites of tension, disputes and power struggles.



Fig. 4: Planting of the Tree of Liberation at Place Stalingrad in 1945
Source: LAPI/Roger-Viollet "Plantation d'un arbre de la libération. Stalingrad, novembre 1945," *Pariszigzag*, January 26, 2016. <https://www.pariszigzag.fr/histoire-insolite-paris/evolution-de-la-place-stalingrad-en-images>



Fig. 5: Tree of Liberation

Source: "Le Tilleul de la libération," *Une Fleur de Paris*, March 18, 2014.
<http://laparisienneetsphotos.eclublog.com/le-tilleul-de-la-liberation-place-de-la-bataille-de-stalingrad-paris-1-a107115862>



Fig. 6: Plaque 1 at the base of the Tree of Liberation

Source: "Le Tilleul de la libération," *Une Fleur de Paris*, March 18, 2014.
<http://laparisienneetsphotos.eclublog.com/le-tilleul-de-la-liberation-place-de-la-bataille-de-stalingrad-paris-1-a107115862>



Fig. 7: Plaque 2 at the base of the Tree of Liberation

Source: Ruth Sangree, "Liberation," 2018.

At 14h25 a torch at the foot of the Tree was lit and three men gave speeches. First, Monsieur Furdin, the president of a Résistance organization, whose remarks were curiously not recorded. Then, Monsieur Frederic-Dupot, President of the Paris Municipal Council, gave an account of the history of France, touching on the action of Kings Henri IV and Louis XIV, of Léon Gambetta, a prominent statesman during the late 19th century and the 37th Prime Minister of France, and Général de Gaulle. He concluded by affirming his admiration for the defenders of Dien Bien Phu⁸². Monsieur Mutter, the Ministre des Anciens Combattants, followed him and paid homage to the soldiers of WWI and WWII and to deported and killed Résistants. He alluded to the soldiers of Verdun and Fort de Vaux, Verdun was the longest lasting battle of WWI and had a particularly high number of casualties. Fort de Vaux was one of the major forts and known for the brutal fighting and heroism that occurred there, during the “Campagne 1914-1918” (1914-1918 campaign) and drew a parallel between their heroism and that of the soldiers of Dien Bien Phu. He finished by affirming that France will never die and crying, “Death rather than dishonor.”⁸³

It is important to note that both latter two speakers glorified the soldiers in Vietnam - a contemporary, and all too recent, conflict. Mutter’s rhetoric is particularly interesting, as he compared them to the heroics exhibited at the Battle of Verdun, and therefore harkened back to WWI, *not* WWII. This may be because

⁸² Ibid, memo no. 5.

⁸³ Ibid, memo no. 6.

the French memory of the latter is far more complex, especially considering there are few examples of military valor to compare it with and therefore the parallels with WWI were simpler and had more cultural weight.

Though the conflict in Vietnam and these contemporary politics had little to do with World War II, the role they played in these historical commemorations is significant. Above all this demonstrates that these ceremonies did not happen in a vacuum, but were influenced, heavily at times, by contemporary circumstances. Mutter's rhetoric demonstrates how common themes of bravery or resilience were drawn through different events and moments, thereby forging a national understanding of what sacrifice and honor in the nation's name meant. He took a moment explicitly about WWII and involved both a conflict pre-dating it and a present-day conflict.

The Place Stalingrad ceremony finished at 15h and the procession of Anciens Combattants, preceded by a band, left in the direction of the Hôtel de Ville. After its departure, about a thousand people processed in front of the Tree of Liberation while the Gardiens de la Paix band played a military march.⁸⁴ While on a smaller scale, this is similar to the end of ceremonies at the Arc de Triomphe. The public is generally allowed to process underneath it to visit the Unknown Soldier, giving ceremonies a more personal and individual element for those who were interested. Furthermore, the authorities are facilitating personal communing and reflection, a nearly religious aspect of ceremony.

⁸⁴ Ibid, memo no. 7.

The Ceremony of Torches is significant for its linking of discrete ceremonies and how it utilized the city of Paris as a space of commemoration. Not only did it link several locations together, but the procession between them acted as a ceremony itself. On the way to the Hôtel de Ville an estimated 1,000 people were gathered at the intersection of the Grands Boulevards, about halfway between Place Stalingrad and the destination, demonstrating that there was a spectacle inherent to this movement of soldiers, dignitaries and torches.⁸⁵

Combining multiple ceremonies (in this instance at Place Stalingrad, the Hôtel de Ville, and finally returning to Place de l'Etoile where it had begun the night before) shows the great lengths the French government went to commemorate the victory. They were willing to organize and execute a certain level of spectacle and pomp and circumstance which was either expected or thought necessary. It also highlights the many different types of ceremonies present during the weekend, even within the officially government organized ones.

The ceremony at the Hôtel de Ville intersected with a ceremony for the Ceremony of Urns. Preparation for the latter had started well before the arrival of the procession. On the afternoon the day before, 90 urns full of earth from different Nazi concentration camps arrived at the Hôtel de Ville from Buchenwald, another former camp. They were brought inside to the Salle des Prévôts by a Guard of Honor composed of former *déportés*, or deported

⁸⁵ Ibid, memo no. 9.

Frenchmen, and lined up on two tables. Four wreaths were laid in the room with them bearing the following inscriptions: “National Federation of Deportees, Internees, Resistants and Patriots,” “Federation of Deportees, Internees, Resistants and Patriots of the Seine,” “Association of Buchenwald,” and “Buchenwald 1954.”⁸⁶ The public could visit that day from 17h to 22h. During the first hour about 100 people came to pay their respects and at 19h30 a delegation from Aubigny came with a bouquet with the description “Amicale d’Aubigny,” or Association of Aubigny. When the Salle des Prevots closed at 22h, 420 people had visited.⁸⁷

That morning the public had been allowed to process before the urns, still in the Salle des Prévots, starting at 9h. During the first hour, 50 people came and at 10h the delegation of Seine-et-Oise arrived to take their urn back to Versailles for the local ceremonies there. At 11h30, 100 people had paid their respects and a 5 person delegation of former déportés to Auschwitz lay a bouquet reading “Amicale d’Auschwitz” (Association of Auschwitz) with a tricolor ribbon.⁸⁸ These visits show the individualization of memory and the ability for lay people, as well as organizations, to commune with the symbols of memory, thereby participating in the memory making themselves.

⁸⁶ Report: Exposition des urnes contenant de la terre de Buchenwald en la Salle des Prevots de L’Hôtel de Ville de Paris le 7 mai, 8 May, 1954, BA 2133, 1954, PP.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Report: Exposition des urnes contenant de la terre de Buchenwald en la Salle des Prevots de L’Hôtel de Ville de Paris, 8 May, 1954, BA 2133, 1954, PP.

The variety of organizations also shows how the experience of the war was both individualized and localized. There were many organizations one could join specific to one's experience. These proliferated after WWII due to the many different experiences. Between résistants, déportés, the few anciens combattants, and their families a host of groups was possible. This was only exacerbated by political tensions, which split résistance groups into different factions, leading to ever more groups. The numbers of people visiting, considering how long the room was open to the public and the size of the crowd at the ceremony, suggests that it was not widely done at least prior to the ceremonies. The bouquets and other offerings left parallel those at other points of gathering, such as the Arc de Triomphe or Place Stalingrad.

The usage of urns of earth is very interesting, particularly for its deep symbolism. The earth is evoking a place, in this case multiple places, and in a very real sense makes it present. Much like the Unknown Soldier, it brings the reality of a conflict – be in the battlefield or a concentration camp – to the people. However, despite the partnering with organizations associated with the deportation, there is not necessarily a real acknowledgement of the facts of this and particularly the complicity of French people in it. While deeply symbolic, the urns are also silent, thus allowing meaning to be projected upon them. Furthermore, they are far more passive and conciliatory. Though they may hint at the horrors suffered by French Jews and political deportees, they do not fully recognize this reality or come to terms with it.

Between 15h and 15h45, 90 delegations, about 300 people, arrived in small groups. New delegations, each made up of 20 people, were allowed access to a room to wait for the ceremony. 60 flags representing different organizations of Résistants, Déportés and Anciens Combattants formed a guard of honor from the front steps to the building's central door.⁸⁹ At 15h10 members of the Municipal Council office and General Council arrived at the Hôtel de Ville. They were followed, a little while later, by various local dignitaries including Municipal Counselors and a representative of the Prefect of the Prefecture of the Seine.

At 15h50, the procession from Place Stalingrad arrived. Made up of 11 torchbearers and 140 flagbearers with tricolor flags of different organizations of the departed on 3 trucks, they were preceded by the 93rd R.I.'s band. They took their places next to the 20 delegations from outside of Paris and 15 flags of organizations of Paris and the suburbs, including the Ancien Combattants de la Préfecture de Police, who had just arrived. The organizing group, Comité du Pèlerinage du Souvenir de Buchenwald, began the presentation of the urns, and the president of the Comité read the "solemn promise" given on April 11th, 1954 at Buchenwald.⁹⁰

In the presence of about 3,000 people, M. Frederic-Dupont, Deputy of the Seine, lit the torches just before 16h. Then, he and various dignitaries lit 11 new

⁸⁹ Report: Cérémonies de l'Hôtel de Ville de Paris, pg. 1, 8 May, 1954, BA 2133, 1954, PP.

⁹⁰ Ibid, pg. 2.

torches from those which had arrived from Place Stalingrad. At 16h15, after the playing of “Aux Morts” and “la Marseillaise” by the 93rd R.I.’s band, the convoy left Place de l’Hôtel de Ville, preceded by a squadron of Republican Guards on horses.⁹¹ Several minutes later, Monsieur Forcinal, the President of the Comité du Pèlerinage du Souvenir thanked the Municipal Council of Paris from the front steps for the “welcome which they had given for the urns” and re-read the “solemn promise” from April 11th, 1954 at Buchenwald.⁹² Monsieur Frederic-Dupont gave a short speech giving “an enthusiastic tribute” to the victims of the déportation.⁹³ Monsieur Forcinal presented 2 urns to Frederic Dupont for the Paris Municipal Council and to Dubar for the General Council of the Seine which were placed in the offices of the President of each Council.

Finally, M. Frederic-Dupont presented the urns to the representatives of French cities and regions, North African colonies and France d’outre-mer (France’s islands overseas). At 17h this distribution of the urns finished and the 15 remaining urns were taken by the Comité d’Organisation to their headquarters. The bouquets laid next to the urns were brought to the foot of the Monument aux Morts in the Hôtel de Ville. The roughly 5,000 attendees slowly dispersed, without incident. About 1,500 people visited the room where the urns had been displayed and at 18h, place de l’Hôtel de Ville was back to normal.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Anniversaire de la Victoire Cérémonie des Flambeaux memo no. 10, 8 May, 1954, BA 2133, 1954, PP.

⁹² Report: Cérémonies de l’Hôtel de Ville de Paris, pg. 2, 8 May, 1954, BA 2133, 1954, PP.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

While these ceremonies are specific to the celebration of World War II, we should seek to understand them more broadly as a microcosm of French commemorative practices. These examples demonstrate how the ceremonies were both highly formulaic and also culturally normalized. There were many different moving parts, from coordinating with different groups to planning the timing so that everyone arrived at the correct times – especially in the case of a several hours long procession such as the Ceremony of Torches. The organizers were obviously practiced and knew what was supposed to be present or what was a tradition.

There also appears to be the expectation that the honors and celebrations which take place at all the ceremonies are understood by those in attendance. No explanations or public proclamations are made about how to act or what to expect, and no major confusion occurs. While it may seem obvious that people knew about the expectations, we should challenge this to interrogate the depth of French cultural practice.

Throughout these ceremonies there is also the creation of a formal space, reserved for commemoration. This is evident through the carefully planned movement and separation between the crowd and officials. It is above all a presentation of symbols and nationalist rhetoric and memory, not an open space for gathering freely. The official ceremonies, especially those at the Arc de Triomphe, were organized in a similar manner though were, if anything, even more controlled and formulaic. Because they took place on the national stage, the

states were even higher and with a larger crowd the possibility of dissenting elements even greater. However, ceremonies also took place on the other end of the spectrum in far smaller versions through localities. They demonstrate the great diversity of commemoration throughout this weekend, even will staying within the same national context.

Small Ceremonies

The depth of the French commemorative tradition is further evident in the smaller, local ceremonies which maintain many of the elements of the national ceremonies. There is clearly a national understanding of how to remember, which plays out on different scales and is used by different groups. These ceremonies were held by local governments (in towns or Parisian arrondissements) or private groups of citizens, including different organizations. The police did not report on all the commemorations, or even keep track of them, so there is only sporadic evidence from their documentation. However, these small examples offer a perspective on how local commemorations took place and the multiplicity of events which marked this anniversary.

Several smaller official ceremonies also took place during the day on May 8th. That morning a General Ganeval, representing the French President, lay a bouquet of flowers on the Crypt at the fort of Mont-Valérien to the west of Paris. Just after this, a little after 10h, members of the Municipal Council of Paris and the General Council of the Seine lay flowers on the tomb of Free France military

hero Maréchal Leclerc at Les Invalides and then at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier under the Arc de Triomphe. This same group then left flowers at Mont-Valérien and observed a minute of silence.⁹⁵ These ceremonies also mimic those on the national scale, with dignitaries laying flowers and observing a minute of silence. However, their description suggests that they were either not open to the public or were meant for the government specifically. The locations, aside from the Unknown Soldier, while important for France's memory of WWII, but are significantly not part of the national public commemorations. In many ways this shows an almost private side of governmental commemorative practices.

Many arrondissements organized local commemorations, such as the 19th arrondissement, who held a small ceremony laying a wreath at the foot of the Tree of Liberation right before the Ceremony of Torches portion at Place Stalingrad.⁹⁶ Although this is an example of a national monument being used for a local celebration, most happened at local memorials. For example, the 18th arrondissement gathered at the Monument aux Morts inside their *mairie*, or arrondissement town hall.⁹⁷ This ceremony involved municipal veteran's associations and other groups who gathered just a few blocks away, on Boulevard Barbès about an hour beforehand. This meant there was a short procession leading to the ceremony which mimics the national ceremonies, albeit on a smaller scale.

⁹⁵ Report: Cérémonies Commémoratives de la Victoire du 8 mai 1945, pg 7, 6 May, 1954, BA 2133, 1954, PP.

⁹⁶ Anniversaire de la Victoire Cérémonie des Flambeaux, memo no. 1, 8 May, 1954, BA 2133, 1954, PP.

⁹⁷ Célébration du 9ème anniversaire de la Victoire, memo no. 23, 8 May, 1954, BA 2133, 1954, PP

At the Monument aux Morts about 200 people in total were present for the laying of four wreaths at the memorial. This one, like most, took place without major incident, but the police were nonetheless concerned about subversive activity which might be inspired by the occasion. Evidently, there was the possibility of rebellion at ceremonies of any size.

The police also were also aware of local commemorations taking place in suburbs of Paris. The wording of these reports suggests that officers were present at many of those organized by municipalities and then reported back on the events. However, details were only recorded about three municipalities, on this anniversary in any case, where rhetoric or activities deemed concerning by the police were present. This prioritization clearly demonstrates that the police were most preoccupied with subversive activity, rather than how the ceremonies took place or were organized.

In two of these three instances mayors spoke out on political issues. Monsieur Frerot, a member of the Communist Party and the Maire of Gentilly denounced “the war criminals who are preparing for a new conflict” demanded that “Dien-Bien-Phu be the last slaughter in Indochine, a conflict which needed to immediately end in peace/peacefully” as well as “unified action against the E.D.C.” during his speech in front of the local Monument aux Morts with 100 people in attendance.⁹⁸ During their speeches in front of the Saint-Ouen town hall,

⁹⁸ Report: Commémoration de la Victoire de 1945 dans diverses arrondissements de Paris et Communes du Département de la Seine, 8 May, 1954, BA 2133, 1954, PP.

Monsieur Alary, the deputy maire, and member of the Communist Party, and Monsieur Fabre, President of the local branch of the U.F.A.C., a national veterans union, critiqued the Bonn-Paris accords – and thereby the E.D.C. – and demanded an end to the war in Indochine.⁹⁹

In the third example, local Communists put up a banner reading “No weapons for Nazis” on the wall of the cemetery in Joinville-le-Pont before the planned ceremony, referencing fears around the future of Germany, particularly over its sovereignty and rearmament with the E.D.C. and Bonn-Paris Accords. In retaliation, the local Anciens Combattants refused to process “until firefighters took it down.”¹⁰⁰ The Communists persisted in their protest, and those who were required to process (likely local officials) went at the very end of the procession.

These ceremonies are all further evidence for the usage of a gathering about WWII to further political concerns and ideologies. They also demonstrate that the police were aware of the potential for subversive activity in commemorations of all sizes and their attention to these small ceremonies – in addition to the larger, national ones – shows they were cause for concern, no matter how small. However, during these ceremonies any dissidence is generally quiet, at most rhetoric in a speech or on a poster or bouquet. There is little to no active protestation or disruption of the events – though the police were ready for it.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Fête de Jeanne d'Arc and de Gaulle's visit

The police's documentation, and particularly planning, of the weekend show an awareness that contemporary politics could play into commemorations, particularly through action taken by dissident groups. However, in this particular year the police were far more concerned about disruptions during or due to the events of the day after May 8th: the Fête de Jeanne d'Arc and Général de Gaulle's visit. The celebration of Joan of Arc (a secondary patron saint of France and major French historical figure) is an annual event in France, but de Gaulle's visit was far more out of the ordinary. He announced a visit to "commemorate in silence before the Unknown Soldier all the painful suffering and all the glory won for the independence of France."¹⁰¹ This visit is significant for both his insertion into the national stage, as he was far less of a public figure or politician at this time, and organization outside of the government.

At 9h45 on the morning of May 9, French President Coty lay a wreath at the foot of the Jeanne d'Arc statue at Place des Pyramides near the Louvre and various associations processed before it. His presence at this event shows its importance, particularly since he did not attend all ceremonies the day before. Although the police were fully mobilized that day (a fact which will be discussed below), there was no recording of how the ceremonies played out. *Le Figaro* described the ceremony as "enthusiastic" and the crowd present as

¹⁰¹ "L'hommage du général de Gaulle," *Le Monde*, May 7, 1954.

“contemplative,” but mentioned no disturbances during or afterwards.¹⁰²

However, in the weeks leading up to it there was serious anxiety about what might occur.

In a note on April 12, the Director General of the Municipal Police wrote to the Prefect of Police about general plans for the weekend’s ceremonies and prospective security concerns to be aware of.¹⁰³ This shows the depth and rigor of planning; they were thinking of the ramifications of events nearly a month in advance. But according to their correspondence, this was due to real concerns about the possible malintent of the participants or spectators. Among the participating groups, the Director General notes the presence of the French Scouts, l’Union des Femmes Françaises and les Amis de Aspects de la France. While he writes that “every year since the Libération extremist groups have tried to turn the tribute to Jeanne d’Arc into a political demonstration,” there was heightened concern about these two latter groups.¹⁰⁴ In recent years they had caused “small disruptions” during their processions, which the police had always “successfully and quickly brought to an end,” and they were determined that this would not happen again.¹⁰⁵ In order to prevent this, there was a full deployment of the police throughout the day to maintain order. Additionally, there was a “neutral zone” established around the statue in which only government invitees would be

¹⁰² “Les fetes de Jeanne d’Arc...”, *Le Figaro*, May 10, 1954.

¹⁰³ Report: Commémoration de la Victoire par le Général de Gaulle Place de l’Etoile, pg 1, 9 May, 1954, BA 2133, 1954, PP.

¹⁰⁴ Report: Cérémonies et manifestations des 8 et 9 mai 1954, pg. 2, 12 April, 1954, BA 2133, 1954, PP.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, pg 3.

allowed.¹⁰⁶ This was in hopes of preventing incidents by sympathizers of the organizations or the public present.

While de Gaulle's visit raised similar security concerns as the Fête de Jeanne d'Arc, it was out of the ordinary. The general political tension, particularly on foreign policy had been exacerbated by the defeat in Vietnam two days previous. A memo anticipating security concerns reads, "The atmosphere of the event is troubled, before it has even begun."¹⁰⁷ The police believed that the "pilgrimage to the Unknown Soldier" could be a moment of violence between rival factions – though they do not specify which – and "certain groups may use the pretext of the ceremony to translate their personal ideas into actions incompatible with public order."¹⁰⁸

What was deemed most likely was the massing of groups on the Champs-Élysées and at Place de l'Etoile to protest, and possibly even gaining access to the Arc de Triomphe's traffic circle. Usually during ceremonies, such as the one the day before on May 8th, the public would be allowed to process under the Arc. However, in this case, the Directeur Général of the Police recommended against it. In addition to this, security would be stationed around the area to maintain order and over the course of the day a complete mobilization of the police would be necessary, including for the Fête de Jeanne d'Arc.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Report: Commémoration de la Victoire par le Général de Gaulle Place de l'Etoile, pg 1, 9 May, 1954, BA 2133, 1954, PP.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Report: Cérémonies et manifestations des 8 et 9 mai 1954, pg. 5, 12 April, 1954, BA 2133, 1954, PP.

The preparations for de Gaulle's visit began in the early afternoon, with members of his former political party Rassemblement de Peuple Français, or R.P.F.'s security force assembling at Place de l'Étoile. After 15h, Colonel Ponachardier, in military uniform, took command of the Place and directed his men, through the "rather flexible instructions," to invite those "who have nothing to do under the Arc de Triomphe" to move along.¹¹⁰ Thus, before the ceremony had begun, control was already being established of the space and expectations set. At this time between 1,300 and 1,500 people were gathered on the around the Place. Eight flag-bearers of the Anciens Combattants associations and the M.L.N. former resistance group took their place under the Arc de Triomphe, and statesman and other invited personalities began to arrive.¹¹¹

The public began to arrive in large numbers, with a major jump up to roughly 6,000 people around the Place and a dense crowd heading up the Champs-Élysées with three-quarters of an hour remaining before his arrival. At the corner of avenue de Wagram and rue Brey, 3 R.P. F. militants were selling a brochure entitled "Who is General de Gaulle?" as well as a postcard with the quote "France lost a battle, but not the war."¹¹² Military personalities and important statesman were taking their places around the Arc, and a military band and the battalion of the Republican Guard, the ceremony's honor guard arrived to take their places under the Arc.

¹¹⁰ Commémoration de la Victoire par Général de Gaulle memo no. 4, 9 May, 1954, BA 2133, 1954, PP.

¹¹¹ Ibid, memo no. 6-7.

¹¹² Ibid, memo no. 6.

By the time Général de Gaulle arrived, the Place was full to bursting. 10,000 people were waiting on each side of the Champs-Élysées, an additional 12,000 around Place de l'Étoile and over 1,000 on the traffic circle under and around the Arc.¹¹³ Similar to other ceremonies, 26 flags of Anciens Combattants organizations were stationed on either side of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

As de Gaulle arrived, the military band struck up the French national anthem, *La Marseillaise*, and the crowd joined in. Cheers and applause resounded around the place, greeting him. These included “Vive de Gaulle” and “Power to de Gaulle,” as well as others critical of the current government such as “Take out the trash” (“Les ordures à la porte”) and “Pleven to the pawnshop,” (“Pleven au Mont de Piété”) – Pleven being the Minister of Defense and therefore blamed for the defeat in Vietnam.¹¹⁴ At the Arc, a large delegation, of more than ten people, greeted de Gaulle. These included leadership of veterans and resistance organizations as well as local and national leaders, including the President of the Municipal Council of Paris and the Police Prefect.

De Gaulle’s announcement of his visit had emphasized that he sought a silent and singular communion with the Unknown Soldier which he sought. After bending before the flag of the Republican Guard and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, he reviewed the honoring military group and then laid a cushion in the shape of the *Croix de Lorraine*, or Lorraine Cross, on the Tomb of the Unknown

¹¹³ Ibid, memo no. 8.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, memo no. 12.

Soldier.¹¹⁵ After observing a minute of silence, he too signed the Livre d'Or guestbook while the band performed the "Marche Lorraine."

Then de Gaulle then returned to his car and made the round of the place, warmly applauded, before finally turning down avenue de la Grande Armée out of sight of the crowd. After his departure cars and traffic were allowed back onto the road and the crowd began to disperse.



Fig. 8: de Gaulle's visit

Source: LAPI/Roger-Viollet, "general Charles De Gaulle (1890-1970), in the Triumphal arch. Paris, May 8, 1954." *Parisien Images*, 2017.
<http://www.parisenimages.fr/en/asset/fullTextSearch/page/1/search/may+8/filtered/1>

While de Gaulle's visit was not affiliated with the government in any way, it followed many of the practices from other ceremonies. The minute of silence before the Unknown Soldier, the offering, and recognizing the attending soldiers

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

all took place during other ceremonies at Place de l'Etoile this weekend and are clearly part of French commemorative culture. However, in some important ways his visit was untraditional. It took place outside of the official ceremonies and was essentially unorganized by any institution – though we should note that there were municipal security forces to maintain order. De Gaulle announced his visit and invited all organizations and individuals to join him but came alone. The number of people in attendance (far greater than any other ceremony of the weekend) and many, important dignitaries who met him speaks to his place as a political and cultural figure in France. Finally, that he laid a Croix de Lorraine on the Unknown Soldier's Tomb is significant. During other ceremonies a bouquet or wreath was generally used, but he chose a nationalist symbol directly linked to him and WWII's Free France exile government. In fact, his hometown, Colombey-les-Deux-Eglises, now has an enormous 141 foot (43 meters) high Croix de Lorraine serving as a memorial to him.

All the police's planning and anxiety, the waiting of the public had been for a fifteen-minute ceremony. However, this glimpse of de Gaulle was still enough time to excite the crowd, and while they dispersed, groups of citizens formed, apparently inspired by the spectacle they had witnessed and de Gaulle's presence. One group, numbering several thousand, marched towards Place de L'Etoile, singing "La Marseillaise" and shouting "Power to de Gaulle," while making "V"s for victory with their fingers.¹¹⁶ Around 50 demonstrators succeeded

¹¹⁶ Ibid, memo no. 14-15.

in reaching the off-limits traffic circle where they also sang “La Marseillaise.” Some voiced intentions to gather at the Elysée palace – the official resident of the French President, just a few blocks from the Champs-Élysées – but this call was not followed. Several security officers attempted to control the group and asked them to leave.¹¹⁷ In Figure 9, we see this crowd gathering at the base of the Arc – while off to the right a police officer rushes to confront them.



Fig. 9: Gaullists at the Arc de Triomphe

Source: Roger-Viollet, “Gaullist ceremony for the 9th anniversary of the Victory. Paris, Arc de Triomphe, 8 may 1954,” *Parisien Images*, 2017.
<http://www.parisenimages.fr/en/asset/fullTextSearch/page/1/search/may+8/filtered/1>

Two other groups left the Place de l’Etoile after the ceremony for other locations. About 3,000 R.P.F. sympathizers headed East towards Porte Maillot, but just fifteen minutes later had seemingly abandoned this goal and returned to

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 16.

Place de l'Etoile.¹¹⁸ There, and on the avenue Champs Elysée, according to the Police's report, the public was still numerous and had stopped departing, seemingly waiting for new events.¹¹⁹

The other group, numbering about a thousand, had headed towards the Free France *Monument aux Morts* at the Modern Art Museum nearby on the Seine, but on the way apparently changed their minds and headed back towards the Arc. Near the Champs-Elysées, on avenue George V, they collided with a police barrier and then turned in the opposite direction of the Arc de Triomphe towards Place de la Concorde.¹²⁰ Some members expressed interest in going to the Elysée and others to the War Ministry. About half an hour since it had originally left Place de l'Etoile, the group had swelled to between 3,000 and 4,000 people and was now closer to a more formal procession, preceded by 5 flagbearers. But their enthusiasm did not last and within a few minutes their numbers dropped to no more than 1,500. After stopping for a moment in front of the offices of *Le Figaro* on the Champs-Elysées, it continued towards Place de la Concorde.¹²¹ The group was stopped by the police and a short brawl broke out, injuring several members of the group. Although one of their members suggested they disperse, they regrouped and headed towards the Place through the gardens on the north side of the Champs-Elysées, but their numbers dropped before reaching it and they seemed indecisive. After a short stop, they turned back

¹¹⁸ Ibid, memo no. 17.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid, memo no. 17-18.

¹²¹ Ibid, memo no. 18-19.

around towards the Arc de Triomphe and started, with a flagbearer in front, but were soon stopped by the police again and, on the order of one of the leaders, dispersed.

One final group formed, “spontaneously” according to the Police, again with a flagbearer before them.¹²² They were quickly stopped by security personnel, who intervened and confiscated the flag. While the group members briefly fought back, they were soon dispersed. Arrangements were made with the remaining stragglers, of about 30, that the flag would be returned the next morning. Among these people, the presence of Jacques Sidos, a known radical. He had been noted in the crowd earlier in the afternoon and the police had evidently been keeping tabs on him throughout this time.

At half past 17h, after hours of preparation, a fifteen-minute ceremony, and more than an hour of dissident groups moving around the First and Eighth arrondissements, all was calm at Place de l’Etoile.

Conclusion

It is difficult to succinctly characterize the commemorations which took place this weekend. There were a variety, and we do not have the information on them all. However, they demonstrate some key aspects of commemoration as a practice.

¹²² Ibid, memo no. 24.

Firstly, the scope was larger than WWII. Not only were references to WWI and the conflict in Vietnam made, and their veterans even involved, but other contemporary politics, like the European Defense Community were present. Although this is in part inherent and to be expected in commemoration, it also has to do with the nature of France's relationship with, and memory of World War II. At this time, it was still a challenge to characterize the conflict and thus by bringing in other, simpler or clearer narratives, cultural understanding was possible. For example, the comparison between the soldiers at Dien Bien Phu and at Verdun. This easily communicated something to the French public, which would have been missed if they stuck only to examples from WWII. This isn't to say it is inherently good, nor bad, but rather to point out the negotiation ever present in these events and in the practices of commemoration itself.

Secondly, the weekend is generally called "the celebration [or anniversary] of the Victory of May 8, 1945," which circumscribes a generally celebratory or joyful nature to the remembrance. While it may seem straightforward considering that France was on the winning side, this understanding should be challenged. World War I after all was also won by France, and yet the commemoration was marked by deep mourning. Throughout the ceremonies of the weekend, there are many funerary elements or aspects which challenge the characterization of it as a complete celebration. For example, the usage of the song "Aux Morts," or "To the dead," or the focus upon those lost in the conflict. The focus upon victory is not singular to WWII, for it is also

Commented [CL3]: say more and explain the different threads that went into this.

Commented [CL4]: This could be a separate paragraph.

present in the description of the first world war. However, in any case this demonstrates a literal negotiation of the remembering and celebration of the conflict. What light was it to be cast in and who got to decide?

This brings us to our third and final point: that there were a variety of commemorations by different groups and with different aims and tactics. The anniversary of WWII was celebrated in many ways. Private gatherings, whether by organizations or local communities were organized, but also many municipal ones either by towns or arrondissements. People came together in a variety of ways during these days of remembering, bearing witness to and participating in the crafting of a narrative and negotiation of memory.

Commented [CL5]: And different tactics. Summarize what you mean here.

Chapter 3: Theorizing Commemoration

The 1954 weekend of ceremonies and general history of commemoration demonstrate how complicated and dynamic commemoration is as a practice. Furthermore, we see how it has been used by different groups, including the government, to consolidate power or consensus and bring the nation together. This chapter seeks to understand how scholars have theoretically understood commemoration, including its practices and effects. Specifically, how does memory function in society? How has memory been conceptualized and does the case study of the May 8, 1954 ceremony support or challenge their conclusions?

Commemorations use narratives to build a collective, often national, understanding of history. Therefore, understanding how memory can be communicated and transmuted in society and how this takes place spatially is important. Thus, this chapter discusses the field of memory studies, collective memory and ritual, and finally interrogates how cities such as Paris can serve as site(s) of memory.

Memory Studies

By its very nature, commemoration deals with memory. As a mode of remembering, acts or practices of commemoration depend on and construct narratives which can be communicated through statues, ceremonies, and memorials. Interest in the study of society and memory crystalized in the 1980s

and 1990s, and by the turn of the 21st century it was a discipline unto itself.¹²³

Though grounded in sociological and literary theory, it has been interdisciplinary, involving anthropology, politics, history, psychology, geography and other fields. The central, most cited theory is collective memory, which locates society's memory within the relationship among individuals and therefore describes memory as a mutable, dynamic force which shifts and changes over time through social relations.

When this was theorized in the early 20th century, it broke with the traditional understanding of memory, rooted in history and a conception of group understanding as monolithic. The foremost scholar at the time was Maurice Halbwachs, a French sociologist who studied under Henri Bergson and was a protégé of Emile Durkheim. His theorizing of collective memory was laid out in the 1925 *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (*Social Frameworks of Memory*) and in the 1950 collection of his essays *La Mémoire Collective* (*Collective Memory*), which was published posthumously. Halbwachs situates himself within new, critical understandings of human consciousness as, according to him, the social nature of individual consciousnesses has not been studied until this moment.¹²⁴ Through the recognition of the influence of social circumstances and membership in a group, we can begin to understand memory in a new manner. Halbwachs's latter work was not widely available in English until 1992, a date which coincides

¹²³ Sarah Gensburger, "Halbwachs studies in collective memories," 398.

¹²⁴ Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, eds. *The Collective Memory Reader*, 148-149.

with the rise in memory studies, a field that also has ties to the then burgeoning field of Holocaust and trauma studies. While Halbwachs's approach has been used as evidence for the centrality of social relations in the field, other circumstances, notably geopolitics, played an important role.

Charles Maier proposes that the upheavals during the fall of Communism which rejected traditional democracy and nation-states in addition to communism, led to a reliance on ethnicity and kinship.¹²⁵ Edward Said suggested that people relied on this era's new understanding of memory (be it "social memory," "collective memory," or "popular memory") to "give themselves a coherent identity, a national narrative, a place in the world" due to many factors, most of all "the decreasing efficacy of religious, familial, and dynastic bonds."¹²⁶ These perspectives both suggest that memory and history have been used as a stabilizing force in states, nations, and the world at large. This is further evidence for commemoration serving both emotional and political roles in society.

John Gillis's study of commemoration concludes with a third, post-national period which happens in tandem with this "new self-consciousness about identity and memory."¹²⁷ Since the 1970s, but particularly from the mid '80s, monuments have been conceived of in new and more avant-garde ways. These new memorials – he uses James Young's term "counter monuments"¹²⁸ – challenged formal, traditional practices of commemoration, sometimes integrating

¹²⁵ Ibid, 444.

¹²⁶ Hoelscher and Alderman, "Memory and place," 348-349.

¹²⁷ Gillis, "Memory and Identity," 16.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

it into daily life or representing monuments differently. This demonstrates that the decades preceding the turn of the 21st century were marked by changing relationships with memory in both academic and the public at large.

Ceremony and Collective Memory

While May 8, 1954 case study is on commemoration, it plays out through ceremonies. They exist as unique phenomena unto themselves and merit their own study into how they are constructed and what effects this has. They are one method for forging collective memory and therefore we must understand the power exercised when a space for commemoration is created and how it is experienced by people.

Emile Durkheim was an early French sociologist from the turn of the 20th century whose work on ritual and ceremony, from his 1912 work *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, or *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, are foundational to this study. Though he primarily studied aboriginal groups, his conclusions were meant to be universal and suggest that religion and ritual transcend culture or civilization and that there is something deeply fundamental in human nature which puts faith in such practices that are affected by collective belief. Durkheim describes rites as acts which maintain a group's system of beliefs, writing,

[T]here is something eternal in religion which is destined to survive all the particular symbols in which religious thought has successively enveloped itself. There can be no society which does not feel the need to upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals

the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which make its unity and its personality.¹²⁹

This definition is relatively plastic and therefore useful to conceive of modern religion, national festivals, pagan practices, and civil religion all at once. It suggests that there is a deep, intrinsic power in them which can overcome differences in culture, era, or other circumstances.

Because commemoration relies directly upon the memory and power of history, Durkheim's understanding of it and how it works through and alongside rites is important to understand. He purports that "it is life itself, and not a dead past which can produce a living cult."¹³⁰ This does not dismiss/discredit the usage of history for political means, such as in the construction of nation-states, but his characterization suggests that it is specifically a sort of resurrection of the past. Essentially, while the past can be used we must recognize that it is not the exact same past, but an approximation or attempt at recreating it. The past is given new life only through its recreation – in this case, commemorating through practices which have a deep cultural history in France.

This concept is expanded upon in his description of the usage of rite, which offers a unique interpretation of ceremony: "keeping alive [the] memory...by means of celebrations which regularly reproduce their fruits."¹³¹ In the context of commemorative practices, this suggests that it is not a

¹²⁹ Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, eds. *The Collective Memory Reader*, 137.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

commemoration of the events themselves, such as World War I, but of the original remembering (i.e. November 11, 1918 or 1919). In other words, the ceremonies are more of a recreation of the original ceremony than an active remembering of the events. They are a practice in regaining the power and societal effects of the first commemoration. Understanding them as such exposes the motivation behind them to reclaim the meaning or spirit found in the first.

Durkheim's theories on history and ritual establish a distance between the moment of commemoration and the moment being commemorated. This complicates the meaning of a ceremony which is explicitly about bringing people closer to a past event, but also enriches how annual commemorations, such as the 1954 case study, are understood. It emphasizes the materiality of the practice and most of all the planning of commemoration. That they generally follow the same formulas and patterns is easy to take for granted, but we should not overlook that this was made up of conscious choices by those planning them.

While Durkheim does not explicitly describe it as such, it strikes me that he is describing the continued and continuous usage of a language of commemoration. As explained in the first chapter, secular, democratic commemoration arose in France during the Revolution, but it drew from Catholic doctrine and rituals. This language changed throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries but also grew from these understanding. Thus, WWI was influenced by the Franco-Prussian war which was influenced by the Napoleonic wars. And WWII took from the precedent of WWI, though adapted it to fit its own needs.

Although the initial commemorations of WWI were undoubtedly not triumphant, there was a central narrative present. This tension in narrative is central to WWII and may have changed the very nature and experience of its ceremonies and rites. It may have been more of a search for meaning in general, rather than recreation of the original meaning. In any case, Durkheim encourages us to think in a different manner about the tradition of annual ceremonies and what commemoration as a practice truly means.

I see Durkheim's influence on Halbwachs, his protégé, in the latter's discussion of generations and the passing down of memory. Halbwachs clearly differentiates between history and collective memory, citing that, in essence, their scopes are very different. He describes history as "a record of changes"¹³² and as artificially constructed, moving from period to period, from great event to great event. Memory, on the other hand, is far more dependent upon the individuals, and their groups, and includes more banal, everyday activities. There is much which exists within collective memories that is left out of history.

Collective memory, as Halbwachs explains it, is highly fluid. Because it is dependent on people, it changes over time as they die and are born and thus meanings shift from generation to generation. In our case study, it is significant that most of the people planning and attending the ceremonies lived through these events. There are still close ties and many personal feelings or experiences tied up in the memory of WWII. On the other hand, during the same weekend of

¹³² Ibid, 147.

commemorations today, there is nearly no one left who remembers the events. This undoubtedly marks a change in collective memory though it has occurred gradually and over time as new generations were born and the older came to pass. However, this also calls into question to what extent commemorations are a literal remembering. Durkheim's theory of ritual has suggested that they are in fact a remembering or recreation of a moment of memory, a moment of meaning. This might allow young generations, even those without personal, first-hand knowledge of the events to fully participate and be affected by the commemorations. Whether or not this is possible, the makeup of the society creating or affecting collective memory certainly plays a role in the remembering. Quite simply speaking, those who lived through the events will have a different perspective than those who did not. But this does not necessarily make it any less an example of collective memory.

Halbwachs's argument for the fluidity and dynamism of collective memory suggests that nations must work continuously to reproduce the national project. While he does not theorize very much about the very moment of collective memory making, commemoration, and ceremony in general seems to be one clear method for this reproduction. During the 1954 weekend there are clear efforts by the government to create a spectacle with a certain character for the public. Because these commemorations are highly collective, it really is the nation, as experienced collectively by those present at least. By recognizing the

dynamism of national memory, we understand better why the authorities were so concerned about the planning and carrying out of these ceremonies in 1954.

The concept of a social construction of memory/memory making through the collective is evident within ceremonies. They are literally made up of individuals experiencing the events as a collective, even if has different effects based upon their individuality. Even smaller, private ceremonies are by their very nature collective and therefore a moment for possible collective memory making. Durkheim's study of rites demonstrates that they, including ceremonies, have a tangible effect upon people. That communing and experiencing something together has effects upon a group. The symbols presented, and the rhetoric evoked have their effects, but so does the literal space. We cannot conceive of collective memory or ritual without understanding the spatial context, because they all take place somewhere whether it is a place of cultural significance or an ordinary street corner. Both locations can be transformed into sacred spaces during the moment of communing, but their cultural importance and history play a role in this. These ceremonies also have a particularly important context since they happen in the capital of France, and therefore have deeper national and official, as well as social and cultural meaning imbued upon them. Essentially, they are put on by the government, but also influenced by the significance and history of the space in which they take place.

City as a site of memory

Commemoration and memory-making happen somewhere, and this spatial context is an underappreciated aspect of its study. Time and space come together within the city as it acts as a site of commemoration and therefore memory. That cities can have significance politically and culturally is not a new idea but understanding them as more active participants in this process is a new re-imagining of its possible roles.

The symbols within the city of Paris and present in these ceremonies are not universally remarkable or particularly striking. Michael Billig's theory of banal nationalism argues that national symbols are subtly threaded through the everyday life of citizenry and this is one way the power of the nation is reinforced. However, the ceremonies of 1954 also involve Paris as a symbol, and therefore we need to understand banal nationalism in a specific context. Joep Leerssen's study of the city in constructing the nation describes cities as "trans-territorial hub[s]."¹³³ The consolidation of people, wealth, administration and, most generally, power, gives it a weight and influence which plays out in culture and politics. He writes that, "Many of the cultural traditions we now frame as simply and unquestionably 'national' turn on closer inspection out to have urban origins...Nation-building in nineteenth-century Western Europe is in many cases the conglomeration of city cultures into a new, national frame."¹³⁴ Furthermore,

¹³³ Joep Leerssen, "The nation and the city," 4.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

his term “national assimilation” attempts to communicate how the culture of the city can become the culture of the “nation.” Paris is a striking example as the consistently largest and most important city in France. It was established as a singular seat of cultural and political power, even while other cities held specific importance, such as Reims as the seat of French monarchy for over a millennium.

Banal nationalism requires a set of national symbols, tied to a character which has been determined by the city, according to Leerssen. Billig describes their usage as “[covering] the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced...Daily, the nation is indicated, or ‘flagged,’ in the lives of its citizenry. Nationalism, far from being an intermittent mood in established nations, is the endemic condition.”¹³⁵ This conception of nationalism is particularly apt in the study of commemoration as it suggests that the practice of constructing a nation is continuous and commemoration is but one practice for these ends. This is in line with Halbwachs description of collective memory and his understanding of the nation as a mutable space.

Paris has been the undisputed center of France for centuries, but Leerssen’s study grants it the title of originator of national practices and norms which make up the nation. Which is constantly being reinforced and recreated through national symbols. Therefore, according to Billig and Leerssen’s theories, the 1954 ceremonies exist at a nexus point, taking place in and around the seat of French power and legitimacy, at culturally and historically significant locations,

¹³⁵ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 6.

and at an explicit moment of national memory construction with the invocation of national symbols.

These sites where national memory and indeed nationhood take place deserve more study, and Pierre Nora is a key scholar for understanding this conceptualization. His theory of *lieux de mémoire*, or sites of memory, were put forth in his enormous project: *Les lieux de mémoire* from the mid '80s to early '90s. In three volumes, *La République*, *La Nation* and *Les France*, (Republic, Nation, and Frances), he and other scholars explore French nationalism through a unique study of people, places, symbols and other “things” which he argues make up the mythology of the French nation. Nora’s unpacking of symbols has parallels with Clifford Geertz’s anthropological study of the “webs of significance” of different elements of a culture. Essentially, Nora is disentangling these webs to draw out the key characteristics of “France.”

Nora’s novel understanding of the construction of a nation exists, according to him, between memory and history. Therein lies its originality as it creates a space in which Nora can study subjects outside of traditional history. France’s national anthem, the Marseillaise, for example, has undoubtedly been studied in terms of when it was written and how it has been used, but has not likely been conceived of as a site upon which the memory of France is acted.¹³⁶ Although Nora does not concern himself much with commemoration, his work is

¹³⁶ Michel Vovelle, “La Marseillaise,” in *Les lieux de mémoire, Vol I: La République*, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 85-136.

nonetheless important due to how he conceives of the meaning assigned to different “sites.” This reimagines national symbols to be more than the flag or a capitol, and critically looks at the construction of meaning and memory around them. Nora writes that “sites of memory are not that which is remembered, but where memory works; not tradition itself, but its laboratory.” (“les lieux de mémoire ne sont pas *ce* dont on se souvient, mais *là* où la mémoire travaille ; non la tradition elle-même, mais son laboratoire.”¹³⁷) This speaks to commemoration as a practice that is more than a simple remembering of a war or person and is part of broader national projects and meanings at play.

Hoelscher and Alderman summarize Nora’s distinctions between different types of places as being material sites, such as battlefields, cathedrals or cemeteries, and non-material sites, the “celebrations, spectacles and rituals that provide an aura of the past.”¹³⁸ The ceremonies of the case study challenge this binary and seem to negotiate a complex location between the two. The practice of ceremonies creates non-material sites, while also linking together material sites around Paris. This suggests that greater nuance could be developed in Nora’s framework for understanding the linkages and complexities between sites.

The sites used during this weekend of commemoration are fascinating in and of themselves, as each has their own history and significance. None of them are literal battlefields, but many served in one way or another as sites of conflict

¹³⁷ Pierre Nora, *La République*, x.

¹³⁸ Hoelscher and Alderman, “Memory and place,” 349.

during WWII. The Arc de Triomphe suffered regular Nazi military parades, as well as de Gaulle's triumphant return. The Hôtel de Ville has preserved the bullet holes in its walls from the liberation of Paris. Place Stalingrad did not even exist until after the war. Nonetheless, these sites are central to the French commemoration of WWII. The Arc de Triomphe in particular has been a designated site for mourning and remembrance for nearly 200 years, and in this time has been co-opted by different groups and regimes. They suggest that within Nora's understanding of material sites there is room for a difference between the site of an event and a site designated for memory-making and remembrance.

The central characters of commemoration are space and time. Although they exist under different names – history, memory, place or site – they are both present in commemorative practices and boils down to these two and their relationship. Spacio-temporal theory is a more abstract method for understanding how they come together. Mike Crang and Penny Travlou, in their article, "The City and Topologies of Memory," promote an understanding of "time-space as both fragmented and dynamic; a sense of the historical sites as creating instability and displacement in collective memory."¹³⁹ This contrasts with more traditional readings of place as a static thing for history or memory to be acted upon. Geography is interpreted by them as being a productive and dynamic actor rather than merely an "inert background."¹⁴⁰ This greater concern for space, rather than a

¹³⁹ Mike Crang and Penny Travlou, "The city and topologies of memory," 161.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

time-focused approach is influenced by the postmodernist abandonment of chronological history as well as Halbwach's understanding of the ability of sites of memory to either unite or divide groups and how or where the "spatiality of memory links the social and the personal."¹⁴¹

Athens is an interesting example because of its intersections with Paris. Though Paris does not have as ancient a history as Athens, there are still hundreds of years of history present. There are still memories from different periods within it and therefore layers of time exist in the same space in both cities. The relationship between time and space has been interpreted in different ways by scholars. At the center of this debate is the autonomy of each as a force, or their ability to shape the other. Bergson's "theories of dynamic and active time over inert space," particularly contrast with Proust's "fecund spaces and emplaced memories."¹⁴² By comparing different conceptions of time and space's rapport, Crang and Travlou challenge their pitting against the other. Instead, rather than be diametrically opposed, they argue that time and space can and should be considered in a more interdependent manner. Rather than a purely temporal understanding of cities, their origins and a continuous, linear history, they argue for a spatial one which involves crossing and folding of time within the city.¹⁴³

These theories all deal with the literal inscribing of memory and time upon the space of the city, and thus have deep relevance for the study of Paris as an

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 161.

¹⁴² Ibid, 162.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

actor in the creation of memory itself. Crang and Travlou, and Nora both reveal the different significance of sites. The former shows how different sites can allow multiple periods to be present at once, while the latter demonstrates that cultural significance is present in sites, both physical and abstract. According to Crang and Travlou it is through the dynamic rapport of space and time that memory can be so strongly utilized: "this mapping of historical events can also be seen in the naming of streets or monuments creating places of social memory...in forming the sites of contest or dialogue, they sustain a social memory that articulates civic and personal identities."¹⁴⁴ These concrete examples are very present in Paris and are important aspects of the evocation of memory and history throughout the city. The urban fabric itself can act as a text, if "inscribed with located and spatialised elements; the epigraphy of memorialising space parallels writing to landscape."¹⁴⁵ This is one aspect of the ability to travel through time while in fact traversing a city. The past is far more tangible than we recognize and, according to them, may be just as available as the present.

The locations of ceremonies during the 1954 commemorations are literally sites of memory as society's memory is concentrated around them, and they are a part of the mythology of the French nation. The Arc de Triomphe for example has been used by many different regimes, from monarchists to republics, as a powerful symbol, even up to this day. The naming of the Champs-Élysées after

¹⁴⁴ Crang and Travlou, "The city and topologies of memory," 165.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

the mythical Elysian fields further sets up it up as a space for military remembrance, celebration and mourning. There has been a literal layering of memory over time as commemorative plaques and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier were laid underneath it and Place de l'Etoile renamed for de Gaulle in 1970. Crang and Travlou suggest that discrete moments in time - Victor Hugo's funeral, the Nazi processions from the Arc and later de Gaulle's victory march – are present through this space, even if they occurred in temporally different periods. Though they do not illuminate the mechanics of this; the commemorations of WWII could easily recall either memories or understandings of past events at this location for the participants and spectators of the ceremonies. In a more literal sense, the plaques underneath the Arc remind the French of the lineage of major events in their history. This creates a central national narrative and designates what type of events are appropriate to be mourned or celebrated in this space. The addition of the Unknown Soldier in 1920 only served to further mark the space as the national space for mourning and for the military.

Although Crang and Travlou are critical of Halbwachs' conception of space in collective memory, I believe that his recognition of the ephemerality and shifting of memory is beneficial. However, it should be used in tandem with more geographically minded scholars. While Crang and Travlou do an admirable job of showing how space and time collide and overlap within a city, they, like Halbwachs, are less attuned to the material work of memory making. How are the stories told and by whom? How is this enacted upon the city and how does it

change over time? The sites of Paris offer rich examples of how this can take place, particularly, in my study, the Arc de Triomphe.

This single weekend of WWII commemorations in 1954 demonstrates how memory is both constructed through these practices and how they interact within the city. This is enriched by theoretical understandings of how memory is forged by the collective, as Halbwachs discusses, as well as how Durkheim's study of ritual. These both reframe the conceptualization of these ceremonies and show that they truly are *practices* which draw from legacies of past commemorations and take place socially and spatially.

Conclusion

Nearly one year ago, the day after winning the French presidency, Emmanuel Macron assisted François Hollande, the departing president, with the 72nd anniversary of the armistice.¹⁴⁶ Much like 1954 it was not a major anniversary, stuck somewhere between the 70 and 75-year celebrations. It also took place 63 years, and countless changes in the French political and social landscape, after this case study. How much had changed and to what extent do French commemorative practice remain the same?

The French memory of World War II itself has come a long way. There is now a far greater acknowledgement of French participation in the Nazi occupation of France, including in the deportation of French Jews and political dissidents. Plaques from the beginning of this century appear outside schools which lost students during the Holocaust, or Shoah, all explicitly mentioning active French complicity. The Memorial to the Shoah and Memorial to the Martyrs of the Deportation are centrally located in Paris and striking monuments.

In many ways, Macron and Hollande's visit is nearly the same as those of the 1954 weekend. They visit the Unknown Soldier, observe a minute of silence, leave flowers, sign the guestbook. However, we cannot ignore the change in generations which has occurred. As Halbwachs theorized, memory shifts and changes with new members of the social collective and we are now in the midst of

¹⁴⁶ "Emmanuel Macron a assisté aux cérémonies du 8 Mai aux côtés de François Hollande," *Le Monde*, May 8, 2017.

the final generation who remembers these events. What will happen when they are gone? And how has the gradual change already affected commemoration?

Furthermore, the makeup of France has changed dramatically, as new generations of Frenchmen look less and less like those known by Rousseau or the French revolutionaries. Hollande possibly hints at this with his advice to Macron during the course of their visit: “It is necessary to find the French. Sometimes they can be divided, and they must be reunited. They must be protected. The first thing to do, is to think of the French.”¹⁴⁷ On the surface, this rhetoric seems to recognize the deep political, racial, and religious divisions which had been clear throughout the campaign process, however, it also speaks to nationalist formation of the nation.

That Hollande can speak of “the French” as a singular group at all is due to the civil religion which emerged around the Revolution and was expressed in festivals and commemorations. This new language drew from past forms but also created new symbols, which were reinforced and shored up through practices such as commemoration. Central to these practices was the spatial context in which they played out. The commemorations which Hollande and Macron had just participated in are an annual means for crossing divisions to reunite France, on the national scale, through a narrative of history. Indeed, it is through such ceremonies whether in 1954 or 2017 that the French nation is constantly reborn and reinforced.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

Time and time again commemoration proves to be a practice in mitigation. Of political factions, messy truths, and different narratives. Recognizing this does not invalidate it, but it does open new possibilities for understanding it and its effects. Commemoration, in all its varied forms is much like the writing of history, in that it necessitates simplifications and therefore often exclusions. When we recognize that it is both a conscious act and that decisions are often made by those in power, it can be questioned more effectively and the different aims behind it better understood.

I believe the questioning of commemoration possibly more relevant today than in any other period. As the memory of the major conflicts of the 20th century shifts to accommodate changing generations, France is also faced with new populations who are challenging the definition of being “French.” Will these conflicts be used to consolidate national understanding, or will they be downplayed and phased out, deemed exclusionary? Commemorative practices have been used by so many institutions, particularly the government, and whatever comes to pass, a critical understanding of commemoration will be necessary.

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