

“A MAN HAS DISAPPEARED”: GENDER, SOCIAL FRAMEWORKS, AND NARRATIVE
CONSTRUCTION IN THE AUDIN AFFAIR AND ITS MEMORIAL AFTERLIVES, 1957 –

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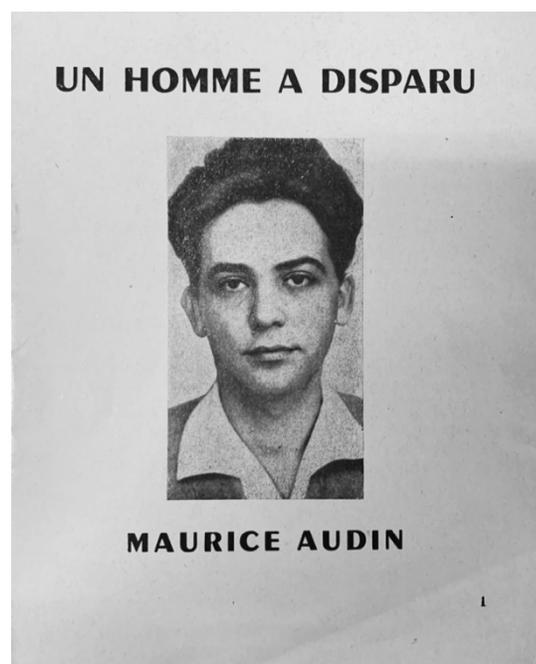
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INTRODUCTION

Josette Audin was 87 years old when she accomplished what she had fought almost her entire adult life to achieve. In September 2018, President Emmanuel Macron came to her diminutive home in the Parisian outskirts to present an official declaration in which he recognized that her husband, Maurice, had been tortured and killed by the French Army alongside countless other victims of a repressive French regime during the Algerian War. Josette, taciturn as ever, said little in response to a moment more than sixty years in the making.

Maurice Audin was arrested at his home by the French Army parachutists on the night of June 11th, 1957, during one of the deadliest periods of the Battle of Algiers. A 25-year-old Algerian of European origins, promising mathematician, member of the Algerian Communist Party (PCA), fervent anticolonialist, and father-of-three, Maurice was arrested by representatives of the French Army for suspected participation in guerilla warfare led by the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN). Upon his arrest, Josette was told that if Maurice was “reasonable, he would be back in an hour.”¹ She would never see him again. While Maurice had in fact died several days after his arrest, after being tortured in a French interrogation camp, the Army and entire State apparatus would claim for decades to



Un homme a disparu [A Man Has Disappeared], published by the Maurice Audin Committee in 1961 (Fonds Josette Audin)

¹ “Madame AUDIN déclare à Témoignage Chrétien: ‘J’ai le droit de savoir la vérité,’” *Témoignage Chrétien* (Paris, France), Aug. 30 1957, BNF Microfilm M-14797, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

come that Audin had evaded custody during a routine transfer. As a political tract about the story would later put it, “a man had disappeared.”²

Throughout these long years of official silence, however, Maurice acquired an immense symbolic significance in what became known as the Audin Affair. Through the combined efforts of Josette and French Left intellectuals, he became a symbol of French torture in Algeria. As amnesty laws promulgated after Algerian independence rendered official justice impossible, however, and new political causes caught the attention of the intellectual Left, the political affair receded into private memory. The memory of the original affair was subsequently reactivated in the French public memory at the turn of the twenty-first century as part of a broader mood of memorial reflection on the Algerian War. Macron’s long-awaited declaration and formal apology to Josette would mark the first ever *official* recognition of a “legally implemented system” of torture in Algeria.³

Historians have played an essential role in the Audin Affair. It was an historian, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, who first disproved the official Army claim that Maurice had escaped custody.⁴ Sixty years later, historians – including Benjamin Stora, Raphaëlle Branche, and Sylvie Thénault – played a crucial role in assisting Macron draft his declaration. The historian’s role has typically consisted of uncovering what really happened to Maurice Audin, however, and since Macron’s declaration and the subsequent opening of all archives relative to Maurice Audin’s disappearance

² Maurice Audin Committee, *Un homme a disparu : Maurice Audin* (Paris: Committee Audin Press, 1961). BNF (RES 16-LB61-259), Bibliothèque nationale de France.

³ “Déclaration du Président de la République sur la mort de Maurice Audin,” *Elysée*, Sep. 13 2018, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2018/09/13/declaration-du-president-de-la-republique-sur-la-mort-de-maurice-audin>

⁴ As Pierre Vidal-Naquet has himself recognized, he grew up with a deep awareness of the Dreyfus Affair passed on to him by his Jewish grandparents and parents until they were themselves deported during the Second World War. His involvement in the Audin Affair has therefore always had this important personal component.

the truth is now out.⁵ The historian can therefore enter into a new phase of her work, examining this story as a *memorial* phenomenon. So far, such a project has not been undertaken.

The memory of the Algerian War more broadly is well-trodden historical terrain. Since his seminal 1991 work on the subject, *La gangrène et l'oubli*, Benjamin Stora has argued that the Algerian War remains a “blank page” in the French collective memory and its “repression ... continues to gnaw away at the foundations of French society like a gangrene.”⁶ Stora situates his analysis within the more traditional, psychoanalytic paradigm of the history of memory that pathologizes society, reading its collective memory of traumatic events, or lack thereof, as a “syndrome” or illness.⁷ I situate my analysis, however, within more recent historiography that understands collective memory as the consequence of individual and collective interventions contingent on particular circumstances for their resonance.⁸ By approaching the Audin Affair with this understanding in mind, it becomes a far richer subject of historical study. To attribute the unique symbolic significance of the Audin Affair and its memory to an inevitable cycle of trauma, repression, and resurgence is to neglect the constitutive mechanisms responsible for this evolution.

This thesis focuses on how gender dynamics influenced the constitutive mechanisms of the Audin Affair and its memorial afterlives, paying particular attention to the role of Josette Audin. From her first efforts to mobilize French public opinion to Macron’s long-awaited declaration at her home, Josette’s role in the creation of the Audin Affair has never been denied. Little attention has been paid, however, to exactly how Josette functioned not just as an *author* of

⁵ “Arrêté du 9 septembre 2019 portant ouverture des archives relatives à la disparition de Maurice Audin,” *Legifrance*, Sep. 10 2019, <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/eli/arrete/2019/9/9/MICCC1923579A/jo/texte>.

⁶ Benjamin Stora, “Guerre d’Algérie : 1999-2003, les accélérations de la mémoire,” *Hommes et migrations*, no. 1244 (July - August 2003), 87.

⁷ This argument was most notably made by Henry Rousso in his 1987 book, *Le Syndrome de Vichy* (Paris: Seuil, 1987).

⁸ See, for example, Sylvie Thénault, “La guerre d’indépendance algérienne : Mémoires françaises,” *Historiens & Géographes*, no. 425 (February 2014).

the Audin Affair but also as its *protagonist* – that is to say as a character within its story. While histories of this period typically focus on what Josette did to create a political affair around her husband’s disappearance, Josette’s actual agency was often limited, whether as a young mother living in a war-ravaged country or later in life as she grew increasingly frail. And yet, Josette’s narrative importance has never wavered. From beginning to end, her portrayal as *veuve éplorée* – or, grieving widow – has been essential to the telling of Maurice’s story. The extent to which Josette mobilized this narrative trope as *subject* or was cast in this role as *object* will remain one of the central points of tension throughout this thesis.

In developing this analysis, I look to the intersection of sociology, memory studies, and gender studies. Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs famously argued that memory is an inherently collective act in that the individual can only “acquire ... recall, recognize and localize their memories”⁹ according to shared “social frameworks.”¹⁰ Social anthropologist, Paul Connerton, similarly recognized that “to remember ... is precisely not to recall events as isolated ... to become capable of forming meaningful narrative sequences”¹¹ according to “narrative archetypes.”¹² In other words, the recollection of past events relies on the ability to fit them into pre-existing narrative frameworks within the collective consciousness. Feminist scholars of memory, Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith, have since extended this analysis to argue that “what a culture remembers and what it chooses to forget are intricately bound up with issues of power and hegemony ... marked by gender, race, and class.”¹³

⁹ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, Translated by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 38.

¹⁰ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 38.

¹¹ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 26.

¹² Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 20.

¹³ Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith, “Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction.” *Signs* 28, no. 1 (2002): 6.

All three of these components are essential to understanding how and why Maurice Audin – a young, white university professor – became central to the French memory of the Algerian War, while thousands of Arab Algerian victims remain anonymous. Audin’s centrality to France’s remembrance of the Algerian War is not incidental but rather a consequence of his unique status – as part of a social milieu with privileged access to the press, to justice, and to the necessary legitimacy to create a political affair – and his ability to satisfy the most powerful (often-gendered) narrative frameworks within the French collective consciousness that Algerian victims could not. In this thesis, I will focus on how gender informed the construction of Maurice Audin’s memory to bring a new perspective to Josette’s role as well as to recognize the unique importance of gender for memories of trauma; throughout history and across cultures “women’s bodies” have often been “more likely than men’s to be assigned the cultural work of mourning and pain.”¹⁴ Nonetheless, the question of gender’s role in the construction of collective memory must be understood as it intersects with ethnicity and class. Ultimately, this thesis is a French story about France’s evolving memorial relationship with the Algerian War and the very absence of Algerian figures from this narrative is telling of the French-Algerian colonial and postcolonial landscape.

This thesis operates from the fundamental assumption that political narratives and collective memories take shape according to certain pre-established and culturally recognizable frameworks, narratives, and tropes that depend on gender, race, and class for their social familiarity. Drawing influence across disciplines, it will follow a broadly chronological structure to examine the importance of gendered narrative frameworks in the four key moments of the Audin Affair’s construction: political affair, private memory, public memory, and official

¹⁴ Hirsch and Smith, “Feminism and Cultural Memory,” 11.

memory. It engages in a larger conversation about how memory is shaped and politicized *by* women (as subjects) and *through* women (as objects) to more fully understand Josette Audin's role in this decisively important story in the evolving French memory of its colonial past.

I. THE BIRTH OF THE AUDIN AFFAIR

The Disappearance of Maurice Audin

It was in the same left-wing intellectual milieu which has come to define the Audin Affair that Josette and Maurice met. The two first crossed paths at the University of Algiers, as students of mathematics. According to family lore, Maurice joined the university PCA cell in 1951 to find a community that shared his anticolonial beliefs as well as to spend more time with the pretty mathematician who had caught his eye.¹⁵ After marrying in 1953, the two had three children together – Michèle, Louis, and Pierre – and pursued their respective mathematical careers in Algiers, Josette as a high school teacher and Maurice as an assistant professor at the Faculty of Science. As firm believers in an Algeria free from French rule, both Josette and Maurice remained affiliated with the PCA and its anticolonial activities after university. However, as tensions rapidly escalated between the French Army and Algerian nationalist fighters over the next two years, the PCA was formally banned in September 1955 for its known anticolonial sympathies. Within the party's new clandestine existence, Maurice led propaganda and recruitment efforts at the university. Occasionally, he and Josette engaged in more sensitive tasks;¹⁶ however, neither Maurice nor Josette were ever directly involved in the PCA's armed fight.

In January 1957, after the FLN had stepped up “terrorist” activity in Algiers, 8,000 soldiers from the French Army's 10th Parachute Division – known as parachutists – were deployed to Algiers under the command of General Massu. Having been granted “special powers” in Algeria by a March 1956 vote in the French National Assembly, Massu and the

¹⁵ Pierre Audin in conversation with the author, August 2019.

¹⁶ For example, in September 1956, the Audins assisted in the exfiltration of PCA leader, Larbi Bouhali.

parachutists effectively presided over a system of martial law in the region. On June 9th, 1957, just two days before Maurice's arrest, the FLN had bombed the Corniche Casino, killing eight people and wounding ninety-two. Although the predominantly European PCA members were not responsible for this or the vast majority of bombings in the region, they faced disproportionate scrutiny from the French Army. It was in this tense atmosphere that Maurice and Josette agreed to hide the Communist leader, Paul Caballero, in their family home. After Caballero became ill during his stay, they called a trusted PCA doctor – Georges Hadjadj – who was arrested shortly after leaving the Audin home. After three days of brutal torture, Hadjadj eventually gave up Maurice's name to his interrogators. Late on the evening of June 11th, Maurice was arrested while Josette and their children were restrained in the bedroom. At the moment of his arrest, Maurice was twenty-five and the young couple had been married for four years. Josette's commitment to finding out what happened to her husband would last until her own death, more than sixty years later.

Nom: AUDIN		
Prénom: MAURICE		
Surnom:		
Fils de: Louis		
et de: Alphonine - Port		
Né le: 14/6/1932		à Beja (Tunis)
Domicile: HLM 5 Bat. BI Champ de Manœuvre Pleyer		
Profession: Professeur.		
Arrêté le: 11 Juin		par: A. H. e. P.
Motif: membre du PCA accusé de Maison tenue par Hadjadj et autres MOI A E Evadé le 21.6.57.		

Maurice Audin's Official Arrest Record (Fonds Josette Audin, La Contemporaine)

Josette's Initial Actions

After Maurice's arrest, Josette was kept under house arrest by the French parachutists for more than four days, unable to make any phone calls. Upon her release, she leapt into action, "writing to the academic, military, police, judicial and government authorities" to find out where Maurice might be.¹⁷ Having received a series of contradictory statements from the French Army about her husband's whereabouts, Josette was eventually told, nearly four weeks later, that her husband had escaped custody. Conscious of other assassinations that had been concealed with a false story of evasion, Josette embarked on an ambitious and entrepreneurial campaign of legal procedures and public appeals to discover the truth. Having been in contact with Communist-affiliated lawyers since Maurice's arrest, Josette lodged a formal civil accusation of "homicide against X [persons unknown]" on the 4th of July.¹⁸ This marked the beginning of a long and frustrating series of judicial efforts. Unable to have her case heard in civil court under martial law, Josette found herself embroiled in an unsolvable legal contradiction: since Audin had technically been under Army custody until his supposed escape, any actions prior to his evasion fell under internal military jurisdiction, but any facts after that moment did not exist.¹⁹ After a cursory investigation, a military judge quickly dismissed Josette's complaint, declaring that Audin had indeed escaped custody and punishing the soldier responsible with a fifteen-day suspension.²⁰ Even after Josette's case was moved from Algeria to France in 1959, the impossibility of this juridical quagmire would prove insurmountable.

¹⁷ "Josette Audin," in *Elles et eux et l'Algérie*, ed. Michel Reynaud, (Paris: Tirésias, 2004), 43.

¹⁸ "Josette Audin," *Elles et eux et Algérie*, 46.

¹⁹ Vidal-Naquet, *L'Affaire Audin*, 25.

²⁰ Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *L'Affaire Audin*, 2nd edition (Paris: Minuit, 1989), 23.

Far more fruitful than Josette's legal action was her mobilization of public opinion in France. Shortly after learning of her husband's disappearance, Josette launched an immense letter-writing campaign to the French press and intellectual community. Before long, her call for help found a response. On July 4th,

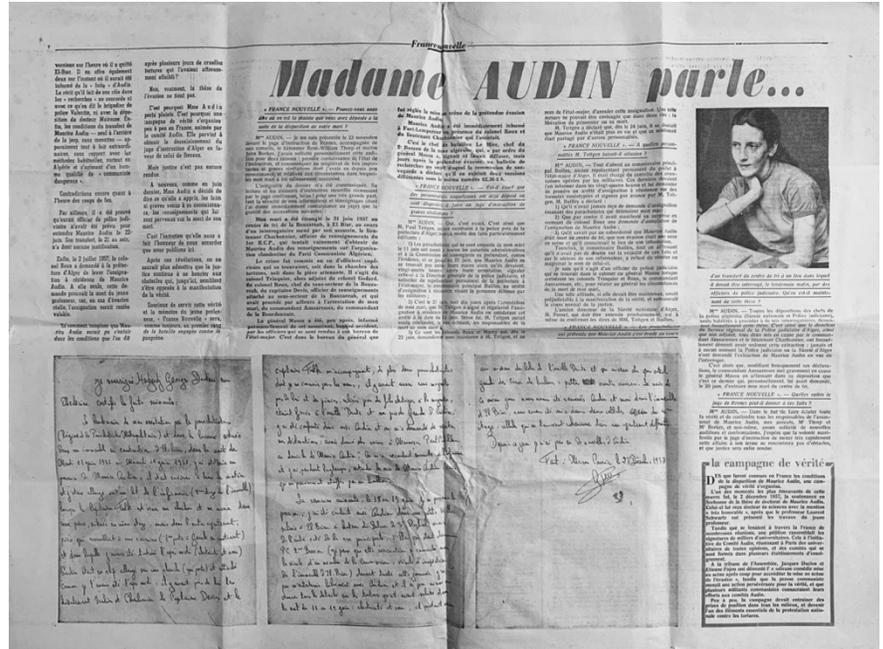
the Communist newspaper *L'Humanité* first made known Maurice's disappearance and, shortly after, an excerpt of

Josette's letter was published in *Le Monde* and left-leaning publications.²¹ As Josette was all too aware, however, her platform to galvanize significant public interest in Maurice's

disappearance was limited. As a mother to three young children, working as a high school teacher in Algiers to support her family, and under extreme censorship that made communication with the French metropole slow and incomplete, there was only so much that she could do.

From Audin Case to Audin Affair

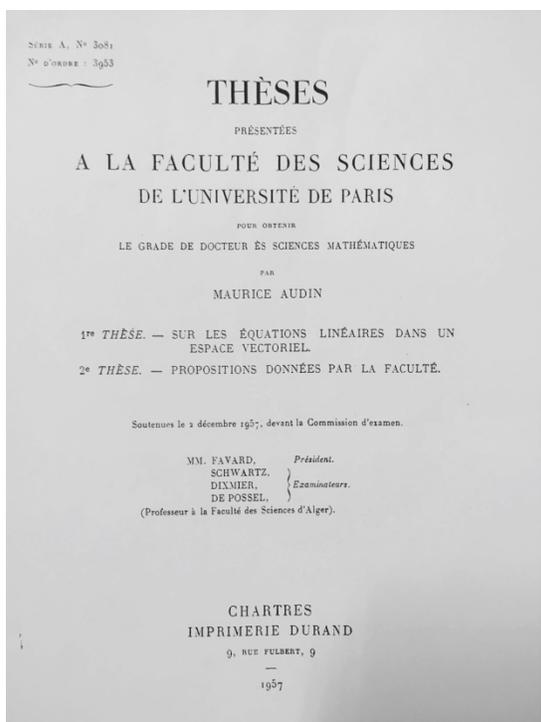
By late August, Maurice Audin's disappearance was being consistently referred to as the "Audin Affair" in the French press.²² Sociologist Elisabeth Claverie has defined an affair as a



A double-page spread from the France nouvelle special edition on the Audin Affair (1959), with the headline "Mrs. Audin speaks..." (Fonds Maurice Audin, La Contemporaine)

²¹ "Qu'est devenu M. Audin ?" *L'Humanité* (Paris, France), July 4 1957; "Une lettre de Mme M. Audin inquiète du sort de son mari," *Le Monde* (Paris, France), Aug. 13 1957. Both in BNF Microfilm M-14797, Bibliothèque nationale de France.
²² "L'affaire AUDIN Nouvelles protestations universitaires," *L'Humanité* (Paris, France), Aug. 23 1957. BNF Microfilm M-14797, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

political form of critique arising from the *extralegal* discourse surrounding a court case.²³ For a perceived injustice to gain the status of affair, “it requires the mediation of actors both sufficiently detached from the victims to appear disinterested and sufficiently skillful to bring about the reversal of the prevailing discourse towards a favorable opinion.”²⁴ The impartial mediator lends its authority to try the case, so to speak, in the tribunal of public opinion. In the process, the formerly accused is deemed to be innocent and the accuser to be guilty. According to this definition, Maurice’s story could never become an affair as long as Josette remained its sole champion. She required the mediation of a detached, disinterested authority to reverse public opinion – the Maurice Audin Committee.



Front Page of Maurice Audin’s Doctoral Thesis, awarded in absentia (Fonds Josette Audin, La Contemporaine)

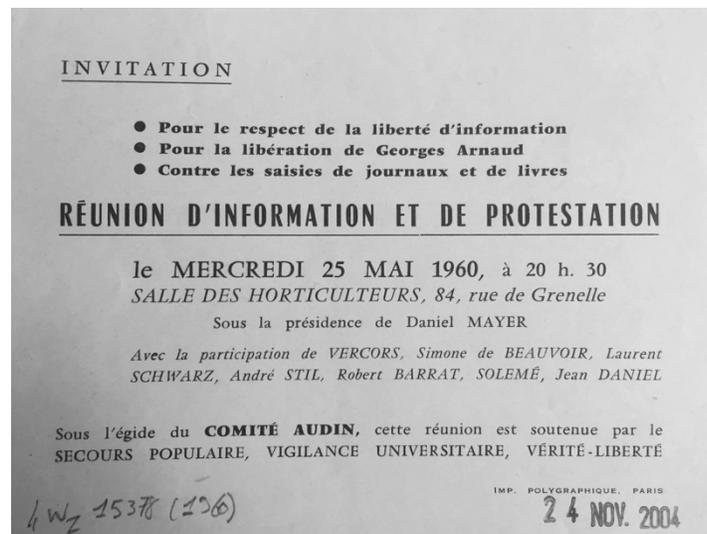
Some of the first to respond to Josette’s letters were Maurice’s French mathematician colleagues. One of these was Laurent Schwartz, a preeminent figure in French mathematics who had met with Maurice earlier that year and was due to judge his doctoral dissertation defense at the Sorbonne. Together with Maurice’s doctoral advisor in Algeria, René de Possel, and other leading figures in the mathematical community, Schwartz organized one of the landmark moments in the construction of a political narrative around Maurice’s disappearance. On December

²³ Elisabeth Claverie, “La naissance d’une forme politique : l’Affaire du Chevalier de la Barre,” *Critique et affaires de blasphème à l’époque des lumières*, ed. Philippe Roussin (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1998), 89.

²⁴ Nicolas Offenstadt and Stéphane Van Damme, “Introduction: Une longue histoire,” *Affaires, scandales et grandes causes: De Socrate à Pinochet*. (Paris: Stock, 2007). Kindle Edition.

2nd, 1957, in front of a crowd that far exceeded the capacity of one of the largest amphitheaters at the Sorbonne, a jury of French mathematicians performed Audin's thesis defense *in absentia*. Leading intellectuals, journalists, and politicians watched on as the President of the jury, Jean Favard, asked "Is Maurice Audin in this room?" ... to no response.²⁵ As Schwartz recognized, this event represented a veritable "detonator in the fight against torture:"²⁶ a wife's personal tragedy began to strike a resonance with the intellectual community at large.

Riding the momentum of the thesis defense, a formal Maurice Audin Committee was formed in the following weeks. Initially proposed in a letter to Josette by Jacques-Fernand Cahen, a specialist in American Literature, the Committee was officially founded in December 1957. Among its initial members were Cahen, Schwartz, and the young historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet, already in communication with Josette at the time. Despite Josette's initial interventions, it is this Audin Committee that is typically understood to have created the Audin Affair. As French historian François-René Julliard argues in his insightful and exhaustive dissertation on the topic, it was "under the impetus of the Audin Committee" that "this mathematician quickly became a symbol of the repression ... being practiced."²⁷ United in its efforts to "[discover] the truth about the Audin Affair and unconditionally



An invitation to a meeting and protest held by the Audin Committee in May 1960 (Fonds Josette Audin, La Contemporaine)

²⁵ François-René Julliard, *Le Comité Maurice Audin. Des intellectuels en lutte contre la torture pendant la guerre d'Algérie*, (Lyon: l'École Normale Supérieure de Lyon, 2014), 22.

²⁶ Julliard, *Le Comité Maurice Audin*, 23.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

[denounce] torture,”²⁸ the Committee mobilized French public opinion through regular meetings, protests, film screenings, legal proceedings, and, most importantly, the distribution of tracts. The Committee’s success relied almost entirely on “the mobilization of an important social capital: thanks to the network that it could build with the press, with publishers and in certain political circles, it could easily distribute the texts it produced.”²⁹

According to Claverie’s definition of an affair as “a replica of the judicial process,”³⁰ the Committee and its publications truly transformed Maurice’s story into an affair. This is most apparent in Vidal-Naquet’s *L’Affaire Audin*. Published in 1958, with a not-negligible initial printing of 12,000 copies, the book systematically disproved the Army’s claims through a methodology equal parts historical and legalistic.³¹ Situating his work explicitly in response to the inadequacies of the official justice system, Vidal-Naquet insisted that “From the moment when the investigating judge did not do his job, it was up to the historian to do it.”³² This parallel pseudo-legal discourse is also evident in the Committee’s 1961 tract, *Un homme a disparu*.³³ Written in response to the dismissal of a defamation case that would have allowed the key witnesses to Audin’s disappearance to be heard in court, the tract follows the structure and rhetoric of a traditional legal argument to prove the Army’s culpability for Maurice’s death. It first establishes the facts of Audin’s disappearance: “Maurice Audin, 25-years-old, married, father of three, was arrested in the evening of June 11th 1957 by General Massu’s parachutists...”³⁴ In a section titled “The Audin Committee accuses...,” the tract then outlines its

²⁸ Vidal-Naquet, *L’Affaire Audin*, 124.

²⁹ Julliard, *Le Comité Maurice Audin*, 35.

³⁰ Claverie, “La naissance d’une forme politique,” 92.

³¹ Julliard, *Le Comité Maurice Audin*, 63.

³² Vidal-Naquet, *L’Affaire Audin*, 43.

³³ Comité Maurice Audin, *Un homme a disparu*.

³⁴ Comité Maurice Audin, *Un homme a disparu*, 2.

six main accusations against the French Army.³⁵ Finally, it provides the statements of Dr. Hadjadj and Henri Alleg, the last people to see Audin alive, and Paul Teitgen, the former secretary general of the Algerian police who had testified about the Army's efforts to modify the date of Audin's house arrest in official records. As the tract asserts, by means of introduction: "In the lawsuit that we filed against *La Voix du Nord*, four witnesses were present. Here is what they would have said had the trial taken place."³⁶

If the defining characteristic of an affair is taken to be the intervention of a detached and authoritative mediator to create a parallel legal procedure in the public realm, the Audin Committee and the intellectuals who composed it were undeniably responsible for the creation of an Audin Affair. But an affair requires more than a detached and authoritative mediator for its success. As Claverie and Boltanski recognize, the affair's "grammatical schematic ... is as *affective* as it is politico-juridical in nature" (emphasis added).³⁷ When Julliard emphasizes the concrete politico-juridical mechanisms of the affair's construction, in which Josette was necessarily less involved, he ignores the affective story that the affair required for its creation. To fully understand the Audin Affair, the nature of the story being told, in which Josette played a central role, is as essential as the mechanisms of its telling.

Social Frameworks in the Audin Affair

In examining the story being told in the Audin Affair and explaining to what extent it relied upon an affective register for its resonance, Maurice Halbwachs' analysis is useful. In his seminal work, *On Collective Memory*, Halbwachs argues that memories can only be acquired

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁷ Luc Boltanski and Élisabeth Claverie, "Du monde social en tant que scène d'un procès," *Affaires, scandales et grandes causes*, ed. Nicolas Offenstadt and Stéphane Van Damme (Paris: Stock, 2007). Kindle Edition.

and localized, as reconstructed images of the past, through participation in a social structure. He writes, “there exists a collective memory and social frameworks for memory; it is to the degree that our individual thought places itself in these frameworks and participates in this memory that it is capable of the act of recollection.”³⁸ While Halbwachs’ analysis is situated in memory work, I argue that the same ideas can be extended to the interpretative reconstruction of the immediate past to create a political narrative, as in the case of an affair. If reconstructions of the past are only capable of being retained and recollected in so far as they fit within pre-existing “meaningful narrative sequences,”³⁹ the Audin Affair must be understood in light of the recognizable narrative sequences around which it took shape.

There were many such social frameworks at play in the Audin Affair. One sought to draw parallels between French torture in Algeria and the atrocities of Nazi Germany. This narrative, made all the more powerful by lingering national shame surrounding French collaboration under the Vichy regime, long predated the Audin Affair. In 1951, the journalist Claude Bourdet had published an article, “Is there a Gestapo in Algeria?” in which he denounced the use of torture and summary execution by the French Army.⁴⁰ The rhetoric surrounding Maurice’s disappearance tapped into this familiar narrative sequence. In an article entitled “Affair of Honor,” *Libération* Editor-in-Chief, Marcel Fourrier, declared: “It would be shameful for the methods of Nazism against which the entirety of France fought so hard during the tragic years ... to be able to return, even flourish under the guise of a cruel war.”⁴¹ Similarly, in its November/December 1960 bulletin, the Audin Committee described the actions of the DOP⁴²—

³⁸ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 38.

³⁹ Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 26.

⁴⁰ Claude Bourdet, “Y a-t-il une Gestapo algérienne?” *Observateur* (Paris, France) Dec. 6 1951.

⁴¹ Marcel Fourrier, “Affaire d’honneur,” *Libération* (Paris, France) Sep. 3 1957. BNF Microfilm M-14797, *Bibliothèque nationale de France*.

⁴² Les dispositifs opérationnels de protection

the military body responsible for “interrogation” in Algeria – as “functioning like a veritable Gestapo.”⁴³ But two more clearly gendered narrative frameworks were also at play: the “affair” as a distinctly masculine phenomenon and the familial idioms of the grieving mother, grieving widow, and orphan of the state.

a) The “Affair”

The affair has a uniquely rich and important legacy in France, stemming most notably from the Dreyfus Affair. Largely credited as a turning point in the relationship between French citizens and the State, the Dreyfus Affair involved a Jewish French Army captain falsely accused of handing over military secrets to Germany in 1894. Despite evidence of Dreyfus’ innocence, he remained imprisoned for years due in part to rampant anti-Semitism within the Army. This injustice provoked the intervention of several major French intellectuals, the most notable being Émile Zola, who published his famous *J’accuse* in 1898 that condemned the system of military justice. With Zola and others, the figure of the engaged Dreyfusard intellectual – fighting for truth and justice armed with the pen as his weapon – was born. Dreyfus was eventually acquitted in 1906; however, the affair left French society deeply divided for years to come. Since this moment, the word *affair* has invoked an extremely powerful social framework. Claverie and Boltanski recognize this potent “referential relationship” in their analysis; they write, “the drawing of parallels by individuals [between their own affair and those of the past] ... emerges ... as a political, moral, and social resource, latently inscribed in the public culture as a

⁴³ Maurice Audin Committee, *Comité Maurice Audin Novembre-Décembre 1960* (Paris: Audin Committee Press, 1960), 2. BNF (8-LC2-6991), Bibliothèque nationale de France.

mobilizable figure of the critical repertoire.”⁴⁴ The affair can thus be understood as one of the most potent Halbwachsian social frameworks in the French collective consciousness.

From the early days of its existence, the Audin Committee self-consciously positioned itself as heir to the legacy of the Dreyfus Affair. At the first press conference held by the Committee, the Hellenist Louis Gernet declared, “there is from this moment an Audin Affair like there was a Dreyfus Affair before.”⁴⁵ Similarly, in its 1958 memorandum *Nous accusons*, co-signed by other anticolonial organizations, the Committee members established themselves as the heirs to Zola, aligning their publication with his renowned 1898 letter.⁴⁶ Vidal-Naquet’s decision to name his book *L’Affaire Audin* is perhaps the most blatant invocation of this Dreyfusard vocabulary.

The French press, in turn, framed its coverage of the story in keeping with this referential discourse. One remarkable inaccuracy in early articles makes the potency of the “affair” narrative framework and its associative power abundantly clear. Recounting the same press conference where Gernet announced the new Dreyfus Affair, a *Libération* article erroneously referred to Josette as “Madame Lucie Audin.”⁴⁷ Similarly, an article in *L’Humanité* the following day recounted how “Lucie Audin was accompanied by one of her three children,”⁴⁸ while an article in *France Observateur* included a photo of Josette with the caption, “In the first row, Lucie Audin.”⁴⁹ Decades before Josette Audin, Lucie Dreyfus had fought to prove the innocence

⁴⁴ Boltanski and Claverie, “Du monde social en tant que scène d’un procès.”

⁴⁵ Julliard, *Le Comité Maurice Audin*, 53.

⁴⁶ Comité Maurice Audin, *Dossier sur la torture et la répression en Algérie. Nous accusons...*, (Paris: France, 1958). BNF (16-LK8-4044), Bibliothèque nationale de France.

⁴⁷ “Mme Audin : ‘Je suis persuadée que mon mari est mort des tortures qu’il a subies,’” *Libération* (Paris, France), Dec. 4 1957. BNF Microfilm M-14797, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

⁴⁸ “L’émouvante réception de Lucie Audin par le Comité Central de notre parti,” *L’Humanité* (Paris, France) Dec. 5 1957. BNF Microfilm M-14797, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

⁴⁹ “En l’absence d’Audin...” *France Observateur* (Paris, France), Dec. 5 1957. BNF Microfilm M-14797, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

of her own husband. The press's mistake is indicative of the incredible referential power of the Dreyfus affair and the associated figure of the grieving wife.

There were numerous similarities between the two affairs that might have prompted the press' misrecognition. Both dealt with a deep injustice, carried out by the French state, to be corrected by engaged intellectuals who, by the very nature of their profession, were understood to have a unique relationship with the truth. In reality, however, the differences are stark. The Dreyfus Affair was and continues to be one of the defining historical moments in French collective memory. The Audin Affair has never attained equal renown. Moreover, the Dreyfus Affair concerns the unjust treatment of one individual (albeit in a broader context of rampant anti-Semitism) whereas Maurice Audin was one victim among many of French torture in Algeria, and a non-representative victim at that. Nonetheless, these inconsistencies did little to diminish the discursive and narrative power of this association. As Julliard recognizes, "the reference to the Dreyfus affair presented an obvious media-friendly device ... awakening the [public] consciousness by invoking a momentous scandal, in the hopes of creating a similar echo."⁵⁰

The social framework of the affair cannot be separated from the Dreyfusard intellectual who instigates it. While Zola remains the archetype of this trope, he was one of many intellectuals who intervened in the Dreyfus Affair as self-ascribed, non-partisan arbiters of the truth. As historian Michael Winock describes, "if he [the Dreyfusard intellectual] entered in the political melee ... it was in the name of 'humanity,' 'justice,' in brief 'of an abstract principle that was superior and directly opposed to political passions.'"⁵¹ The Audin Committee consciously subscribed to this same model; as Julliard notes, "the Committee chose to focus

⁵⁰ Julliard, *Le Comité Maurice Audin*, 52.

⁵¹ Michel Winock, "Les intellectuels dans le siècle," *Vingtième Siècle : revue d'histoire* n°2, (April 1984), 4.

uniquely on the problem of torture, that is to say on a morally unassailable subject ... to the exclusion of political considerations.”⁵² This was true also of how individual members presented themselves. As is written in the preface to *L’Affaire Audin*: “Pierre Vidal-Naquet is a historian. If he is biased, it is only in favor of the truth.”⁵³ In content and in form, the Audin Committee actively invoked the potent framework of the Dreyfus Affair and its main characters.

It is striking that Winock describes how “*he* [the engaged intellectual] entered in the political melee” (emphasis added). Of course, to assume an unspecified subject as masculine can be mere literary convention but it is a telling choice nonetheless, since the Dreyfusard intellectual is undeniably masculine in implication. As a consequence of the profound gender hierarchy within academia at the turn of the twentieth century, all the original Dreyfusards – Georges Clemenceau, Émile Zola, and Léon Blum among others – were male.⁵⁴ This gendered hierarchy had diminished little by 1957. Julliard notes that while Madeline Rebérioux would eventually become Audin Committee Secretary, the original leadership was all male and women often undertook menial rather than public-facing jobs.⁵⁵ When listing the members of the Audin Committee in an interview with documentarian François Demerliac decades later, Josette’s lawyer, Pierre Braun, mentioned everyone except Rebérioux.⁵⁶ Interestingly, the Committee often portrayed its relationship with Josette as distinctly patriarchal. In one meeting bulletin, the Committee indicated a gift of 400 new francs to “Mme Audin” in its annual financial report followed by an excerpted letter from Josette, expressing the helplessness of her situation: “Thank you so much for your last letter and for the check for our unhappy children. I would like you to

⁵² Julliard, *Le Comité Maurice Audin*, 37.

⁵³ Vidal-Naquet, *L’Affaire Audin*, 57.

⁵⁴ Eric Cahm, *The Dreyfus Affair in French Society and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996), 54.

⁵⁵ François-René Julliard in conversation with the author, January 2020.

⁵⁶ Observation courtesy of Michèle Audin, in email communication May 2020.

know how much what you are doing is appreciated here and how much we are relying on your help in the difficult battles we are fighting ..."⁵⁷ The first Audin Committee president – renowned mathematician and politician, Albert Châtelet – described its purpose as “to defend the future of Mme Audin and her children.”⁵⁸ Symbolically and sometimes literally, the masculine entity of the Committee stepped in to fill the void of Maurice’s absence.

Outside of the Committee, gender continued to determine whose voices were heard in the construction of the Audin Affair. Committee members were by no means the only academics who empathized with Maurice and Josette’s plight. Josette’s personal archives refer to dynamic movements led by female high school teachers to initiate strikes surrounding Maurice Audin’s disappearance; however, these movements are not at all part of the dominant memory of the Audin Affair and were the subject of limited newspaper coverage at the time.⁵⁹ As an extension of a gender hierarchy within the academic profession itself, male university professors held the cultural capital and intellectual authority to construct a political narrative that female high school teachers did not. In a recent interview, Julliard posited that in the Audin Affair, as in the Dreyfus Affair, female intellectuals’ lack of authority was further exacerbated by the fact that the French Army, a traditionally masculine institution, was their interlocutor.⁶⁰ The affair as narrative framework had immense potential to mobilize French public opinion around Maurice’s disappearance, but it was a framework from which women were largely excluded.

⁵⁷ Maurice Audin Committee, *Comité Maurice Audin Bulletin de liaison Janvier-Février 1961* (Paris: Audin Committee Press, 1961), 10. BNF (8-LC2-6991), Bibliothèque nationale de France.

⁵⁸ “La femme de Maurice Audin déclare devant les journalistes : ‘Je suis persuadée que mon mari est mort à la suite des tortures qu’il a subies,’” *L’Humanité* (Paris, France), Dec. 4 1957. BNF Microfilm M-14797, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

⁵⁹ See, for example, “Inquiètes du sort de M. Audin : 62 professeurs du lycée ‘Hélène-Boucher’ écrivent au ministre de l’Education nationale,” *Libération* (Paris, France) Nov. 12 1957. BNF Microfilm M-14797, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

⁶⁰ François-René Julliard in conversation with the author, January 2020.

b) The Familial Idiom

Women, however, played the central role in a second narrative framework, which featured the familial idiom of the grieving mother/widow and orphan of the state. In *The Generation of Postmemory*, Marianne Hirsch argues for the immense facilitative power of such “familial structures” for affiliative memory. Acknowledging the prevalence of familial images in the media in the wake of traumatic incidents, she writes: “The idiom of family can become an accessible lingua franca easing identification and projection, recognition and misrecognition, across distance and difference.”⁶¹ Within Gender and Memory Studies, scholars have been especially interested in how protest movements have centered around such familial images. In “Traumatic Memes,” Diana Taylor traces the emergence of Mothers’ Movements, starting with the 1977 Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo movement that protested the disappearance of young men at the hands of the Argentinian military junta. These public sit-ins involved “a group of unarmed, middle-aged women wearing white scarves, and holding or wearing photographs of their disappeared children;” women who publicly “performed” their maternal grief.⁶² Taylor recalls how these initial protests, as well as the subsequent protests that modeled themselves after

⁶¹ Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 39.

⁶² Diana Taylor, “Traumatic Memes,” *Women Mobilizing Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 123.

them, stemmed from an impulse to “organize as mothers, sensing the symbolic power of situating the demand for justice within a *recognizable framework*” (emphasis added).⁶³ The culturally-established iconography and social framework of the grieving mother had enormous “affective as well as communicative” power.⁶⁴

While Josette fulfilled the role of grieving mother more indirectly, as she grieved for her own children who had lost their father, the more important familial idioms at play in the Audin Affair – the grieving widow and orphan of the state – can be understood in a similar way. As

historian Michael Rothberg argues in *Multidirectional Memory*, memory is an inherently multidirectional and mutually reinforcing process in which recollections of the past shape our comprehension of the present while events in the present reshape our memories of the past.⁶⁵ With the all



A photo of the Turkish Saturday Mothers, taken by Naila Bozo in 2013 (Courtesy of the Alliance for Kurdish Rights)

too recent memory of two World Wars, a lost generation of young men, and a home front torn apart, these narrative frameworks held an even more powerful affective association at the time of the Audin Affair.

⁶³ Taylor, “Traumatic Memes,” 127.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁶⁵ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (California: Stanford University Press, 2009). ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/columbia/detail.action?docID=805149>.

Of course, the extent to which Josette operated as subject or object in the deployment of the familial idiom in the Audin Affair remains a remarkably slippery distinction. From the outset, it was Josette's helplessness that formed the affective essence of the story she told. When first contacting the authorities and press, she used a photo of Maurice with their eldest child, Michèle, on his lap.⁶⁶ She very consciously ensured that her audience perceived and could sympathize with Maurice as a father rather than an anonymous face. When Josette wrote her letters she rarely referred to "Maurice" but rather to "my husband," emphasizing her personal loss and marital and familial relationship to him.⁶⁷ In these early interventions, Josette deployed normative gendered associations as *subject* in order to awake a public response, instigate solidarity among French intellectuals, and establish the Audin Affair's core emotional narrative.

We see evidence of this in the first letter she sent to French academics after Maurice's disappearance. It begins,

I am writing you this letter to inform you of what happened to my husband, Maurice Audin, assistant in the Faculty of Sciences at the University of Algiers and graduate with a degree in science (mathematics), who was supposed ... to defend his doctoral thesis at the Sorbonne and to become, at 25 years old, one of the youngest doctors of Science in France.⁶⁸

Josette is remarkably intentional in her efforts to establish the commonalities between Maurice and the recipients of her letter, in terms of their shared intellectual background. But she also solicits their sympathy by highlighting the familial dimensions of Maurice's disappearance. Josette goes on to recall, "they detained me at my house, alone with our three children (three years, 20 months, and one month old), absolutely forbidding me from communicating with the

⁶⁶ Pierre Audin in conversation with the author, August 2019.

⁶⁷ See, for example, "Une lettre de Mme M. Audin inquiète du sort de son mari," *Le Monde*, 13 Aug 1957. BNF Microfilm M-14797, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

⁶⁸ "Qu'est devenu Maurice Audin – assistant à la Faculté des Sciences d'Alger – disparu depuis le 21 juin,?" *L'Humanité*, (Paris, France), Aug. 13 1957. BNF Microfilm M-14797, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

outside world.”⁶⁹ By emphasizing the vulnerability of her situation and the youth of her children, Josette constructs a sympathetic narrative that integrates normative assumptions of female fragility and encourages cognitive associations with the grieving widow framework. She recognizes outright the limitations of her own platform with an ingenious combination of flattery and beseeching: “I ask you to use all of your authority to ensure that this tragic affair is brought to light as soon as possible.”⁷⁰

At the same time, Josette and her family were also cast as grieving widow and orphan of the state by others. When Josette’s ability to intervene as *author* in the Audin Affair was limited, she and her family remained just as integral to the narrative being told but as *objects* as opposed to *subjects*. An article in *Express* recounting Josette’s testimony to the *Commission for the Protection of Individual Rights and Freedoms in Algeria* in July 1957 described her as “a slight woman, 24 years old, with big pale eyes.”⁷¹ This description emphasizes Josette’s physical vulnerability, in-keeping with the familiar iconography of the vulnerable grieving widow. Similarly, in a *Libération* article written about Maurice’s dissertation defense *in absentia*, Josette is described as “a pale young woman” and elsewhere the writer recounts: “in the front row, pale, thin, delicate like a De Vinci, the wife of Maurice Audin has just sat down, so young, silent and dignified.”⁷² This plays even more explicitly into the traditional characteristics of the grieving widow: Josette is physically weak, even thin or malnourished, implying possible destitution without her husband to care for her. At the same time, she is tragically young and beautiful like the heroine of a renaissance painting.

⁶⁹ “Qu’est devenu Maurice Audin – assistant à la Faculté des Sciences d’Alger – disparu depuis le 21 juin,?” *L’Humanité*, Aug. 13 1957. BNF Microfilm M-14797, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ “La Nation,” *Express* (Paris, France) Aug. 30 1957. BNF Microfilm M-14797, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

⁷² “Au cours d’une émouvante cérémonie qui honore l’Université Maurice Audin...” *Libération* (Paris, France), Dec. 3 1957. BNF Microfilm M-14797, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

While Maurice's mother – Alphonsine – was less explicitly involved in efforts to create a public scandal around her son's disappearance, she was also subject to similar gendered narrativization. The same *Libération* article described Alphonsine wiping away her tears at the dissertation defense, conjecturing that

However learned her son might have been ... her son remained her little one ... whose childlike silhouette she was no doubt thinking about ... The school boy having his first success. The kid in short pants, and bare calves, the top student in his class ... The teenager who was already a scientist at heart. The joys of university success, the family pride. And what sad, painful pride, torn apart today, in this hour devoted to the dissertation defense to which he had dedicated so much of his youth.⁷³

Through this highly evocative description of Maurice as a young boy, Alphonsine is presented in a manner even more explicitly reminiscent of the later Mothers Movements. In each instance, grief is inscribed in the recognizable framework of the grieving mother to construct a powerful political narrative. Where Alphonsine differs from the Mothers Movements, however, is in their relative subjectivity/objectivity. In the Mothers Movements, women acted as subjects, intentionally and consciously mobilizing the affective toolkit of a culturally familiar trope. Alphonsine had this narrative framework imposed on her as an object.

The question remains, therefore, to what extent the political narrative of the Audin Affair was shaped around gendered narrative frameworks deployed *by* women as subjects or imposed *on* women as objects. To this question, there is no easy answer. The press, the Audin Committee, and members of the general public undeniably related to the Audin Affair through the affective power of viewing Josette, Alphonsine, and the Audin children according to normative familial tropes. In a speech made to the Council of French Ministers in August 1957, the Communist party representative, Jacques Duclos, exclaimed: “The public opinion ... and his [Maurice's]

⁷³ “Au cours d'une émouvante cérémonie qui honore l'Université Maurice Audin...” *Libération*, Dec. 3 1957. BNF Microfilm M-14797, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

wife, mother of three young children, must be informed of his fate.”⁷⁴ A 1959 article in

L'Humanité included a photograph of Maurice

with the infant Michèle on his lap,

accompanied by the pathos-filled caption:

“Maurice Audin with his daughter ... they

wanted to stay together, and play”.⁷⁵ At the

same time, however, Josette was just as

complicit in bolstering this narrative. Pierre

recalls that his mother was always distinctly

aware of her affective power as Maurice’s

widow. But how much agency can we ascribe

to Josette? This question is further

complicated by the fact that the grieving

widow trope implies a normative female

powerlessness that inevitably calls agency into question. Can the vulnerable, powerless widow

ever be a subject? To what extent was Josette deploying an affective toolkit or instead having it

imposed externally? The answer, most likely, is some combination of the two.



Maurice AUDIN avec sa fille... Ils voulaient rester ensemble, et jouer

An image from L'Humanité, March 18 1959. The caption reads: “Maurice AUDIN with his daughter... They wanted to stay together, and play. (Fonds Josette Audin, La Contemporaine)

The End of the Audin Affair

The success of the Audin Affair depended both on the intervention of a detached, authoritative storyteller and on the affective power of the story being told. Its power lay in its

⁷⁴ “Jacques Duclos à Bourgès-Maunoury sur l’affaire Maurice Audin,” *L'Humanité* (Paris, France), Aug. 24 1957. BNF Microfilm M-14797, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

⁷⁵ “On va juger une ombre,” *L'Humanité* (Paris, France), March 18 1959. BNF Microfilm M-14797, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

engagement of two different but equally important affective registers: dispassionate/intellectual/masculine and emotional/domestic/feminine. Even as the Committee increasingly took up the role as author of this narrative in light of practical limitations placed on Josette, they still relied on the affective framework she had first created. Instead of seeing Josette's agency in constructing a public affair around her husband's disappearance as being increasingly sidelined by the more authoritative voices of the metropolitan French, typically male Audin Committee intellectuals, we should instead recognize how Josette benefited from these connections, appealing strategically to a sense of intellectual solidarity and mobilizing gendered tropes to her advantage. The transformation from Audin case to Audin Affair must be understood therefore as dependent on a mutually-reinforcing relationship between Josette and the Audin Committee. It was by constructing the narrative of Audin's disappearance around the grieving young widow Josette that the individual context of his disappearance became immaterial and his story universal.

Of course, the irony is that Maurice Audin – a universally sympathetic victim to a French audience – was not at all representative of the typical victim of French torture in Algeria, indicating the systems of privilege within which Maurice and Josette's story operated and its ability to participate in established social frameworks that Algerian victims could not. This is something that Josette and the members of the Audin Committee were profoundly aware of at the time. Vidal-Naquet wrote in the second edition of *L'Affaire Audin* (1989),

he was well-chosen [as a symbol] because Maurice Audin was at the same time European, which prevented any racist reaction ... a communist, which earned him sympathy from an important fraction of public opinion ... an academic, a well-respected mathematician ... and, moreover, very young ... which provoked corporative solidarity, ... among his fellow university assistants.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Vidal-Naquet, *L'Affaire Audin*, 30-31.

Julliard has similarly identified Maurice's "triple status" – as a European, Communist intellectual – that allowed him to attract a unique symbolic significance.⁷⁷ While both Julliard and Vidal-Naquet fail to include the important affective currency of the familial idiom, the sentiment is correct. Josette also benefited from certain privileges: she was literate, where many Algerian women were not, she had access to a justice system (albeit flawed), to important connections with intellectuals and journalists, and, importantly, because of her whiteness, she could be decontextualized to play the role of an archetypal widow for the French public in a way that Arab Algerian women could not.

Even at the peak of its activity, the Audin Affair was never a widespread political scandal. For the most part, its supporters came from a left-leaning intellectual milieu already opposed to the Algerian War. With the accomplishment of Algerian independence in 1962 and the promulgation of amnesty laws by the French state that forgave all infractions committed by police, judicial, and military services on both sides of the conflict, all ongoing legal efforts to hold the French Army responsible for Audin's death were automatically dismissed, the affair's timeliness was lost, and the Committee's existence increasingly futile. While some individuals continued to intervene publicly in the question of French war crimes in Algeria, the Committee as a formal structure ceased to exist by 1965. With the end of the Audin Affair proper, there was no longer a detached mediator intervening nor an official legal process to parallel in the court of public opinion and so it passed from the realm of political affair to potential memory. It would be decades before Maurice's story would once again gain renown in the French collective consciousness.

⁷⁷ Julliard, *Le Comité Maurice Audin*, 15.

II. THE YEARS OF SILENCE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF PRIVATE (POST)MEMORY

A War Without a Name

On July 5th, 1962, Algeria finally achieved its independence after a long and bloody struggle and thus began what Benjamin Stora has famously referred to as “la gangrène et l’oubli”— the gangrene and forgetting.⁷⁸ Following years of widespread censorship and conscious efforts to erase all evidence of torture and crimes during the conflict, an intentionally cultivated amnesia persisted in France. Shaken by the loss of a region it considered an extension of its own mainland, the French State would refuse to acknowledge this conflict as a “war” for decades to come, referring to it euphemistically as “the events.” Books and films on the subject were censored well into the 1970s. Abetted by amnesty laws that made any legal, and by extension official, memory of French atrocities during the Algerian War impossible, a dominant narrative was crafted in which torture, when used, had been exceptional, proportional, and non-systematic. While recent historians have criticized Stora’s thesis, as will be discussed in the following chapter, there was an undeniable unwillingness and inability to talk about the Algerian past for both victims and perpetrators in France during the decades following Algerian independence. In this same context, Maurice Audin’s story largely disappeared from the public stage. While there were countless articles about the Audin Affair in *Le Monde* between 1957 and 1962, his name appeared a mere seven times over the next three decades.⁷⁹ Josette never gave up hope that she might one day know the truth about what happened to her husband but even she recognized the

⁷⁸ The word “gangrène” has a particular significance in this context. In December 1958, Les Éditions de Minuit (the same publishing house that published *L’Affaire Audin*) published a collection of testimonies of Algerians tortured in Paris entitled *La gangrène*. The book was quickly seized by the French government and censored. The book would later be republished in 2012.

⁷⁹ With thanks to François-René Julliard for collating all mentions of “Audin” in *Le Monde* from 1957 to 2014.

impossibility of seeking justice under the amnesty laws. She recalls of the period following their promulgation, “there was nothing to be done... As soon as it was possible I tried to make things change but it was never possible.”⁸⁰

As a consequence of the relative non-existence of the Audin Affair in the public realm during the final decades of the twentieth century, this period has received little attention, historical or otherwise. As one of Josette’s lawyers, Nicole Dreyfus, would remark in a 2010 interview: “with the problem of the amnesty, Josette did not obtain any kind of satisfaction... and then the years passed.”⁸¹ To skip over these years, however, is to ignore a hugely important period in the affair’s memorial construction. The story of Maurice Audin could have been like countless other fleeting political scandals that disappeared from the public stage in 1962, never to be heard of again. For Maurice Audin’s memory to be mobilized later on, it was necessary for it to have been maintained on a private level.

The Afterlives of the Audin Affair

While the Audin Affair as a political scandal ceased to exist by the mid-1960s, echoes of its existence lived on for those implicated in its initial formation. Many former Committee members remained committed to achieving justice for Maurice and all the *disparus*⁸² of the Algerian War. Upon publishing his autobiography in 1997, Laurent Schwartz sent a press review to Josette with a handwritten note attached: “To the Audin family, with all my friendship, in memory of Maurice, and of a long struggle that has marked my life.”⁸³ Madeleine Rebérioux,

⁸⁰ “Josette Audin,” Rush Footage for “Maurice Audin : La disparition.” *Fonds François Demerliac*, La Contemporaine.

⁸¹ Nicole Dreyfus interviewed in *Maurice Audin : La disparition*, dir. François Demerliac (France : Chaya Films, 2010), DVD.

⁸² A widely-used term for those who “disappeared” during the Algerian War.

⁸³ “Letter from Laurent Schwartz written to Josette Audin,” Carton 5, *Fonds Josette Audin*, La Contemporaine.

who remained in correspondence with Josette throughout her life, would later become the President of the French Human Rights League and defend individuals similar to Maurice. More engaged than most was the historian, Pierre Vidal-Naquet. For the entirety of his life, he stayed in close correspondence with Josette. As he poignantly acknowledged in a letter written six months before his death, he wrote few letters now in his old age “but if he writes to anyone it should be to [her].”⁸⁴ A specialist in Ancient Greek history by training, Vidal-Naquet dedicated much of his career to the issues he had first become engaged with through the Audin Affair. In 1963, he published *La Torture dans la République (Torture in the [French] Republic)*⁸⁵ and three years later *Les crimes de l’armée française (The Crimes of the French Army)*, a collection of sources proving the war crimes committed between 1954 and 1962.

The Audin Affair also lived on, albeit on a limited scale, in the French Communist party. In Argenteuil, Berre-l’Étang, and Poitiers, local PCF cells continued to be named after Maurice Audin up to, and perhaps beyond, 1977. For university-based cells in particular, the young, communist professor was a particularly popular martyr. For the most part, however, Audin became decontextualized from the struggle against torture and the Algerian War. More than anything, the cell bulletins from this period that discuss peace in Vietnam or university reform attest to the extent to which other political causes had gained the attention of the Left in the decades after Algerian independence.⁸⁶ More tangible were efforts led by local Communist elected officials and Vidal-Naquet to enter Maurice Audin into the public memory by naming streets and landmarks after him. In 1982, for example, a cul-de-sac was inaugurated in Maurice

⁸⁴ “Letter from Pierre Vidal-Naquet written to Josette Audin,” Jan. 11 2006. “Correspondance,” *Fonds Pierre Vidal-Naquet*, l’EHESS, Aubervilliers.

⁸⁵ This work was published in English, with the title *Torture: Cancer of Democracy*.

⁸⁶ See, for example, “Bulletin de la Cellule Maurice Audin, Faculté des sciences de Poitiers / Parti communiste français,” BNF NUMP-2586, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Audin's name in the Communist dominated municipality of Guyancourt and a memorial procession was organized to mark the occasion.⁸⁷

For the most part, however, it would not be until the late 1980s that French communists more broadly would truly take ownership of Maurice Audin as a symbol, in the context of the growing anti-racist movement founded in response to the rise of the extreme right. Most memorial resistance to the official erasure of Maurice's death therefore took place in the private realm. This did not happen in the Audin family unit alone, as evidenced above, but it was primarily through Josette, her children, and eventually her grandchildren that Maurice's memory was constructed and preserved, ready to be mobilized into a public memory at a moment of greater public receptivity.



A poster advertising the inauguration of the Maurice Audin cul-de-sac in Guyancourt, 1982 (Image courtesy of Pierre Audin)

Life Goes On

The Audin Family would never be the same after Maurice's arrest and yet, even as Josette fought to discover the truth, life inevitably went on. As the Algerian War increased in intensity, Josette returned in September to teach mathematics at the Kouba High School for Young Girls and continued to participate in the PCA's propagandist efforts to achieve Algerian independence. Sadek Hadjerès, former director of the PCA's armed wing, recalls seeing Josette

⁸⁷ Pierre Audin in conversation with the author, January 2020.

at a clandestine printing press in 1959, with the three-year-old Louis in her arms.⁸⁸ Life was never easy during the final years of the war. Hadjerès recalls how Josette faced “the heavy constraints of being a mother, police harassment, and taunts from the ultra-colonialists.”⁸⁹ However, after independence had been achieved, Algeria became an even more difficult place for the Audin family to live. Josette later recounted how she “thought that [they] could stay there [in Algeria], that [they] would be Algerians like the others” but “this was a utopia without a doubt.”⁹⁰ Hoping to continue teaching as an Algerian rather than a French state functionary, Josette was met with immediate distrust and struggled for a long time to receive Algerian nationality. Ultimately, Josette, along with many other Algerians of European origin, would receive Algerian citizenship by a decree passed in July 1963. Nonetheless, she “understood that she was unwanted by the Algerians, the officials. They didn’t consider [her] to be Algerian.”⁹¹

The turning point came when Colonel Boumediene was brought to power in the 1965 coup d’État. Characterized by a more deeply nationalistic and ethnically and religiously restrictive vision of Algerian identity, Boumediene’s government made the existence of the *pieds-rouges* – European Algerians who had fought for independence – increasingly difficult. Josette later speculated that, had she been alone, she might have remained in Algeria; however, she had three children and so in 1966 Josette made the difficult decision to relocate⁹² to France. Josette’s relationship with Algeria would remain complex for the rest of her life. As she recognized in a 1999 interview, “It is in Algeria that I was happy ... I loved the Algeria of my

⁸⁸ Sadek Hadjerès, “REFLEXIONS SUR Maurice AUDIN ET LA TORTURE (à l’occasion de l’inauguration d’une place Maurice Audin à Paris le 26 05 04).” Carton 5, *Fonds Josette Audin*, La Contemporaine.

⁸⁹ Hadjerès, “REFLEXIONS SUR Maurice AUDIN ET LA TORTURE (à l’occasion de l’inauguration d’une place Maurice Audin à Paris le 26 05 04).” *Fonds Josette Audin*.

⁹⁰ “Josette Audin,” Rush Footage for Maurice Audin : La Disparition, *Fonds François Demerliac*. La Contemporaine.

⁹¹ Josette Audin interviewed by Leïla Sebbar, “C’est en Algérie que j’ai été heureuse,” 2009. Carton 1, *Complément au fonds Josette Audin*, La Contemporaine.

⁹² For Josette and her children, it remains an important distinction that Josette *went* (entrer) to France rather than *returned* (rentrer) to France. She was born in Algeria and considered herself to be Algerian, not French.

twenties. It was colonial Algeria, it's true, but it is there that I met my husband, that I had my children, that I fought with my comrades."⁹³ After moving to France, Josette would always dream of returning to Algeria, but to an Algeria that no longer existed. She remained in the Parisian region for most of her life, raising her children, teaching mathematics, actively participating in anti-racist organizations, and never once giving up her fight to discover the truth about her husband's disappearance.

Josette, the Audin Family, and the Failure of Memorial Transmission

As vocal as Josette had been about Maurice's disappearance during the original Audin Affair, she struggled to vocalize her experiences within the private familial sphere. Having received no confirmation that Maurice was in fact dead and been denied the typical rituals of grief, Josette seemed trapped in mourning and unable to transition to a memorial mode. Maurice's niece, Geneviève Buono, recalled in a 1997 article: "My aunt never resigned herself to Maurice's death. I remember ... when the war was not yet over, she would still say to her children: 'When dad [Papa] returns, you will have a little sister, we will call her Malika...'"⁹⁴ Despite growing up surrounded by images of his father, Pierre recalls that he heard little about Maurice from Josette. Sociologist Meltem Ahiska has examined a similar phenomenon in the Turkish Saturday Mothers movement. Ahiska explains how women who willingly recounted their personal trauma in the public sphere as part of collective political action, could not do the same at home. Citing the testimonies of protestors, Ahiska surmises: "the transmission of memories is never full in the private realm ... women as mothers mostly hide stories and feelings

⁹³ Josette Audin interviewed by Leïla Sebbar, "C'est en Algérie que j'ai été heureuse."

⁹⁴ Geneviève Buono, "Mon oncle Maurice," *L'Humanité* (Paris, France), June 7 1997, 16. Carton 5, *Fonds Josette Audin*, La Contemporaine.

from children ... Home is the place of secrets. But, ‘at the moment when women step into public space they develop certain points of resistance and strategies against both the manifestations of state violence and the mechanisms of social control.’”⁹⁵

This framework can perhaps help explain Josette’s fraught relationship with Maurice’s disappearance – oscillating between mourning and memory, public candor and private evasiveness. It is abundantly evident that the traumatic loss of Maurice remained an obsession throughout Josette’s life. Referring to his own interview conducted with Josette in 2014, Julliard notes that “She never really lived ... since 1957 she lived for that alone ... for the Audin Affair and her husband.”⁹⁶ He recalled how, during the interview, “there were large portraits of Maurice everywhere ... at least four or five in the living room.”⁹⁷ Josette’s own archives also attest to this obsession. She held on to every trace of their life lived together, bringing dozens of boxes of nondescript documents with her from Algeria to France. At the same time, however, Josette struggled to communicate her lived experience as memory to Michèle, Louis, and Pierre. Pierre recalls, “there were certain things that there was no question of her talking about ... she kept her little secret garden ... there was the public aspect and there was the personal aspect that even with us she had difficulty talking about.”⁹⁸

Remarkably, the story Josette told her children was often the same that she told and re-told to the public for decades. Not only did an ostensibly private narrative become reified through repetition in the public realm but Josette’s children heard little more than this same fixed narrative. As Pierre describes, “there was a speech that she... had accepted to say, she continued

⁹⁵ Meltem Ahiska, “Memory as Encounter: The Saturday Mothers in Turkey,” *Women Mobilizing Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 143.

⁹⁶ François-René Julliard in conversation with the author, January 2020.

⁹⁷ François-René Julliard in conversation with the author, January 2020.

⁹⁸ Pierre Audin in conversation with the author, August 2019.

to agree to tell it but she had no way of telling other things ... of recounting how they [her and Maurice] were when they lived together.”⁹⁹ Indeed, the extent to which Josette’s story remained the same from the first letters she wrote to the French press in 1957 to a testimony she provided in 2004 is striking.¹⁰⁰ In each recollection, the dialogue exchanged with the parachutists at the moment of Maurice’s arrest does not change: “if he is reasonable, he will be back in an hour.” In each retelling, she learned via letter that her husband was in “good health” and was distressed upon hearing two parachutists refer to Maurice in the “imperfect” past tense. When I interviewed him, Pierre in turn repeated this same story.¹⁰¹

Scholars across disciplines have written on the relationship between trauma and repetition. In *This is not the Place*, Diana Taylor tells the story of an Argentinian survivor of torture – Pedro Matta – who worked as a tour guide at the site of his own torture years later. Remarkably reminiscent of Josette’s own fixed narrative of her painful past, Taylor describes how Matta “gives the tour the same way every time – stands in the same spot, recounts the same events, cries at the memorial wall.”¹⁰² While Marianne Hirsch argues, in her analysis of the transmission of traumatic memories from parent to child, that “repetition connects the second generation to the first, in its capacity to produce rather than screen the effect of trauma,”¹⁰³ this was not the case for the Audin family. The repetition of the same fixed narrative was an obstacle for the Audin children in their efforts to construct a memory of their father. Nadine Fresco has identified a similar failure of memorial transmission within the family unit in “Remembering the Unknown,” a series of interviews conducted with Jewish children born after the Holocaust. In

⁹⁹ Pierre Audin in conversation with the author, January 2020.

¹⁰⁰ “Josette Audin,” *Elle et eux et l’Algérie*.

¹⁰¹ Pierre Audin in conversation with the author, August 2019.

¹⁰² Taylor, “This Is Not the Place.”

¹⁰³ Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 108.

her analysis, Fresco recognizes how parents often “transmitted only the wound to their children, to whom the memory had been refused and who grew up in the compact void of the unspeakable,” going on to conclude that “the silence was all the more implacable in that it was often concealed behind a screen of words ... an *unchanging story*, a tale *repeated over and over*” (emphasis added).¹⁰⁴ While Fresco’s analysis is situated in the context of the Holocaust, an event with a much more active social memory in the Halbswachsian sense than the Audin Affair, comparison is still valuable. For the Audin children, as for the children of Holocaust survivors, the trauma lived by their mother remained a blank page around which no private memory could be transmitted or constructed.

There was one notable exception. Towards the end of Josette’s life, Michèle sat down and asked her mother to tell her life story, so that she might share it with the family. At the time, Josette expressed regret at having failed to share more about Maurice with her children when they were young as well as her continued difficulty to do so. She then proceeded to tell the most remarkable stories about the streets where she and Maurice walked while courting, their shared love of mathematics, even the fact that when Michèle was born Maurice thought that she vaguely resembled Mao



Photo of Maurice and Josette taken in Maginot, while students at the University of Algiers (Fonds Josette Audin, La Contemporaine)

¹⁰⁴ Nadine Fresco, “Remembering the Unknown,” *International Review of Psychoanalysis* no. 11 (1984): 417-427. Available online: <http://www.anti-rev.org/textes/Fresco84a/>. Accessed April 10 2020.

Zedong!¹⁰⁵ In this rare moment when Josette succeeded in transmitting a more intimate memory, a process that Michèle recalls remained extremely difficult, she did so out of familial duty.

Michèle kindly agreed to share this document with me but she was at pains to stress that it not be shared publicly.¹⁰⁶ As public as Josette's grief had necessarily been early on, she retained a strict border between public and private grief in the subsequent years. This moment of revelation came much later in Josette's life, when her children had already reached retirement. For the most part, the Audin children learned little about their father's memory from Josette. As powerful as the family unit and its associated narrative frameworks had been in the creation of the initial Audin Affair, the transmission of memory within the Audin family itself broke down.

Putting Together the Pieces of Postmemory

As impenetrable as Josette's memory of Maurice remained, that of her children can perhaps provide some insight. In Marianne Hirsch's definitive work on the transmission of memory from parents to children, *The Generation of Postmemory*, she defines postmemory as "the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up."¹⁰⁷ While memory pieces together lived experiences, "Postmemory's connection to the past is ... mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation."¹⁰⁸ Michèle, Louis, and Pierre's relationship with their father does not fit exactly with Hirsch's model, in that the Audin Affair did not exist as

¹⁰⁵ Document written by Michèle Audin in 2007 for family use. Many thanks to Mme Audin for providing me access to this document.

¹⁰⁶ Michèle Audin has consented to the inclusion of the paraphrased anecdotes in this thesis via email communication, May 2020.

¹⁰⁷ Hirsch, *The Postmemory Generation*, 5.

¹⁰⁸ Hirsch, *The Postmemory Generation*, 5.

collective and cultural trauma to the same extent as the Holocaust, yet it can still be examined as a postmemorial phenomenon. All of the children, three years or younger at the time of Maurice's disappearance, had few if any personal recollections of their father and instead "[grew] up with overwhelming inherited memories," as Hirsch describes.¹⁰⁹ In fact, in light of Josette's inability to transmit her own lived experience, their relationship was even more one of "imaginative investment, projection, and creation." Each of them, however, approached this task very differently. Louis Audin sadly passed away from lung cancer in 2006 and so, since I was unable to meet with him, he will not be discussed here.

Michèle's memorial relationship with her father has always been marked by a desire to know him beyond the symbol he became after his death. As she recognized in an interview this year, "the only thing that exists is his death, people only ever talk about his death. It's a little bit unfair."¹¹⁰ Even when Michèle rejected the Legion of Honor, awarded to her in 2009 by President Sarkozy for her contribution to French Mathematics, she did so not as a political act to bolster her father's symbolic significance but out of solidarity with her mother's struggle.¹¹¹ The clearest indication of Michèle's particular memorial relationship with her father comes from her 2013 biography of Maurice's life, *Une vie brève*. As she clarifies in the book's introduction, "Here you will learn

Michèle Audin Une vie brève



Michèle Audin, Une vie brève (Paris: Gallimard, 2013)

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Michèle Audin in conversation with the author, January 2020.

¹¹¹ "La fille de Maurice Audin refuse la légion d'honneur," *Le Monde*, Jan. 11 2009, https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2009/01/09/la-fille-de-maurice-audin-refuse-la-legion-d-honneur_1140101_3224.html.

nothing new about [the Audin Affair]. Not the martyr, nor his death nor his disappearance are the subject of this book. It is, to the contrary, about life, about his life.”¹¹² When describing her motivations for writing *Une vie brève* in an interview, she affirmed: “I didn’t write in order to trigger something. Nor to be useful. I wrote for myself, to speak about this young man: my father.”¹¹³ For Michèle her *postmemory* was consciously and deliberately personal.

One especially remarkable component of *Une vie brève* is Michèle’s use of the counterfactual mode when historical record fails her. Although Michèle insists that she “tried to find and reconstitute ... To affirm rather than imagine,” she often slips into hypothetical fabrication.¹¹⁴ She postulates about Maurice’s life as a young boy: “he read *perhaps* what they were reading at school, what the school library was lending, or what his older sister was reading.”¹¹⁵ Elsewhere she ponders, “He played, of course: all children play. Did he fight with his sisters while playing cards? What did they play? ... Surely not Monopoly?”¹¹⁶ Michèle’s speculation continues for several pages. These moments of counterfactual thought are made poignant by their very mundanity and it is via this counterfactual mode that Michèle most explicitly engages in *postmemory* work. As literary critic Catherine Gallagher recognizes, counterfactual thinking helps “satisfy our desire to quicken and vivify historical entities, to make them seem not only solid and substantial but also suspenseful and unsettled.”¹¹⁷ Likewise, *postmemory* work, premised on an inability to recollect an experience, strives rather to “reactivate and re-embody” the past.¹¹⁸ By oscillating between the biographical and

¹¹² Michèle Audin, *Une vie brève* (Paris: Gallimard, 2013), 13-14.

¹¹³ Catherine Simon, “Michèle Audin, géomètre du souvenir,” *Le Monde*, Jan. 10 2013, https://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2013/01/10/michele-audin-geometre-du-souvenir_1814899_3260.html.

¹¹⁴ Audin, *Une vie brève*, 39.

¹¹⁵ Audin, *Une vie brève*, 44.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹¹⁷ Catherine Gallagher, *Telling It Like It Wasn’t: The Counterfactual Imagination in History and Fiction* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2018), 11.

¹¹⁸ Hirsch, *The Postmemory Generation*, 33.

counterfactual, Michèle reactivates, reembodies, and vivifies her father in a way that she and the wider public had never known him – the human being, the school boy, and the young fiancé behind the symbol.

Pierre’s relationship with his father’s memory is entirely different. One month old when Maurice disappeared, Pierre acknowledges that, unlike Michèle, he has no memories of his father. He recalls: “I knew him through black and white photos, I never saw him move, I never heard him talk, I never saw him in color ... I don’t really have a memory of him, for me he is a symbol, he is a hero...”¹¹⁹ Faced with Josette’s unwillingness to talk about the past, Pierre

“started [learning about his father] by reading Vidal-Naquet’s book [*L’Affaire Audin*] before really discussing him with [Josette].”¹²⁰ His first real knowledge of Maurice was therefore as the symbolic entity that the Audin Committee had made him out to be. While Michèle remained committed to celebrating her father’s life, Pierre had only ever known him through his death and his memory has been mostly defined by a continued mobilization of his father as a political symbol. In 1978, in response to one of his father’s torturers – Lieutenant-Colonel Érulín – being honored by the French Army, Pierre published an article in his local Communist student union



The front page of the Communist Student Association newsletter for Paris-6, in which Pierre Audin condemned the actions of General Érulín, 1977 (Image courtesy of Pierre Audin)

¹¹⁹ Pierre Audin in conversation with the author, August 2019.

¹²⁰ Pierre Audin in conversation with the author, January 2020.

journal. Writing as “the son of Maurice Audin,” he recounted the events of his father’s disappearance, Érulín’s complicity, and the subsequent military cover-up. He concluded his article with an impassioned appeal that the French state “recognize officially what happened to [his] father and to so many other Algerians.”¹²¹ Using remarkably similar rhetoric to that of the Audin Committee decades earlier, he showed no discomfort with his father’s symbolic existence. This political relationship with Maurice’s memory persists to the present; Pierre remains extremely involved with the current Maurice Audin Association and its initiatives.

While Michèle resisted politicized efforts to reduce her father to a symbolic figure, insisting instead on better knowing the man behind the affair, Pierre engaged with his father’s memory almost exclusively in a politicized, symbolic context. During our interview, Pierre readily recalled all the key moments in the Audin Affair within recent years – legal proceedings, presidential statements, etc. Michèle struggled to remember such political developments and was far more interested in talking about her family. At one point, she voluntarily showed me a beautiful album of photos she had gathered for Josette’s wake. In these two different responses we can perhaps see two conflicting elements to Josette’s own memory – Maurice as the love of her life and Maurice as a political symbol of unrepentant State violence. While it is impossible to know for sure where such differences originate, it is worth recognizing their resonance with feminist scholarship, including that of Selma Leydesdorff, that identifies the different ways in which men and women relate to memory: the “very widespread tendencies for men to dominate in the public sphere and for women’s lives to focus on family and household.”¹²² Is it perhaps significant that Josette would ultimately share the most private memories of her own life with

¹²¹ Communist Students Union of Paris-6 University, *L’ouverture est claire* (June 1978), courtesy of Pierre Audin.

¹²² Selma Leydesdorff, “Introduction,” *Gender & Memory*, ed. Selma Leydesdorff, Luisa Passerini and Paul Thompson (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2005), 1.

Michèle rather than Pierre? Regardless, whether a question of difference in age or temperament, or rather a broader gendered difference in the dynamics of memory, the two children dealt with the failure of familial memorial transition and created vivid postmemories of Maurice in remarkably different ways.

To pass over the years of relative silence with regards the Audin Affair, between the mid-1960s and late-1990s, is to ignore essential developments for its reactivation as a public memory at the turn of the twenty-first century. As Pierre asserts, the reason we talk about Maurice Audin today is because Josette fought her entire life to keep his memory alive, “if [Josette] had not led this fight, [the affair] would have fallen into obscurity like many others.”¹²³ Of course, the reality was far more complex than that. While the Audin Affair initially failed to engender a real public memory, it retained a private memory among Josette, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, and others who had been involved with the original affair as well as an active *postmemory* for the Audin children. It was essential that guardians of Maurice’s memory preserve it in the private realm so that the political affair could be reactivated in a French society increasingly receptive to discussing the Algerian War.

¹²³ Pierre Audin in conversation with the author, August 2019.

III. THE REACTIVATION OF THE AUDIN AFFAIR AS PUBLIC MEMORY

The Mirror Breaks?

In 1999, after years of official denial, the French National Assembly finally recognized that the “events” in Algeria between 1954 and 1962 had constituted a real “war.”¹²⁴ As the late-1990s and early-2000s in general witnessed a remarkable discursive outpouring in regards to the Algerian War, in both academia¹²⁵ and popular media, it seemed that the collective amnesia had begun to give way.¹²⁶ According to Stora’s psychoanalytic model, this was the moment when the necessary passage of time had passed for past trauma to be addressed, when “the mirror broke”¹²⁷ and the “sudden memory boom”¹²⁸ began. As historians such as Sylvie Thénault have made evident, however, this psychoanalytic framework inappropriately extends theories of trauma from the individual to societal level and fails to recognize memory as deeply situated in a changing socio-political context.¹²⁹ For Thénault, there was no such collective silence or psychological repression in the preceding years; she in fact argues that the Algerian War remained a point of obsession for many on an individual level.¹³⁰ The reemergence of an active memorial discourse with regards the Algerian War was therefore not an inevitable part of a traumatic cycle but rather the consequence of “different intersecting rhythms and temporalities”

¹²⁴ Assemblée Nationale, *Proposition de loi tendant à la reconnaissance de l'état de guerre en Algérie*, No. 1558, April 28 1999, <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/11/propositions/pion1558.asp>.

¹²⁵ See, most notably, Raphaëlle Branche, *La torture et l'armée pendant la guerre d'Algérie (1954-1962)* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001); and Sylvie Thénault, *Une drôle de justice. Les Magistrats dans la Guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: La Découverte, 2001).

¹²⁶ Benjamin Stora, *La gangrène et l'oubli*, 2nd edition (Paris : La Découverte, 2005), 3.

¹²⁷ This idea of a broken mirror, “le miroir brisé”, was first introduced in Henry Rousso’s 1987 text, *Le Syndrome de Vichy*.

¹²⁸ Benjamin Stora, “Guerre d’Algérie : 1999-2003, les accélérations de la mémoire.”

¹²⁹ Sylvie Thénault in conversation with the author, August 2019.

¹³⁰ Thénault, “La guerre d’indépendance algérienne : Mémoires françaises.”

in the academic, public, and political realms.¹³¹ For Thénault, the most important of these was the rise of the National Front during the 1980s and the anti-racist movement it provoked.¹³²

In the context of an increasingly conservative bent to European politics throughout the late-1960s and early-1970s, Jean-Marie Le Pen – a former soldier in the Algerian War – began to consolidate extreme right sentiment in France within his newly-formed National Front party.¹³³ Characterized by xenophobic and anti-Arab rhetoric, the National Front's gaining popularity in the late-1980s provoked a dynamic anti-racist protest movement in France. This movement advocated for a condemnation of present racism through a reconsideration of France's Algerian past. Originating in October 1983, with the *March for Equality and Against Racism* that protested police brutality against North African immigrants, the movement increasingly dominated left-leaning circles at the time. As historians Jim House and Neil McMaster recognize, the anti-racist movement gave relevance once more to the Algerian War and to the historical violence committed by France.¹³⁴

At the same time, these political developments coincided with a strong trend of memory work on both sides of the Mediterranean. In Algeria, as historian Natalya Vince recognizes, the civil war between the Algerian government and radical Islamist movement, starting in 1991, encouraged a reconsideration of the War of Independence and the values for which it had originally been fought.¹³⁵ Meanwhile in France, memory work was initially directed towards rethinking French collaboration during the Second World War. With the publication of academic works, such as Rousso's *Le syndrome de Vichy* (1987) and Robert Paxton's *La France de Vichy*

¹³¹ Sylvie Thénault in conversation with the author, August 2019.

¹³² Sylvie Thénault in conversation with the author, August 2019.

¹³³ Harvey Simmons, *The French National Front* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

¹³⁴ Jim House and Neil McMaster, *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹³⁵ Natalya Vince, *Our Fighting Sisters: Nation, Memory and Gender in Algeria 1954-2012* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 5.

(1999), as well as Jacques Chirac's groundbreaking 1995 Vel d'Hiv declaration that officially recognized France's responsibility in the deportation of Jewish citizens for the first time, a mood of memorial reconsideration took hold. This burgeoning discourse of facing up to France's historical errors served as an impetus to also reconsider the Algerian War: the two memories produced and were produced by one another.¹³⁶ It was in this trans-Mediterranean mood of memorial reconsideration that the left-leaning press in France began to dedicate increasing page space to the memory of the Algerian war, and the first stirrings of a largescale French recognition of this conflict began. Notably, however, while this movement had originated in Algeria, Algerian voices would remain largely absent from the French public memory of the conflict taking shape.

The catalyzing moment in France came on June 20th, 2000, when a journalist at *Le Monde*, Florence Beaugé, told the previously unknown story of Louise Ighilahriz. Louise, a former Algerian nationalist and FLN combatant, had been tortured and raped for three months by the French Army during the Battle of Algiers.¹³⁷ While she was ethnically Berber as opposed to European, critics have noted how French Ighilahriz appeared in Beaugé's article. Adam Shatz, contributing editor to the *New York Review of Books*, wrote: "Ighilahriz's testimony was especially powerful because of who she is. A student of the work of Victor Hugo and a fluent speaker of French, she has far more in common with her French contemporaries than with the bearded fundamentalists who waged jihad in her country throughout the 1990s."¹³⁸ With the emergence of Louise's story, against the backdrop of the anti-racist movement and a broader

¹³⁶ Sylvie Thénault in conversation with the author, August 2019.

¹³⁷ Florence Beaugé, "Torturée par l'armée française en Algérie, 'Lila' recherche l'homme qui l'a sauvée," *L'Humanité*, June 20 2000.

¹³⁸ Adam Shatz, "Torture in Algiers," *The New York Review of Books*, Nov. 21 2002, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2002/11/21/the-torture-of-algiers/>.

moment of memorial reconsideration, the political climate was ripe for the story of Maurice Audin to be reactivated. Where it had previously been a political narrative, then confined to the realm of private memory, the Audin Affair began to develop a French public memory in the early twenty-first century.

Josette's Interventions in a New Climate of Receptivity

On December 2nd, 1997, more than 250 people gathered in the amphitheater of the Henri Poincaré Institute to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of Maurice's doctoral dissertation defense *in absentia*. In attendance were many familiar faces, including former committee members Madeleine Rebérioux, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Laurent-Schwartz, and Jacques Panijel. Josette, her three children, and her grandchildren were also present. In her speech at the event, Josette thanked Vidal-Naquet and Schwartz "not only for having organized this commemoration of Maurice's thesis 'in absentia' but also for the important help that the Audin Committee ... gave during the difficult years of the Algerian war to her and all those who denounced the methods used there by France."¹³⁹ The event gained little attention beyond those for whom Maurice held a personal memorial significance, however, and it was not until the new millennium, following the publication of Louise Ighilahriz's story, that a truly public memory of Maurice Audin began to take shape.

At this moment, as before, it was Josette who instigated the revived public conversation about Maurice Audin. In its July 24th edition, *L'Humanité* made an appeal to victims of torture in Algeria willing to come forward and share their story. In a response that was meticulously redrafted, as her personal archives attest, Josette wrote:

¹³⁹ Laurent Schwartz, "Commémoration de la Thèse de Maurice Audin assassiné pendant la guerre d'Algérie," Carton 4, *Fonds Josette Audin*, La Contemporaine.

Since the end of this war, in 1962, thirty-eight years have passed and it is a good thing that those who escaped torture can finally testify, before it is too late. I hope that many will do it. But those who died under torture, and they are many, could never and will never testify ... **This is what happened to Maurice Audin...**¹⁴⁰

Josette then told the same story she had told many times before. It was by no means a given that the story of Maurice Audin would become central to this emergent discourse about torture in Algeria; it was Josette's intervention that brought his story to the fore. In her letter, Josette created an emotionally poignant narrative centered on gendered familial tropes, as she had done in her initial letter-writing campaign back in 1957. She referred to Maurice, "He was 25 years old. He had three children," signed off as "Josette Audin (widow of Maurice Audin)," and finished with the highly emotional plea "How many Algerian women, how many Algerian mothers, how many Algerian children, have not found their husband, their sons, their father, 'disappeared' after passing through the hands of torturers?"¹⁴¹ By centering her rhetoric around traditional associations between femininity and family, Josette continued to deploy the familial idiom as affective device in the public realm to universalize Maurice's story.

This was not Josette's first attempt, however, to participate in the newly active conversation about French war crimes in Algeria. Just a few weeks earlier, on August 15th, 2000, she had written an outraged letter in response to an article published in *La Marianne* by Michel Charbonnier, the son of one of the men responsible for Maurice's death, who had argued for his father's innocence.¹⁴² Making little effort to conceal her disdain, Josette condemned the "article that you were not ashamed to publish, signed by the son of the torturer lieutenant Charbonnier" and went on to recount: "Forty years ago, the name of Maurice Audin was well-known ... we knew that Maurice Audin ... was arrested ... and atrociously tortured, until his death ... Among

¹⁴⁰ Josette Audin, "Les crimes doivent être condamnés," *L'Humanité*, Sep. 15 2000, 8.

¹⁴¹ Audin, "Les crimes doivent être condamnés," *L'Humanité*.

¹⁴² Michel Charbonnier, "Non, mon père n'était pas un bourreau," *La Marianne* (Paris, France), July 24 2000.

the parachutists of the 1st regiment who arrested Maurice Audin, was Lieutenant Charbonnier ... He is a torturer and he is an executioner.”¹⁴³ In this highly impassioned letter, Josette positioned herself again as the grieving widow, signing off as “Madame Widow Maurice Audin.”¹⁴⁴ The press in turn highlighted the elements of this poignant narrative with the headline, “Yes, Lieutenant Charbonnier was an executioner. This parachutist was a torturer. Among his victims, Maurice Audin. His widow testifies.”¹⁴⁵

Where Josette’s unwavering dedication to creating a public memory around her husband’s death had fallen for the most part on deaf ears during the previous decades, the political climate was now ready for her voice to be heard. Speaking of the years of silence, Pierre Audin recalls: “There were several moments when she succeeded in talking about the Audin Affair but society wasn’t very receptive, it wished instead for a complete ‘black-out’ surrounding everything related to the Algerian War.”¹⁴⁶ In a society inspired to look back on its past at the turn of the twenty-first century, however, this non-receptivity was over.

The Return of Maurice Audin as Symbol

It would take another year, however, for Maurice Audin to become a public symbol and, just as before, it required the combined effort of Josette and the left-leaning intellectual and journalistic community. In October, 2000, inspired by Josette’s testimony published the month prior, *L’Humanité* Editor-in-Chief, Charles Silvestre, coordinated one of the defining moments in the revived campaign against torture in Algeria: *l’Appel des Douze* [The Appeal of Twelve]. In this open letter, twelve prominent figures called upon the French government to condemn the use

¹⁴³ Josette Audin, “Oui, le lieutenant Charbonnier était un bourreau,” *Marianne* (Paris, France), Sep. 4 2000.

¹⁴⁴ Audin, “Oui, le lieutenant Charbonnier était un bourreau,” *Marianne*.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Pierre Audin in conversation with the author, January 2020.

of torture during the Algerian War, referring to the precedent established by President Chirac at Vel d'Hiv. Among the twelve, over half had been involved in the original Audin Affair: Vidal-Naquet, Alleg, Schwartz, Rebérioux, Germaine Tillion, and Josette, notably referred to as “wife of Maurice Audin, assassinated by his torturers.”¹⁴⁷ Josette did not initiate this campaign but remained deeply engaged, as her personal correspondence with Silvestre indicates. Benefitting from a historical moment of interest in the memory of the Algeria War, the *Appel des Douze* was hugely influential in mobilizing the French public. At this stage, efforts to condemn torture were by no means centered around Maurice Audin but, thanks to Josette’s participation, people once more began to recognize the narrative power of Maurice’s story and Josette’s role as proprietor of it.¹⁴⁸

Half a year later, in the spring of 2001, events conspired to make Maurice even more central to the conversation about French torture. In early May, General Paul Aussaresses published a tell-all book, *Services spéciaux, Algérie 1955-1957 – Mon témoignage sur la torture*,¹⁴⁹ in which he admitted to torture and summary execution in Algeria. While Aussaresses had made earlier confessions to Florence Beaugé, the book was notable in that, as Thénault recognizes, “all of a sudden the debate became fairly widespread ... everyone started to talk about torture



A cartoon from *Le Monde* (May 3 2001), depicting General Aussaresses typing up his confessions as a man is tortured by electrocution behind him (Fonds Josette Audin, La Contemporaine)

¹⁴⁷ “L’Appel des Douze à la condamnation de la torture durant la guerre d’Algérie,” *L’Humanité* (Paris, France), Oct. 31 2000. Available at <https://histoirecoloniale.net/1-appel-des-douze-a-la.html>, accessed April 10 2020.

¹⁴⁸ CREOPS, “Letter to Josette Audin,” Carton 3, *Fonds Josette Audin*, La Contemporaine.

¹⁴⁹ Translated into English: *Special Forces, Algeria 1955-1957 – my testimony of torture*.

in Algeria and it was at that moment that the Audin Affair returned.”¹⁵⁰ While Aussaresses continued to insist that he had nothing to do with Maurice’s death, the fact he had been accused of complicity since 1958 meant the Affair was once more relevant.

Two days after Aussaresses’ book was released, *L’Humanité* published a familiar photo of the young mathematician on its front-page alongside the headline, “After Aussaresses’ revelations, when will the truth about the death of Maurice Audin come out?”¹⁵¹ Inside was a double-page spread, featuring interviews with Henri Alleg and Josette Audin. Josette was well



“Après les révélations d’Aussaresses, à quand la vérité sur la mort de Maurice Audin?” [After Aussaresses’ revelations, when will the truth about the death of Maurice Audin come out?], *L’Humanité*, May 4 2001. (Fonds Josette Audin, La Contemporaine)

aware of the opportunity this scandal had created. In her interview she remarked, “We must seize the publication of this book to ensure that things progress, that France recognizes and condemns the crimes committed in its name.”¹⁵² As always, her appeal for a recognition of *all* French crimes committed in Algeria earned its poignancy through her *personal* suffering; she recalled “We never saw Maurice Audin after his arrest. We don’t know anything, and it is terrible to live with that.”¹⁵³ Where the affair had once centered around the crime of Maurice’s death itself, it now centered on the memory of this crime.

¹⁵⁰ Sylvie Thénault in conversation with the author, August 2019.

¹⁵¹ *L’Humanité* (Paris, France), May 4 2001. Carton 3, *Fonds Josette Audin*, La Contemporaine.

¹⁵² *L’Humanité*, May 4 2001, 5.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

In the midst of this media frenzy, history seemed to repeat itself as Josette turned to the law courts in the hopes of finally creating an official memory of her husband's death. On the suggestion of Nicole Dreyfus, a lawyer who had defended many of those involved in the fight for Algerian independence, Josette filed a case against the French state for "false imprisonment" – since the body of Audin had technically never been found – and for "crime against humanity." As Dreyfus wrote in an article at the time, referring to an "awakening" in the French collective consciousness, "the state of public opinion has only now allowed the return of this 44-year-old affair."¹⁵⁴ Ultimately, this legal procedure would prove as futile as its predecessors in the face of restrictive amnesty laws; however, in a changing political climate in which, as Josette recognized, "more and more French people, most notably among the younger generation, were manifesting their desire to know the truth," this high-profile legal case helped build a public memory around Maurice Audin.¹⁵⁵

While the 1997 thesis defense commemoration had acted as a focal point to bring intellectuals and mathematicians interested in Maurice Audin's story back together, it was ultimately a new generation of intellectuals who took charge of reactivating the original affair. In 2000, Pierre Mansat, the then adjunct-mayor of Paris, decided to use his platform to raise awareness around Maurice's story. Together with former key players, he founded a committee in 2001 dedicated to naming a public space in Paris after Maurice.¹⁵⁶ The Maurice Audin Square was officially inaugurated on May 26th, 2004, by the socialist mayor Bertrand Delanoë. Around the same time, Gérard Tronel – a mathematician with strong ties to Algeria and a former adherent of one of the smaller, provincial Maurice Audin committees during the original affair –

¹⁵⁴ "Josette Audin porte plainte," *L'Humanité* (Paris, France), May 10 2001, 8. Carton 3, *Fonds Josette Audin*, La Contemporaine.

¹⁵⁵ "Josette Audin porte plainte," *L'Humanité*, May 10 2001.

¹⁵⁶ Pierre Mansat in conversation with the author, August 2019.

became increasingly involved in reviving its memory. Only twenty-three years old when he had joined the provincial committee, Tronel was now a renowned mathematician in his own right, allowing him to lead efforts to reactivate the Audin Affair. After the inauguration of Maurice Audin Square, Tronel proposed transforming Mansat's previous committee into a Maurice Audin Association, in the image of the Committee several decades earlier.¹⁵⁷ In 2004, under the impetus of Tronel, the Association reinstated the Maurice Audin Mathematics Prize, which had been inactive since 1963, to be awarded to a French and an Algerian laureate. To this day, the Association exists to award the Maurice Audin prize, promote Franco-Algerian reconciliation, and hold the French government responsible for its crimes.

A Reluctant Hero(ine)

As before, the reactivation of the Audin Affair was a combined effort of the Audin family, intellectuals, and journalists who identified with the cause. Interestingly, however, it was Josette who yet again served as the movement's symbolic figurehead. No matter who you ask – historians, family members, and politicians alike – it is agreed: there would be no Audin Affair today without Josette. This is despite the fact that her actions depended on the interventions of others to attain a wider reach. This is also despite the fact that Josette herself resisted such attention. Pierre recalls how his mother always “wanted to talk about Maurice, not about herself.”¹⁵⁸ Michèle too remembers how Josette was always hesitant to discuss her own actions, constantly ensuring that Maurice and the other victims remained the focus. Indeed, in all of her communications with the French press, Josette consistently defined herself in relation to Maurice, as his “widow.” Charles Silvestre alluded to Josette's ambivalence towards heroization

¹⁵⁷ Pierre Mansat in conversation with the author, August 2019.

¹⁵⁸ Pierre Audin in conversation with the author, January 2020.

in a May 2001 *L'Humanité* editorial: “Josette Audin will forgive us for disregarding her modesty, but she has accomplished an act which honors all those who have resisted this crime, honors all those who share a certain number of values, honors a people who are not, as much as some would wish them to be, without a memory.”¹⁵⁹

This hesitance is, of course, hard to reconcile with Josette’s complicity in making herself a key figure in the Audin Affair’s narrative since the very early days. I propose that the source of this tension, between Josette mobilizing herself as a character to tell Maurice’s story and her unwillingness to become a symbol, is three-fold. First of all, it represents the tension between personal and political. Pierre is definitive that what his mother wanted was “not just a recognition of what happened to [Maurice] but a recognition of what happened to the Algerian people;” had it not been a larger political struggle, she would not have fought for so long.¹⁶⁰ While Josette only returned to Algeria once, as part of a 1984 celebration of the 30th anniversary of the start of the Algerian War, her archives attest to continued correspondence with the Algerian embassy in France and an eagerness to inscribe him in the Algerian memory of the war. Thénault recalls a panel discussion she hosted together with Josette and Michèle, in which she asked whether Josette ever got tired of answering the same questions. Josette responded, deadpan: “Because you think that this amuses me?” While initially taken aback, Sylvie claims that what Josette meant was that “she did what she did out of political duty and out of activism.”¹⁶¹ Josette’s personal proximity to the story warranted the political duty of its telling.

At the same time, however, Maurice’s story was not simply a political cause for Josette. Pierre recognizes, “Maurice Audin was not only a victim ... he was the love of her life ... he was

¹⁵⁹ Charles Silvestre, “Commentaire: Leur courage,” *L'Humanité*, 10 May 2001, 9. Carton 3, *Fonds Josette Audin*, La Contemporaine.

¹⁶⁰ Pierre Audin in conversation with the author, January 2020.

¹⁶¹ Sylvie Thénault in conversation with the author, August 2019.

a living person for her. She could not reduce him to a victim; he was her love, her passion.”¹⁶² Her appeals to the French press were also driven by a personal need for answers. She wrote in an interview with *L’Humanité* shortly after the publication of Aussaresses’ confessions: “The question [of what happened to Maurice] has haunted *me* since the day he was arrested ... more than forty years later, we still don’t know anything ... and it is terrible to have to live with that. *I* have a right to know, *I* have a right to make the truth known. *I* owe it to *his* [Maurice’s] memory” (emphasis added).¹⁶³ Her duty to tell and re-tell her husband’s story was always both politically and personally motivated. By entering Maurice into the public and eventually official memory, she ensured that he would never be forgotten, even after her death.

Secondly, and on a related note, Josette necessarily had a visible presence in the Audin story as the self-assigned custodian of Maurice’s memory. As Michèle recalls about her mother, the Audin Affair “was her story, she was the custodian of this story;”¹⁶⁴ anyone who wanted to use Maurice’s memory therefore had to go through her. Josette’s sense of custodial duty is evident from letters she wrote to the press, correcting errors she believed they had made in representing Maurice’s memory. In 2001, she wrote to *Nouvel Observateur*,

While it seems to me that many things mentioned are questionable, I will satisfy myself with contesting those that relate to me ... It was with my full agreement that Pierre Vidal-Naquet wrote “L’Affaire Audin” in 1958. I never “preferred to organize a response from my side” ... I am proud to stand today alongside those [involved in the Committee] to continue asking the French authorities to solemnly condemn torture, the torturers and those who ordered and covered it up.¹⁶⁵

Despite a certain ambiguity in this statement, Josette is nonetheless steadfast in presenting a united front between her and the Committee members in the public memorial record of the

¹⁶² Pierre Audin in conversation with the author, January 2020.

¹⁶³ Josette Audin, “Josette Audin porte plainte,” *L’Humanité*.

¹⁶⁴ Michèle Audin in conversation with the author, January 2020.

¹⁶⁵ “Letter from Josette Audin to the Director of the Nouvel Observateur,” Carton 3, *Fonds Josette Audin*, La Contemporaine.

Audin Affair. Josette also ensured her husband was never accused of participating in the armed fight for Algerian independence. In a 2010 interview with documentarian François Demerliac, she firmly asserted: “my husband was not a terrorist ... he never killed anyone, he never helped to kill anyone.”¹⁶⁶

The seriousness with which Josette took her role as memorial custodian was most apparent in the wake of the publication of *La vérité sur la mort de Maurice* in 2014.¹⁶⁷ Written by journalist and filmmaker, Jean-Charles Deniau, the book claimed to reveal the truth of what happened to Maurice Audin based on exclusive interviews with General Aussaresses shortly before his death. Notwithstanding the doubtful credibility of his work, Josette was most upset that Deniau had not consulted the family before publishing. When asked how she felt about the book during a *France Inter* interview, she responded: “I was outraged to find out this afternoon about ... this book and the title of this book, which uses the name ‘Maurice Audin’ without myself or my children having been informed ... I strongly condemn this book and I do not condone this project.”¹⁶⁸ In her characteristically subdued but firm voice, Josette made clear her role as guardian of Maurice’s story. By situating herself in this role, Josette inevitably earned an undeniable importance in the Audin Affair: even if she was not personally involved in every initiative to create a public memory, it all came through her.

Finally, Josette’s immense symbolic significance despite her own wishes further indicates the continued power of familial frameworks in constructing collective memory. In his speech at the inauguration of Maurice Audin Square, Vidal-Naquet recalled: Maurice Audin “was arrested ... at the home he shared with *you, Josette*, [he gestured to her] with *your three children* and it

¹⁶⁶ “Josette Audin,” Rush Footage for “Maurice Audin: La disparition,” *Fonds François Demerliac*, La Contemporaine.

¹⁶⁷ In English, *The Truth About Maurice Audin’s Death*.

¹⁶⁸ “Retour sur la guerre d’Algérie,” *FranceInter*, Jan. 8 2014, <https://www.franceinter.fr/emissions/le-7-9/le-7-9-08-janvier-2014>.

would be at *your house* that Henri Alleg would be arrested the next day” (emphasis added).¹⁶⁹

The figure of grieving widow and mother, so essential for constructing an initial political narrative in 1957, proved just as important in the public memory taking shape in the early 2000s. In fact, with the passing of time, it had only increased in affective power. For the archetypal grieving widow, every passing year of loyalty provides ever more powerful evidence of her devotion: the most well-known example being Penelope in *The Odyssey*. As classicist Mitchell Carroll remarks,

the sentiment which most characterizes Penelope is love of husband, child ... This intensity of affections marks the twenty long years of separation. Every night, she bewails Odysseus, her dear lord, till gray-eyed Athena casts sweet sleep upon her eyelids. She ever longs for ... his return ... Never was there in a woman's heart a more ardent flame of love and devotion.¹⁷⁰

For Penelope as for Josette, the passing of time itself is essential to her affective power. Where writers emphasized Josette's youth, vulnerability, and physical fragility during the original Audin Affair, articles in the early 2000s focused on Josette's decades-long, unwavering commitment.¹⁷¹

By the mid-2000s, Maurice Audin was once more a symbol of French crimes during the Algerian War, albeit predominantly within the same left-leaning circles in which his story had originally been known. In the reactivation of the Audin Affair at the turn of the century, the combined actions of Josette and prominent public figures remained as important as ever but much had changed since 1957. Josette was living in France, her children were fully-grown and, most significantly, her voice could stand alone in a way that it could not before. Having gained a

¹⁶⁹ Recording courtesy of Pierre Mansat, “Inauguration de la place Maurice Audin”, *Youtube*, published Jan. 17 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V7_Ie-deVHY.

¹⁷⁰ Mitchell Carroll, *Greek Women* (Project Gutenberg, 2010), <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/32318>.

¹⁷¹ See, for example, Rosa Moussaoui, “Il faut une condamnation de ce qui a été fait au nom de la France en Algérie,” *L'Humanité* (Paris, France), Dec. 14-16 2012, 4. Carton 4, *Fonds Josette Audin*, La Contemporaine.

symbolic significance and legitimacy through the original Audin Affair, Josette could now independently intervene as the custodian of this story. Where the construction of the original affair had required a detached and authoritative mediator, the *memory* of this affair – as it took shape in the early twenty-first century – could operate on a more purely affective level. Josette's relationship with this re-emergence of the Audin Affair on the public scene was, however, riddled with paradox. She resisted being a protagonist but played into the affective potential of herself as a narrative figure. She asserted that her struggle had always been political and yet refused gestures that reduced Maurice to a cynical political device. Her engagement was often prompted by other historical agents and yet she remained the gatekeeper of any public memorial action. Highlighting this tension does not serve to undermine the very real importance of Josette's actions in giving new life to the Audin Affair and for maintaining its memory in the intervening years. Rather it aims to recognize how the narrative that surrounded Josette's interventions was as important as the interventions themselves.

IV. THE RECOGNITION OF THE FRENCH STATE AND THE CREATION OF AN OFFICIAL MEMORY

Early Stirrings of an Official Memory

With his groundbreaking 1995 Vel d'Hiv speech recognizing France's responsibility for the largescale deportation of Jewish citizens during the Second World War, Jacques Chirac ushered in a new era of official apology in France that sought to recognize past errors and amend erroneous official memories. As historians Elazar Barkan and Alexander Karn have recognized, acts of official apology, while "they do not erase or undo what has already happened" have the unique ability to "*amend the past* so that it resonates differently in the present."¹⁷² In the instance of the Algerian War, the 1960s amnesty laws had erased the story of Maurice Audin and other victims from the official memory and an official apology, therefore, held the immense power to retrieve them.¹⁷³ However, such an apology was far more fraught a possibility than one concerning French collaboration. While the participants in the Second World War were divided quickly in the collective consciousness between heroes and villains, the legacy of colonialism remained and remains more complex.

Over the years, small gestures of recognition – if not outright apology – had been accomplished with regards Maurice Audin. In November 1982, Josette received a letter from Anicet Le Pors, a Communist minister under President Mitterand, who acknowledged that "even if the facts [of the affair] haven't been settled, the responsibility of the state must nonetheless

¹⁷² Elazar Barkan and Alexander Karn, "Group Apology as an Ethical Imperative," *Taking Wrongs Seriously: Apologies and Reconciliation* (California, Stanford University Press, 2006), 8.

¹⁷³ The terminology here – apology, recognition, declaration etc. – is prone to confusion and while it would be a worthwhile exercise to distinguish between these terms, for the purposes of this thesis and its length restrictions, all such official acts will be considered alike. The distinction I will make in this thesis, however, is that between these official acts of *apology/recognition* and *responsibility*.

have been involved.”¹⁷⁴ Similarly, the awarding of an indemnity of 100,000 francs to Josette and each of her children in November 1983, “in compensation for the damage caused by the death of your husband,”¹⁷⁵ marked a *de facto* official recognition; to grant this money meant to accept that Maurice was indeed dead, not just “missing” after escaping military custody. However, these gestures remained limited, localized, and non-explicit; it was only in the context of a growing public conversation about the practice of torture in Algeria that attempts to create an *official* memory around Maurice’s death truly began to bear fruit. First under the presidency of François Hollande and subsequently under current French president, Emmanuel Macron, Josette finally received the official recognition, apology, and memorialization of her husband’s death that she had fought for decades to attain. Josette was by no means alone in accomplishing these official gestures. Politicians, historians, family members, and many others were often more involved in the practicalities, as Josette herself grew increasingly frail. However, as from the very beginning, she was essential to the narrative around which the official memory took shape.

An Incomplete Gesture: Official Recognition During the Hollande Presidency

Shortly after his election in 2012, President Hollande received a letter from Josette Audin like many of his predecessors before him. In this letter, Josette implored: “It is time, more than 50 years after the end of the Algerian War, that the truth be known and recognized.”¹⁷⁶ Hopeful that this newly socialist government might bring with it a more open-minded approach to recognizing France’s past mistakes, Josette was initially disappointed when an *Elysée*

¹⁷⁴ “Letter from Anicet Le Pors, Deputy to the Minister of the Armed Forces,” Nov. 11 1982. Carton 3, *Fonds Josette Audin*, La Contemporaine.

¹⁷⁵ “Letter from Claude Jorda, Director of Judicial Services to Josette Audin,” Feb. 1 1984. Carton 3, *Fonds Josette Audin*, La Contemporaine.

¹⁷⁶ “La lettre de Josette Audin à François Hollande,” *L’Humanité*, Dec. 14-16 2012, 4.

representative replied that “the President of the Republic did not have any new information that would allow him to respond to the questions [she] had raised.”¹⁷⁷ However, in the context of increased efforts to improve French-Algerian relations and strengthen strategic and economic ties, Hollande soon demonstrated an apparent change of heart. In the run-up to his first official Algerian visit in December 2012, he wrote to Josette:

More than fifty years after the end of the Algerian War, the French state must face up to its responsibilities and to the duty of truth which it owes to you and your family, but equally to all [French] citizens ... I am undertaking a state visit to Algeria in several days. On this occasion, I will visit the Maurice Audin Square [in Algiers], in homage to the memory of your husband.¹⁷⁸

Echoing Chirac’s earlier recognition of the “duty” of memory,¹⁷⁹ François Hollande thus became the first French president to recognize that the “truth” had not yet come out about Maurice Audin, effectively discrediting the Army’s thesis of evasion.

A week later, Hollande paid his respects at the Maurice Audin Square in Algiers. The following day, he made a landmark speech at the Algerian parliament in which he recognized the 132-year-long “profoundly unjust and brutal system” of colonization and the “suffering that this colonization inflicted on the Algerian people.”¹⁸⁰ Showing little reticence in condemning France’s past actions, he acknowledged the violent massacre of Algerian troops at Sétif and Guelma in May 1945 and the crimes committed during the “war, which for a long time [had] not had its



President Hollande at Maurice Audin Square in Algiers, 2012

¹⁷⁷ “Letter from Bernard Abbo to Josette Audin,” Aug. 28 2012, Carton 4, *Fonds Josette Audin*, La Contemporaine.

¹⁷⁸ “Le président Hollande répond à Josette Audin,” *L’Humanité*, Dec. 17 2012, <https://www.humanite.fr/societe/le-president-hollande-repond-josette-audin-511139>.

¹⁷⁹ The full text of Chirac’s speech is available at: Sophie Guerrier, “Le discours de Jacques Chirac au Vel d’hiv en 1995,” *Figaro*, 31 mars 2014, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/le-scan/2014/03/27/25001-20140327ARTFIG00092-le-discours-de-jacques-chirac-au-vel-d-hiv-en-1995.php>.

¹⁸⁰ “VIDEO. Hollande reconnaît ‘les souffrances que la colonisation a infligé au peuple algérien’” *franceinfo*, Dec. 20 2012, https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/video-hollande-reconnait-les-souffrances-infligees-par-la-colonisation-francaise-en-algerie_190385.html

name heard in France.”¹⁸¹ Hollande affirmed, again reiterating concepts first established by Chirac: “We [the French people] have respect for memory, for all memory. We have this duty of truth with regards the violence, the injustices, the massacres, the tortures. To know, to establish the truth is an obligation.”¹⁸² While not mentioned by name, Maurice Audin’s presence hung heavy over these words.

Josette, however, was by no means satisfied with Hollande’s recognition and its failure to explicitly state the *responsibility* of the French Army for her husband’s death and condemn France’s actions more generally. This is what had been so remarkable about Chirac’s 1995 speech: he had acknowledged outright that “France, land of the Enlightenment and of Human Rights, land of hospitality and asylum ... committed the irreparable.”¹⁸³ In February 2013, Josette wrote to Hollande: “I want first of all to say that I appreciate the homage you made to Maurice Audin ... during your visit to Algiers. I am nonetheless extremely disappointed that you did not, in the name of France, condemn the generalized use of torture and summary executions of which Maurice was one victim like thousands of other Algerians.”¹⁸⁴ She then went on to express her respects to Hollande, “in the constant hope that the truth about her husband’s disappearance be made known.”¹⁸⁵ In a subsequent letter a year later, Josette reiterated in even stronger terms her desire that the archives be opened more generally and that “the attitude [Hollande] had indicated in Algeria in December 2012 bring an end to the state lie in regards to her husband.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸¹ “VIDEO. Hollande reconnaît ‘les souffrances que la colonisation a infligé au peuple algérien’” *franceinfo*.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ As Cited in Julie Fette, “Apology and the Past in Contemporary France,” *French Politics, Culture & Society*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Summer 2008), 81.

¹⁸⁴ “Letter from Josette Audin to François Hollande,” Feb. 1 2013, Carton 4, *Fonds Josette Audin*, La Contemporaine.

¹⁸⁵ “Letter from Josette Audin to François Hollande,” Feb. 1 2013.

¹⁸⁶ “Letter from Josette Audin to François Hollande,” Feb. 24 2014, Carton 4, *Fonds Josette Audin*, La Contemporaine.

Yet again, Josette's demands amounted to little in the short term; however, in the context of a growing public debate around the Audin Affair in 2014 with the publication of the *Appel des 171*¹⁸⁷ – an open letter modeled after the earlier *Appel des Douze* – Hollande made a further step towards official recognition. In response to an invitation from Gérard Tronel to make a statement at the upcoming Maurice Audin prize ceremony, Hollande invited Josette to the *Elysée*. While Josette gathered from this meeting that Hollande would finally make an explicit recognition of France's responsibility in the atrocities of the Algerian War, this hope was short-lived.¹⁸⁸ In his statement released the next day, Hollande remained equally equivocal as before. Reiterating his commitment to making the truth known and opening the archives, Hollande went no further than to acknowledge that “Mr. Audin did not escape. He died during his detention.”¹⁸⁹ Having briefly held out hope that her struggle might finally be over, Josette would have to wait another four years to receive the recognition of responsibility she sought.

“At Last”: The groundbreaking declaration of Emmanuel Macron

It fell to the next president, Emmanuel Macron, to complete the job. Macron had already demonstrated an interest in the relationship between memory, history, and colonialism as a student at *Sciences-Po*, even assisting his mentor Paul Ricoeur with the writing of his 2003 book, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*.^{190 191} This academic interest continued throughout Macron's life and his presidential campaign. In an effort to distinguish himself from his competitor, Marine Le

¹⁸⁷ “Maurice Audin. L'appel des 141 pour la vérité,” *L'Humanité*, March 31 2014, <https://www.humanite.fr/lappel-des-171-pour-la-verite>.

¹⁸⁸ François Demerliac in conversation with the author, January 2020.

¹⁸⁹ François Hollande, “Message du Président de la République à l'occasion de la remise du prix Maurice AUDIN pour les mathématiques,” *Elysée*, June 18 2014, <https://web.archive.org/web/20140813142432/http://www.elysee.fr/declarations/article/message-du-president-de-la-republique-a-l-occasion-de-la-remise-du-prix-maurice-audin-pour-les-mathematiques/>.

¹⁹⁰ In English, *Memory, History and Forgetting*.

¹⁹¹ Sylvie Thénault in conversation with the author, August 2019.

Pen – daughter of the infamous National Front founder – and her racist policies, Macron started his electoral campaign by visiting Algeria and committing to facing up to France’s colonial past. While in Algeria, he became embroiled in a major scandal after referring to French colonization as a “crime against humanity.” Successfully salvaging his campaign, however, Macron would then appoint French-Algerian historian Benjamin Stora as an advisor upon election. The first president to have been born long after the Algerian War, Macron found himself uniquely positioned to mark a rupture with the previous erasure of this conflict in official memory.

This moment finally came on September 13th, 2018. In a declaration presented to Josette at her home, Macron formally recognized that



*President Macron at Josette’s home, September 13th, 2018
(Image courtesy of L’Humanité)*

[Maurice’s] disappearance was made possible by a system that successive governments had allowed to develop: the system known ... as ‘*arrestation-détention*’ allowed the forces of order to arrest, detain, and interrogate all ‘suspects’ in order to lead the most efficient fight against the enemy ... This system was the horrific breeding ground of sometimes terrible acts, including torture, which the Audin Affair has demonstrated.¹⁹²

As Pierre would say the following day

in a televised *France 24* interview: “At last.”¹⁹³ At last, France had recognized its Army’s responsibility for Maurice Audin’s death. At last, the French state had taken responsibility for the use of torture as a political weapon during the Algerian War.

¹⁹² Emmanuel Macron, “Déclaration du Président de la République sur la mort de Maurice Audin,” *Elysée*, Sep. 13 2018, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2018/09/13/declaration-du-president-de-la-republique-sur-la-mort-de-maurice-audin>.

¹⁹³ “Affaire Maurice Audin : une demande de pardon historique, une avancée pour l’Algérie,” *France24*, 14 September 2018, <https://www.france24.com/fr/20180914-affaire-maurice-audin-macron-france-demande-pardon-historique-avancee-algerie>.

“The widow who asked eight French presidents for the truth”

This historic break with silence and denial marked the culmination of Josette’s decades-long struggle. At the same time, however, it was ultimately the result of multiple factors. Perhaps most importantly, thanks to decades of historical work¹⁹⁴ and political activism, of which the Audin Affair was but one small part, the public consensus had shifted towards acknowledging France’s large-scale use of torture in Algeria. What had remained to be accomplished was the recognition of the perpetrator itself – the French state. Moreover, by 2018, much of the generation for whom an apology for the Algerian War would be so offensive – namely French veterans involved in this conflict – were increasingly too frail to sustain their previous resistance.¹⁹⁵ As had been the case with Chirac’s 1995 declaration, the official stance thus lagged far behind the historical and popular consensus.

The accomplishment of the declaration itself is typically attributed to the mathematician Cédric Villani. A member of Macron’s party, elected to the National Assembly in 2017, Villani empathized with the promising mathematician’s story and used his political influence to bring the declaration about.¹⁹⁶ Josette remained secondary to negotiations and it was primarily Pierre who represented his mother at the *Elysée*.¹⁹⁷ While Josette’s actual involvement in the Audin Affair necessarily lessened in this period, her symbolic involvement became more important than ever. This was in part because of her undisputed role as gatekeeper of this memory, as recognized previously, but also because of the strategic role she could play as a vehicle for France to deal with its complicated Algerian past.

¹⁹⁴ Again, the most notable examples of this are the works of Raphaëlle Branche and Sylvie Thénault.

¹⁹⁵ Sylvie Thénault in conversation with the author, August 2019.

¹⁹⁶ Pierre Audin in conversation with the author, January 2020.

¹⁹⁷ Michèle Audin in conversation with the author, January 2020.

This strategic value has been most explicitly examined in the context of the Mothers Movements. Gülsüm Baydar and Berfin İvegen have identified the unique power of gendered familial tropes as non-threatening in political, male-dominated spaces. They write,

motherhood is a safe female category in patriarchal culture. As it is defined outside feminine sexuality, it does not pose a threat to the dominant fiction that is based on masculine domination and control ... Associated with the domestic sphere, [the mother] perpetuates familial hierarchies and the paternal order, which form the basis of social order ... Hence, [the use of motherhood] domesticates the sittings, renders [the protestors] safe and harmless in the eye of the public. It turns public attention away from the political content of the protest to the private realm of emotion ... possible political outrage is instead channeled toward private sentiments toward a mother who has lost her child.¹⁹⁸

A similar claim can be made about the grieving widow. She too, by dedicating her life to her husband and their children and by refusing to remarry similarly exists outside of feminine sexuality. While the widow remains more threatening than the mother, she is still ultimately supportive of the nuclear family and dominant patriarchal order. The grieving widow, like the grieving mother, exists as a universally recognizable figure in a domestic context. Josette therefore, as a devastated widow and mother to orphaned children, served to soften and outwardly depoliticize the French apology for its crimes in Algeria. When the Maurice Audin Association reached out to President Hollande for a statement, he did not respond by inviting the male, politically active association president, Gérard Tronel, to the *Elysée* but rather Josette. During this meeting, it was Josette's own heroism, as opposed to Maurice's story or the Communist and anticolonial cause for which he died, that Hollande focused upon: "I wanted to meet *you*, myself, after the many efforts that *you* have made throughout so many years. We have ensured that everything [from the archives] be shared with *you*" (emphasis added).¹⁹⁹ By

¹⁹⁸ Gülsüm Baydar and Berfin İvegen, "Territories, Identities, and Thresholds: The Saturday Mothers Phenomenon in İstanbul," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 31, no. 3 (Spring 2006), 695-696.

¹⁹⁹ François Demerliac, "Maurice Audin, une histoire de mathématiciens," *Le blob, l'extra-média, Youtube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LRLBOeg1caE&feature=emb_title.

focusing his recognition on Josette, Hollande universalized it beyond the fraught context of the Algerian War.

This impulse to universalize was all the more evident in Macron's engagement with the Audin Affair. Thénault recalls how Macron and his counsellors were at pains to prevent the declaration from appearing partisan. She recounts: "one of the first questions that [Villani] asked me was, 'can you assure me that [Maurice] was not involved in the bombings?' If not, there would never have been a declaration."²⁰⁰ Likewise, according to Pierre and Thénault, Macron intentionally made his declaration the day before a large-scale festival hosted by the Communist newspaper *L'Humanité*, so as not to appear to be giving in to specifically Communist demands.²⁰¹

In the declaration itself, Macron further universalized his statement by framing his denunciation of France's war crimes as an inclusive affirmation of French Republican values rather than a divisive condemnation of colonialism:

At stake is the honor of *all* French people who, *civilian or military*, denounced torture, did not engage with it or refrained from it and who, today as before, refuse to be equated with those who implemented and practiced it. At stake is the honor of *all* the soldiers who have died for France and *all* those more generally who lost their lives in this conflict. At stake, above all, is the duty of truth which lies with the French Republic ... there is no freedom, equality, and brotherhood [*pas de liberté, d'égalité et de fraternité*] without the exercise of truth. (emphasis added)²⁰²

Historians Peter Carrier and Julie Fette have identified a similar "strong sense of nationhood and national continuity" in Chirac's 1995 apology.²⁰³ In much the same way as Chirac "distilled images of a negative Vichy with ... affirmations of positive republican values,"²⁰⁴ Macron

²⁰⁰ Sylvie Thénault in conversation with the author, August 2019.

²⁰¹ Both in conversation with the author, August 2019.

²⁰² Macron, "Déclaration du Président de la République sur la mort de Maurice Audin."

²⁰³ Fette, "Apology and the Past in Contemporary France," 81.

²⁰⁴ Fette, "Apology and the Past in Contemporary France," 81.

successfully neutralized his condemnation of French torture in Algeria under the guise of reaffirming French republicanism.

Moreover, and to a greater extent than Hollande before him, Macron universalized his declaration through the sympathetic figure of Josette and her strategic utility as a depoliticizing force. His declaration begins with Maurice and Josette's individual story before expanding to make larger claims about French rule in Algeria. Employing intentionally emotive language, firmly situated within the familiar idiom and remarkably reminiscent of Josette's own narrative, Macron describes how "Josette Audin, left alone with three young children, detained for several days in her apartment, strived as soon as she could to try and find out where her husband was detained."²⁰⁵ All subsequent claims he went on to make thus remained rooted in this universally tragic story. When he referred to the widespread practice of torture by the French Army in Algeria, it was the image of the young, bereaved Josette, left alone with her three children that was implied. Even the declaration's official title – "The President of the Republic's Declaration about the Death of Maurice Audin" – suggests it relates to Maurice Audin alone, not to all Algerian victims of French war crimes. While this was not the case, Maurice is indeed the only victim identified by name.

The centrality of Josette's affective importance in the text itself was explicitly reinforced by the optics of the event. Josette had been at the *Elysée* three days prior to approve the text; however, no one wrote about this.²⁰⁶ The lasting image captured by the press is of the President sitting on a squat couch in Josette's home to make his apology. In conversation, Macron spoke mostly about Josette's story. He remarked, "when there are ... people like you, who fight [and]

²⁰⁵ Macron, "Déclaration du Président de la République sur la mort de Maurice Audin."

²⁰⁶ Michèle Audin in conversation with the author, January 2020.

never give up during decades, it is required” to recognize it.²⁰⁷ Once again situating the moment within a larger narrative of revindicating French values, Macron remarked of Josette’s unwavering tenacity: “Ultimately, it is quite French.”²⁰⁸ When Josette thanked Macron for coming to her home he replied, “No, it is rather up to me to ask for your forgiveness.”²⁰⁹ To return to Barkan and Karn’s argument, this official apology was a means to “amend the past,” entering Maurice Audin into the official memory from which he had been excluded.

In content and in form, Macron’s declaration centered on the narrative of a grieving widow who had at last accomplished what she had fought her entire life to achieve. The same was true of press coverage of the event. While the declaration was most importantly a landmark recognition of French war crimes committed in Algeria that broke with previous official silence, it was the image of Macron extending his hands in apology to Josette that graced newspaper pages around the world. Articles described the moment as “Emmanuel Macron’s visit to Josette Audin” and “an historical demand for forgiveness.”²¹⁰ One BBC journalist used the headline, “The widow who asked eight French presidents for the truth.”²¹¹ The idiom of the grieving widow within the public consciousness proved as powerful as ever.

Literary critic Marianne Hirsch has recognized this danger of social frameworks and their tendency to erase the specificities of a traumatic event. She writes, “the very accessibility of familial idioms ... needs ... to engender suspicion on our part: does not locating trauma in the space of family personalize and individualize it too much? Does it not risk occluding a public

²⁰⁷ “Les images historiques de la visite d’Emmanuel Macron à Josette Audin,” L’Obs, *Youtube*, Sep. 14 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8h95TpRIUU>.

²⁰⁸ “Les images historiques de la visite d’Emmanuel Macron à Josette Audin.”

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ “GUERRE D’ALGÉRIE – Affaire Maurice Audin : Une demande de pardon historique, une avancée pour l’Algérie,” *France24*, Sep. 14 2018; “Les images historiques de la visite d’Emmanuel Macron à Josette Audin,” L’Obs, Sep. 14 2018.

²¹¹ Charlotte McDonald, “The widow who asked eight French presidents for the truth,” *BBC News*, Jan. 17 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/stories-46897151>.

historical context and responsibility, blurring significant differences?”²¹² It was exactly this tendency, however, that proved to be the ultimate strategic benefit of the Audin Affair for the French presidency. Public opinion had shifted to such an extent that it was a matter of time before such an official declaration about the Algerian War would have to be made. It was not given that this would happen through the story of Maurice Audin but was in large part because Josette held a particular strategic appeal. Where any such official gesture had previously been met with fierce resistance from veterans and *pieds-noirs*²¹³ – the most obvious example being Macron’s own “crime against humanity” scandal during his election campaign – the “accessible lingua franca” of the grieving widow allowed Hollande and Macron to use Josette as a universally sympathetic vehicle through which to address the fraught memory of the Algerian War.

The Power of the “Powerless”

None of this is to say that Josette was a mere symbolic device, used by the French presidency for its own benefit. Perhaps the most remarkable trajectory of the Audin Affair is the stunning reversal of power between Josette and the French State. In July 1957, Josette desperately asked representatives of the French Army, in vain, for any news about her husband. As an unknown mother-of-three living in Algiers, the only way she could have her voice heard in the French metropole was through the mediation of predominantly male intellectuals. Here, too, it was her perceived “powerlessness” that had moved many of them to adopt her cause. Even when she had acquired renown as Maurice Audin’s widow, she remained powerless for decades

²¹² Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 39.

²¹³ Algerians of European origins. Many of them maintained that French colonialism in the region had been a positive endeavor.

in light of a State-sponsored silence through amnesty laws. In 2018, however, it was the President who needed *her* approval. Pierre fondly recalls how

Macron's representatives from the *Elysée* made absolutely sure that [Josette] agreed with the declaration because they were terrified of what she might say afterwards ... the orders from the *Elysée* stated: if there was something that [she] did not like, if [she] thought that it was not correct, they would stop everything ... and write it all over again."²¹⁴

This remarkable inversion of power is a testament to Josette's tenacity but also, more counterintuitively, to what Diana Taylor has referred to as "the symbolic, and at times actual, power of the 'powerless.'"²¹⁵ While Josette's affective potential as grieving widow relied on an image of powerlessness, this non-threatening powerlessness was what ultimately gave her the power for her voice to be heard. Where the idiom of the family and its implications of female powerlessness had served as a powerful affective device in the construction of the initial *political narrative* and creation of the subsequent *public memory* of Maurice Audin's death, it now served to render the French condemnation of its colonial past less politically-fraught and more palatable in the long overdue establishment of an *official memory* of the Algerian War.

²¹⁴ Pierre Audin in conversation with the author, August 2019.

²¹⁵ Diana Taylor, "Traumatic Memes," 129.

EPILOGUE – A WOMAN HAS DISAPPEARED?

Shrewd Odysseus! ... You are a fortunate man to have won a wife of such pre-eminent virtue! How faithful was your flawless Penelope, Icarus' daughter! How loyally she kept the memory of the husband of her youth! The glory of her virtue will not fade with the years, but the deathless gods themselves will make a beautiful song for mortal ears in honor of the constant Penelope.

– *The Odyssey, Book 24 (191-194)*

Josette Audin *née* Sempé passed away a little less than five months after President Macron's declaration, on February 2nd, 2019. Rather than marking the end of the Affair Audin, however, Josette's death has given it a new life as her memory and that of the affair have begun to merge. Increasingly, the Audin Affair has become a story of a woman's unwavering pursuit for the truth as well as of an innocent man's unjust death. On December 17th, 2019, participants at the Maurice Audin Association general assembly voted to change its name to the Josette and Maurice Audin Association. As President of the Association, Pierre Mansat, recognized in summer 2019: "Maurice's fight is inseparable from the extraordinary willingness of his wife to lead this fight for 62 years."²¹⁶

And yet, perhaps herein lies the problem. In death as in life, through her own actions as well as others', Josette Audin was never known as anything other than Maurice Audin's widow. Since the publication of the tract by the same name in 1961, the phrase "A Man has Disappeared" has become synonymous with Maurice's story and yet, as Michèle recognizes,

[Josette] also ... disappeared in this story ... She completely ruined her life with this affair. In fact, it wasn't her who ruined it but at the same time she ruined it as well ... she put herself in that position [of just being Maurice's widow]. She never brought her own

²¹⁶ Pierre Mansat in conversation with the author, August 2019.

personal qualities to the fore ... so that she disappeared also ... At the same time, the press made no effort to really get to know her.²¹⁷

The thirty-two boxes of Josette's personal archives also attest to a life defined by disappearance. Innumerable drafts of Maurice's doctoral thesis and notebooks filled with scribbled graphs take up four archival boxes. In another box, Maurice's leather-bound agenda remains bookmarked to the month of his death, a letter received less than two weeks before lying open on the page. Josette's archive is an altar to the eternally young Maurice, frozen at the moment of his disappearance. Even in her own life record, Josette has disappeared.

At the same time, Josette's disappearance is a consequence of the way in which the public and official memory was constructed around her story. Upon her passing, one *France 24* article, "Death of Josette Audin, widow of the activist Maurice Audin," referred to her as "wife of mathematician and militant communist Maurice Audin" and elsewhere "widow of Maurice Audin, the young militant communist tortured and killed by the French Army in 1957."²¹⁸ Even in death, Josette was the syntactical subclause to Maurice: he was the mathematician, he was the militant communist ... and she was his devoted wife. The same was true of homages paid to Josette by public figures. The PCF national secretary, Fabien Roussel, remarked "She fought all her life for the truth and the memory of her husband. She leaves having finally seen this state crime recognized."²¹⁹ President Macron's declaration followed a similar theme: "The President of the Republic applauds the immense courage of a woman who, through love and conviction, never stopped fighting for justice and the truth ... Mrs. Audin's life was a life of love and of resistance for her husband and for the truth. It is her viaticum and the source of our profound

²¹⁷ Michèle Audin in conversation with the author, January 2020.

²¹⁸ "Décès de Josette Audin, veuve du militant Maurice Audin, torture en Algérie," *France 24*, Feb. 4 2019, <https://www.france24.com/fr/20190204-deces-josette-audin-veuve-militant-maurice-audin-guerre-algerie-reconnaissance>.

²¹⁹ "Décès de Josette Audin, veuve du militant Maurice Audin, torture en Algérie," *France 24*.

respect.”²²⁰ In a bizarre use of Catholic language to describe a Communist militant, Josette’s life is reduced to a saintly pursuit of justice for her husband.

Of course, this was far from the case. As Sylvie Thénault acknowledges, “we can see [Josette] as a victimized woman ... but in fact she was a true political militant and that is something that we typically miss because we see her first and foremost as the female victim.”²²¹ The necessary performativity of her public and politicized grief, the universal narrative of the grieving widow which had proved so essential to the affair’s political success, was also what brought about her erasure as an individual. This same tension has been identified in the Mothers Movements. These women too erased their individual identities, holding photos of their sons in front of their faces, shrouding their heads in white scarves, and at times covering their mouths with tape to perform their grief. As Baydar and Ivegen note,

At one level, one may argue for the effectiveness of the hiding of the mothers' faces ... since the story of the protestors concerned the sons rather than the mothers. At another level, however, the phenomenon reinforces the notion of the impropriety of mothers visibly protesting in public space ... mothers covering their faces inadvertently and partially depoliticizes the movement by placing the mothers in the position of representing their sons rather than themselves, that is, rather than having their own voices heard.²²²

A narrative framework that relies on a normative, non-threatening gendered performance, reinforcing notions of female passivity and helplessness, inevitably requires an effacement of the individual woman and her voice. Moreover, as Diana Taylor recognizes, “The traumatic meme [or framework] ... depends on the simplicity of structure for its power and efficacy.”²²³ In order to successfully invoke the affective power of a cultural trope, it must be void of any potentially

²²⁰ “Décès de Josette Audin,” *Elysée*, Feb 4 2019, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2019/02/04/deces-de-josette-audin>.

²²¹ Sylvie Thénault in conversation with the author, August 2019.

²²² Baydar and Ivegen, “Territories, Identities, and Thresholds,” 705.

²²³ Taylor, “Traumatic Memes,” 116.

complicating particularities. In some ways, at least for herself, Josette's greatest success was erasing her own story so that Maurice's could be heard. Of course, none of this makes it any easier for those who knew Josette to see her reduced to a martyr. As both of Josette's children are quick to assert, she was far more than that to them. Pierre affirms, "I am a communist because she was a communist, I am a mathematician because she was a mathematician and got us interested in mathematics."²²⁴ Nor does this excuse the fact that little work has been done to truly understand the woman behind the symbol.²²⁵

I was deeply aware of this tension in writing my thesis. Where does my work situate itself with regards the fraught question of Josette Audin? The *woman* who disappeared. The woman who disappeared through her own volition. In many ways, my thesis is complicit in this act; it quite literally looks at Josette exclusively in regards to her role in the construction of Maurice's memory. At the same time, however, this thesis is founded upon the underlying assumption that by identifying "Josette Audin, widow of Maurice Audin" as, at least in part, a strategic narrative phenomenon, more room can be made to appreciate Josette for everything else that she was: the first of her family to complete high school and go to university, a life-long communist and anti-colonialist, an avid fan of the *Tour de France*, a beloved teacher, a devoted mother, and a hero of the anti-racist movement.

While striving to make apparent the fundamental importance of gender within the construction of political and memorial narratives in the Audin Affair and its afterlives, in an effort to more fully comprehend Josette's role as both its author and protagonist, subject and object, this thesis – like Macron's declaration itself – is just the beginning of more work to be

²²⁴ Pierre Audin in conversation with the author, August 2019.

²²⁵ An important exception to this is a piece written by Nathalie Funès, "Un portrait de Josette Audin," in *Réparer l'injustice : l'Affaire Maurice Audin*, ed. Sylvie Thénault and Magalie Besse (Paris: Institut Francophone pour la Justice et la Démocratie, 2019).

done: the work of remembering all victims of the Algerian war, not just those who fit neatly into narrative frameworks that more readily lend themselves to memorialization. Memory is an act of selective forgetting and in the French public and official memories of the Algerian War, Arab and Muslim Algerian victims remain largely voiceless and forgotten. The necessary work to repair this selective amnesia is already underway. Two days after Macron's declaration, *1000Others.org* was launched as a joint initiative between the Maurice Audin Association and *histoirecoloniale.net*, to identify the people "kidnapped, illegally detained, tortured and at times murdered by the French Army ... the Maurice Audins by the thousands."²²⁶ Available in both French and Arabic, this transnational historical project attempts to enter the anonymous victims into the public and official memories of the war through oral history and personal testimony.

The legacy of the Audin Affair is therefore fraught. The fact that it remains an emblematic story in the French collective memory of the Algerian War reinforces the Eurocentrism of the conversation. And yet it's unique ability to satisfy familiar social frameworks – themselves highly contingent on dynamics of race, class, and gender for their familiarity – enabled it to bring about an unprecedented official recognition of French war crimes in Algeria, opening the way for further important historical work to be done. As Macron recognized in 2018, "the work of memory is not accomplished with this declaration ... The development of this work of truth should open the path to a better comprehension of our past, to a greater lucidity towards the wounds of our history, and to a new willingness to reconcile the memories of the French and Algerian people."²²⁷ Collective memory is not created by a single act but through a cumulative network of reconstructions of the past. Josette dedicated her life to preserving her husband's memory and holding the French state responsible for his death but she

²²⁶ *1000autres*, <http://1000autres.org/appele-a-temoin>.

²²⁷ Macron, "Déclaration du Président de la République sur la mort de Maurice Audin."

ultimately fought “not just so that what happened to [Maurice] be recognized but that [the French state] recognize all that had happened to the Algerian people.”²²⁸ It is in honor of her life that new generations now turn to achieving memorial justice for all the victims of this painful colonial war.

²²⁸ Pierre Audin in conversation with the author, January 2020.

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