

# ‘IT’S NOT WHAT I SAW, IT’S NOT WHAT I THOUGHT’: CHALLENGES ‘FROM BELOW’ TO DOMINANT VERSIONS OF THE FRENCH WARTIME PAST

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## ABSTRACT:

This article draws on the oral history narratives of three people who were children in France during the Second World War to demonstrate their dissatisfactions with dominant versions of this past put forward in authoritative public discourse. Rachel was a Jewish child, persecuted, abused, but saved; Anne-Marie was the daughter of a railway resistance fighter who was deported and killed; Grégoire was a child evacuee who survived a violent bombardment. At various moments of their adult lives, each experienced a disruptive form of dissociation with their (personal) history as lived and experienced in comparison with (national) History as researched and recounted. All three invested in healing this wound, in private and public ways. Norquay (1999) writes that forgetting is ‘an active process which can involve denial, refusal, discrediting, silencing, omitting’; this article shows the generative power of *feeling* forgotten, denied, refused, discredited, silenced or omitted, to inspire action which challenges hegemonic discourse. Central to its argument is a call to attend to what feelings do within societies. (Ahmed, 2014) While much influential scholarship is dedicated to top-down analyses French post-war memorial culture (*mémoire*), less attention is given to personal *souvenirs* of ‘ordinary’ or ‘unimportant’ people, particularly those who were children; such voices and the claims they make have at times been characterised as competitive and damaging to the ‘coherence of the national narrative’ (Wieviorka, 2012). Yet by failing to listen, dominant historical discourse may provoke damaging sentiments of resentment, exclusion and shame.

KEYWORDS: oral history, history, memory, France, Second World War, children, affect, discourse, France, twentieth century, Second World War

# **« CE N'EST PAS CE QUE J'AI VU. CE N'EST PAS CE QUE J'AI PENSE » : OU COMMENT LES REPRESENTATIONS « D'EN BAS » DEFIENT LES VERSIONS DOMINANTES DU PASSE FRANÇAIS DE LA SECONDE GUERRE MONDIALE**

Cet article restitue les récits oraux de trois personnes qui ont vécu la Seconde Guerre Mondiale en France alors qu'ils étaient des enfants. Il interroge leurs insatisfactions vis-à-vis des versions dominantes du passé émanant des discours publics qui font autorité. Rachel fut une petite fille juive persécutée, violente et sauvée ; Anne-Marie était la fille d'un résistant français travaillant dans les chemins de fer qui fut déporté et assassiné ; Grégoire était un enfant évacué qui survécut à un violent bombardement. A différents moments au cours de leur vie d'adulte, chacun a expérimenté une troublante forme de dissociation entre leur histoire personnelle, telle qu'ils l'ont vécue et l'ont ressentie, et l'histoire nationale et académique, telle qu'elle est restituée. Chacun a cherché à panser cette blessure de diverses façons, en privé et de manière publique. Norquay (1999) a montré combien l'oubli est « un processus actif qui peut impliquer le déni, le refus, le discrédit, la mise sous silence, l'omission » ; cet article s'attache à décrire le pouvoir que génère le sentiment d'être oublié, dénié, refusé, disqualifié, mis sous silence ou omis, inspirant des actions qui défient les discours hégémoniques. Au cœur de son argumentation est un appel à prêter attention à « ce que font les sentiments » dans les sociétés (Ahmed, 2014). Alors que la plupart des travaux académiques influents sont dédiés à des analyses par « le haut » des cultures mémorielles liées à l'après-conflit en France, peu de recherches se sont intéressées aux souvenirs personnels des personnes « ordinaires » ou de « peu d'importance », et en particulier aux enfants ; leurs voix et les revendications qu'elles portent ont été souvent réduites à une concurrence susceptible de nuire à la « cohérence du récit national » (Wieviorka, 2012), tandis que l'incapacité ou l'absence de volonté du discours historique hégémonique à les écouter a créé en retour des sentiments de honte, d'exclusion et de ressentiment.

Mots-clés : histoire orale, mémoire, France, Seconde Guerre Mondiale, enfants, affect, discours

France, vingtième siècle, Seconde Guerre Mondiale

# INTRODUCTION

During 2016 I visited various archives in France to collect oral narratives of French wartime childhoods. This research is part of the ‘Disrupted histories, recovered pasts’ project, which has been thinking through the ways in which ‘amateur’ histories can disrupt dominant versions of the past. By ‘amateur’ we mean those not created by history professionals (including historians but also including museum curators, filmmakers, journalists, educators, and so on); ‘amateur’ histories are typically non-elite histories, thus ‘from below’. By ‘dominant versions of the past’ we mean those created by and disseminated through academic channels, the media, the heritage industry, and so on, and which come to constitute authoritative public discourse. By ‘disrupt’, we mean reflect, refract and revise. I was interested to see how these oral narratives, which I will call ‘memory stories’,<sup>1</sup> of a subaltern population – the child population – might evidence these kinds of disruptions.

The narratives I collected included the memory stories of child refugees, those of persecuted Jewish children, of bereaved children, of orphaned children, stories of family separation and physical hardship, as well as stories of children’s everyday wartime lives, of school, food, family and friendship. The interviews had been recorded between the 1980s and the 2010s; some were filmed, some were created at the behest of archives, others by local historians, some through school projects, and others via heritage associations. Together with the oral narratives of wartime childhoods I have recorded myself, these memory stories comprise a data-set of 120 individual stories building a corpus of hundreds of thousands of words, experiences, thoughts and feelings.

While listening in Beaune, a comment in an interview drew my attention:

I get angry when I hear people who didn’t live through that period, particularly young historians, who explain to me what I am, what I was, what I thought – bah! It’s just not true! Who explain to me what I lived through – it’s not true, it’s not true. It’s not what I saw, it’s not what I thought, it’s not what I experienced [...] Everyone you talk to who lived through

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<sup>1</sup> In using this expression, I wish to emphasise both the remembered and narrated qualities of the oral narratives.

this period is pretty annoyed to hear that we were all either dirty collaborators [...] or all worthy resisters.<sup>2</sup>

Her words struck me forcefully. Marie-Rolande's dissatisfaction was reflected implicitly or explicitly in other oral narratives I have listened to: the professionals keep on telling a story which focuses on certain things – notably, the structures, mechanisms and political, social and moral dimensions of resistance and collaboration – to such a degree that many could not recognise the version of their past which was being told. While all historians must accept the epistemological and methodological impossibility of including everyone and everything in the account they construct, it is worth heeding the complaint.

This article uses the memory stories of three people who were children in France during the Second World War to suggest the ways in which they have sought to intervene in versions of the past put forward in authoritative public discourse. Rachel was persecuted and abused because she was Jewish; Anne-Marie was the daughter of a railway resistance fighter who was deported and killed; Grégoire was a child evacuee who experienced a violent bombardment in unusual circumstances. Each experienced a disruptive form of dissociation with their (personal) history as lived and experienced in comparison with (national) history as researched and recounted. And each invested in healing this wound, in private and public ways. Understanding their feelings and actions provides a valuable critique of hegemonic history making, which runs certain risks at a societal level. Naomi Norquay writes that forgetting is 'an active process which can involve denial, refusal, discrediting, silencing, omitting' (Norquay, 1999, 2). In this article I argue, more specifically, for the generative power of *feeling* forgotten, denied, refused, discredited, silenced or omitted, to inspire action which challenges – however gently – dominant discourse.

I take feelings seriously (Phillips, 2008, 52). Listening acutely to hundreds of these memory stories, it is difficult to disagree with Norquay that 'the memory of the event is precipitated by the memory of the feeling' (Norquay, 1999, 11). Without an understanding of the distribution and circulation of feelings – affects, emotions – in and around the discussion of the past – memory, History, public history – our knowledge of that past is incomplete. Drawing on the work of Sara Ahmed and others, I hold that we must see emotions and affects – the terms interpenetrate (Ahmed, 2014)<sup>3</sup> – as going both 'beyond psychological processes that a subject

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<sup>2</sup> Archives municipales de Beaune: Interview with Marie-Rolande Cornuéjols, undated and unclassified. All translations from the French are my own unless specified.

<sup>3</sup> Ahmed writes that she is not interested in distinguishing emotions from affects 'as if they refer to different aspects of experience' (2014, 208, my emphasis), instead recognising the commingled nature of affecting, being affected by, registering that experience, or otherwise.

inhabits or possesses' (Kumar, 2013, 714) and beyond a set of changing cultural representations in text or image (which forms the bulk of work on the history/historicization of emotions). (Fox, 2015; also Trigg, 2014)<sup>4</sup> Instead of identifying what emotions are (or may have been), we need to consider what they do (Ahmed, 2014, 4). Feelings<sup>5</sup> circulate within societies; they accrete around certain histories, memories, processes, pasts and people and acquire intensities which, in turn, precipitate new feelings and actions.<sup>6</sup> They are the fleeting, dynamic alliances between material and non-material objects, between people and ideas, and inside relationships to time and place.<sup>7</sup> In the cases of Rachel, Anne-Marie and Grégoire, active, constructive outlets for remembering and being listened to mitigated a toxic accretion of negative feeling around particular aspects of the past. Yet left unheard, negative intensities may deepen, with the capacity too for precipitating action; the consequences may have detrimental impacts on social cohesion, inclusion and acceptance in the present, and into the future via intergenerational transfer.

It is not possible in this article for me to prove or disprove the preceding point, as it stems from *not* having listened, or *not* having made known, and concerns a future which has not yet happened. What I can show, however, is how three people felt dissatisfied with the ways that a past they had lived were being told, and what they did about it. By doing so, I highlight the power of feelings to inspire both smaller- and larger-scale action 'from below'. Furthermore, I insist that permitting multiple, and non-professional voices, to contribute to the historical record need not be divisive, morcellating or dangerously populist – as certain critics propose. I will begin by introducing the three individuals giving a broad outline of the events of their childhoods around which their stories revolve. Then, drawing on a small part of an impossibly vast literature, I sketch out the processes by which a version of the past becomes hegemonic, the anxieties of some history professionals over the fragmentation of a national narrative, and the risks of upholding that dominant stance. The bulk of the article then explores in depth the

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<sup>4</sup> Drawing on Ahmed, Nick Fox notes the restrictive practice of conceiving emotion 'either as something escaping from the interior of a body, or the product of exterior forces seeping in' (Fox, 2015, 304).

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the value of the vagueness of 'feelings' as an analytical category, in opposition to, say, the more theoretically defined terms emotions or affect, see Highmore (2017), especially chapter 2. Like Ahmed, Highmore sees the interdisciplinary wrangling around definitions as a bind; remaining flexible is more productive. Of affect and emotion, Ahmed (2014) writes that 'just because we *can* separate them does not mean that they *are* separate' (210, her emphasis), and later comments that she 'hope[s] for an intellectual horizon in which emotion and effect are not taken as choices that lead us down separate paths' (fn 8, 230). Perhaps Highmore's attention to feeling and mood takes us closer to that horizon.

<sup>6</sup> Patricia Clough (2004, 15) has written of an 'affect economy' to describe the transformative flow of affects between bodies in relation to power and the production of social life.

<sup>7</sup> This cultural process is powerfully described by archaeologist Yannis Hamilakis (2017) in his article, 'Sensorial assemblages: affect, memory and temporality in assemblage thinking', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, 27.1 (2017), 167-182.

varieties of forgetting which caused Rachel, Anne-Marie and Grégoire dissatisfaction, and what they did about it.

## THREE CHILDREN IN WARTIME FRANCE

The three memory stories were chosen as telling examples of challenges to dominant versions of the past. Rachel was a persecuted Jewish child. Her story was recorded by the Archives municipales du Val de Marne in February 2008.<sup>8</sup> Anne-Marie was the daughter of a railway worker who became a resistance activist.<sup>9</sup> Her story was recorded by the Association pour l'Histoire des Chemins de Fer (AHICF) in 2012. The same organisation also recorded Grégoire in 2012: a child evacuee who narrowly escaped death during an Allied bombardment.<sup>10</sup> These stories are laid side by side to explore the function of feeling in generating action: action to break silence, action to change perceptions, action to go on record.

Rachel was born in Paris in 1934. Her parents were Polish-Jewish immigrants who met and married in France. Rachel and her older sister had French nationality. She said that she knew she was Jewish, but the family were not practicing. In May 1941, her father was arrested and taken to the internment camp at Beaune-la-Rolande, where Rachel recalls visiting him once. Her mother tried to persuade him to escape, but he would not. They never saw him again. In July 1942, Rachel, her mother and sister were arrested during mass-round ups. Those from their neighbourhood were held temporarily in a theatre prior to being moved to the Vélodrome d'Hiver. The girls' mother saw an opportunity and told them to flee; she slapped their faces to force their action. Rachel describes the French policemen guarding the door as turning their heads as the girls escaped. They ran to their grandparents' flat. Later they glimpsed their mother twice, Rachel says, in Drancy concentration camp; she was deported on 29 July 1942 and killed. In February 1943, Rachel was again rounded up, this time with her grandmother and sister. Held temporarily in a police station, the girls remarkably persuaded the police to let them and their

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<sup>8</sup> Archives départementales du Val de Marne : 11AV 310 : interview with Rachel Jedinak, 4 February 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Association pour l'Histoire des Chemins de Fer : AV1 AT LO20/E01 : interview with Anne-Marie Laurens, 12 April 2012. See <http://www.memoire-orale.org/ent-fiche/LAURENSAM-FC-MOIR.pdf> for a résumé of the interview.

<sup>10</sup> Association pour l'Histoire des Chemins de Fer : AV1 AT G037/E01 : interview with Grégoire Guendjian, 14 April 2012. See <http://www.memoire-orale.org/ent-fiche/GUENDJIAN-FC-MOIR.pdf> for a résumé of the interview.

grandmother go: ‘get out of here’, they were told.<sup>11</sup> The children were placed in a Jewish children’s home, and then moved around safe-houses in the Paris region. Next they went west, billeted into different families under false identities. Rachel had to pretend to be a Protestant girl called Rolande from Brittany, orphaned by an air raid. Rachel’s carers were cruel and abusive, and, when they discovered she was Jewish, beat her and threatened her with denunciation. Again, she escaped, this time to her sister. She was found a better, safer place for the rest of the war. The orphaned girls returned to their grandmother after the liberation of Paris, to find their possessions looted. The post-war was a time of grief and difficulty for Rachel. It was not until the 1990s that she started to speak publicly about her experiences.

Anne-Marie was born in 1935 and lived with her parents and older sister in Châlons-sur-Marne,<sup>12</sup> where her father was deputy stationmaster. During the exodus of 1940, when frightened civilians fled the advancing Wehrmacht, the family was bombed on the road. Her father was injured and hospitalised. Once the family was reunited after the Armistice, Anne-Marie noted his dedication to his work and what she later learned to be his resistance activity: during every air raid, he would leave his family and rush to the station. Archival documents situate the start of his resistance activities in March 1941, as part of Résistance-Fer which disrupted and sabotaged German supply networks, and later his role in the military information network Uranus, under the S.R. Kléber umbrella of French military secret service operations.<sup>13</sup> As bombing intensified in early 1944, Anne-Marie’s parents evacuated her to relatives in the countryside. She recalls her father arriving by bicycle one evening in August. He stayed briefly to rest, but would not remain. Anne-Marie said goodbye and never saw him again. His resistance activity had been denounced. He was seized by the Gestapo, imprisoned, tortured and deported, dying in Dachau on 2 March 1945. His family learnt of his death in August 1945. It was Anne-Marie, aged ten, who stepped forward to receive his posthumous medals.

Grégoire’s parents were Armenians who had come to France in the wake of the genocide. He was born in 1932 and lived in the immigrant district of Bron in Lyon. The family was poor, he said, but the two sons were happy enough, despite the sporadic racism they experienced, which was exacerbated by the war. In 1944, Grégoire and his younger brother were to be evacuated

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<sup>11</sup> The expression ‘fichez le camp’ features as the strapline for Rachel’s 2018 memoir *Nous étions seulement des enfants* (2018) : <https://www.fayard.fr/documents-temoignages/nous-etions-seulement-des-enfants-9782213710006>. This article draws solely on the archived interview with Rachel, not on the other iterations of her story.

<sup>12</sup> Today, Châlons-en-Champagne, Marne.

<sup>13</sup> The brief details of Paul Mouton’s record can be found on the website of the Anciens des Services Spéciaux de la Défense nationale: <http://www.aassdn.org/araMnbiMf-Mz.html>.

away from the city on the orders of the municipality because of the imminent danger of heavy Allied air raids. On the morning of 26 May 1944, the boys arrived at the Gare de Vaise in the north-west of the city. While the train was waiting to depart, with around 400 children aboard plus their helpers and teachers, the air raid siren sounded. An argument broke out between the train drivers – who wanted the train to leave immediately – and the stationmaster – who thought it better to get the children off and into a shelter. The train pulled out of the station as the bombs began to fall. The station was destroyed along with much of the surrounding area. Other parts of the city were also bombed; over 700 people were killed, a thousand injured, and perhaps 25,000 bombed out.<sup>14</sup> Having escaped, Grégoire and his brother were billeted with host families in the countryside. His memories of this period are hazy. After what he remembers as a fairly short period of time, his mother collected her sons and they returned to Lyon. Grégoire recalled that after the war his father had tried to find those responsible for saving the children, but without success.

## BEING FORGOTTEN, FEELING FORGOTTEN

Why do Rachel, Anne-Marie and Grégoire – and Marie-Rolande – see around them a historical landscape that is dissatisfying in one way or another? It is worth pausing to consider how such landscapes are constructed, and how such disjunctions come about. The problem hinges on different conceptions, from ‘above’ and from ‘below’, of what history – or History – is, what it is made of and what it might be for. My own emphases on memory and feeling stem from a set of priorities in history-making which are both inclusive (of multiple perspectives) and inconclusive. I say inconclusive because I hold that history is always open-ended, susceptible to multiple interpretations because of the impossibility of certain verification, and remains – contentedly – open to reinterpretation (Jenkins, 2008).

It is broadly accepted, drawing on Henry Rousso’s *Vichy Syndrome*, that war memory in France has passed through various stages, from an initial period of ‘mourning’ following the compound traumas of defeat, occupation and conflict, to a selective ‘re-writing’ of the past dominated by a

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<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of this air raid, see B. Benoit, ‘Le bombardement de Lyon du 26 mai 1944 ... et sa récupération politique’ (2007), on the *Histoires Lyonnaises* ‘Hypothèses’ workbook <https://lyonnais.hypotheses.org/2629>. The precise details of what happened to the train are not fully known; there are several versions of the story which are, however, largely in accord. The version put forward here is the one which emerged from the newspaper investigation in which Grégoire was involved.



heroic French Resistance, to a 'broken mirror' in the early 1970s when France was forced to confront its collaboration with the Nazis, and into an 'obsession' with its own culpability for participation in the persecution and deportation of Jews from France. Rousso used the idea of a 'syndrome' to pathologise the way that France has engaged with these 'dark years'. His important subsequent works suggest that France is 'haunted' by its war memory, highlighting clashes between history and memory, particularly over justice and commemoration.<sup>15</sup> The dialectic process of memory-building at a national level which *The Vichy Syndrome* described follows the dynamic of the Popular Memory Group's Popular Memory Theory: a hegemonic stance, a counter-hegemonic attack and then the disintegration of any 'national' narrative into a multiplicity of claims to recognition from various 'identity groups', which then aim to gain hegemonic status for themselves – and so on<sup>16</sup> (Popular Memory Group, 1998). Memorial practices do not emerge ready formed; there is a process of negotiated construction which takes place over many years (See, e.g. Dawson, 2005). As the dialectic shifts and a new paradigm of memory emerges, some aspects of the past drop out of sight. Others never make it into the system. Thus not only might we note Patricia Clough's 'affect economy', but likewise a 'narrative economy', as Ruth Kitchen writes, inside public discourse about the past, where value accrues around certain ways of telling the past (Kitchen, 2013, 1) Certain ways of telling, to use Ahmed's expression, are 'sticky' (Ahmed, 2010, 29).

Of course, memory building and scholarly history-making are not the same thing, but both feed into public discourse about the past. To ignore the part played by university and other state-funded research in contributing to memorial agendas specifically and public history more broadly is at best naive. The scholars whose knowledge is solicited for documentary and feature films, museum exhibitions, television debates, newspaper, magazine and blog articles, or within judicial processes, are the generators of the value that accrues around aspects of the past, shaping what is deemed worthy of discursive investment. Some see themselves as holding back the worrying tide of 'the social demand' – that is, the call made upon historians' skills and knowledge to support various claims from civil society. This 'demand' is characterised as 'anti-scientific', emanating, as it does, from subjective positionings (Delacroix, 2006, 277).<sup>17</sup> Some demands come from those who see themselves as forgotten:

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<sup>15</sup> Rousso (1991). Arguably this chronological pattern of commemorative practice around trauma and guilt is not specific to France. See, for an example among many, Kansteiner (2006).

<sup>16</sup> The Popular Memory Group met at the Centre for Contemporary Culture Studies at the University of Birmingham met across 1979-1981, and first published their ideas accessibly in 1982.

<sup>17</sup> The anxiety over a 'potential ideologization and instrumentalization which can weaken scientific legitimacy' (Delacroix, 2006, 277) seems in stark contrast to the so-called 'impact agenda' of the Research

This investment in the public sphere by those excluded from History almost always manifests itself not just as political action, but also – and the two go together – as a re-appropriation of a particular past, of a specific history, thought of as singular and distinct from [...], for example, a national history (Rousso, 1998, 31).

Rousso expresses concern at this claim for multiple particularities within the construction of a national past. A teacher, he writes, could invite all the eyewitnesses they wanted to speak to their class, to express differing, ‘often conflicting’, perspectives,

but, at the end of the day, it is down to the teacher to give the history lesson, that is, to produce a narrative which can be accepted by the greatest number (Rousso, 2016, 16).

Rousso’s writing seems to mistrust motivations: with tunnel vision and agenda-driven subjectivities, eyewitnesses are unlikely to contribute usefully to the construction of History.

I disagree in three ways. First, it concerns me that anxieties over the ‘conflictual’ and ‘identity-dependent’ nature of what the eyewitnesses are *presumed to want to say* may prevent them from – metaphorically – even being invited to the classroom. I find it unsurprising that historical actors (eyewitnesses to the past) put forward a ‘specific history’ relevant to their experiences. I also find it unproblematic: to quote Linda Colley, ‘identities are not like hats. Human beings can and do put on several at a time’ (Colley, 1992, 6). People inhabit multiple identities simultaneously and, partly because of that, are usually able to recognise the identities of others in relation to their own. This was apparent in my research into French children bombed by the Allies during the Second World War: among even those who had had traumatising experiences, there was explicit and unsolicited recognition of the suffering of others (Jews particularly), depicted as worse (Dodd, 2016; also Dodd, 2013). They did not use my interest as a springboard for a competitive victimhood, but were typically grateful to have been heard nonetheless. While French post-war history is riven with disputes over claims to economic and symbolic recognition, characterising all who wish to see themselves represented in the historical past as clamouring rivals is reductive. The examples used in this article show that requests – not demands – for recognition may be fulfilled without conflict, and be socially useful.

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Councils UK, where scholarly work is explicitly encouraged to work with, alongside and inside the ‘social demands’ emanating from civil society; viewed positively, ‘impact’ should encourage scholars to ‘listen’. Against this fear of ideological or instrumentalising interference, I would also argue with Keith Jenkins that all ‘history is *per se* an ideological construct’ because it is ‘never for itself; it is always for someone’, or something, and by someone who is necessarily positioned (Jenkins, 2004, 21).

Second, Rousseau's statement asserts the role of an objective (omniscient?) outsider – here, a teacher, but the analogy hints at another expert, the professional historian – in forming interpretations of the past. In contrast to the democratising, co-productive aims which have always animated oral history (see, e.g. Frisch, 1990; Thomson, 2011), a seemingly dim view is taken of the ability of these 'amateurs' to think clearly about the past. History appraises the wood, whereas memory is lost in the trees. Olivier Wieviorka has expressed something similar:

[while] research can separate out these different levels of analysis [war, occupation and Vichy], the French people themselves, subjected to round-ups, air raids, shortages, authoritarianism, spare themselves such subtleties, melting into one the memories of their days (Wieviorka, 2010, 17).

Amateurs – specifically those who lived through a particular past – are bringers of muddle. The inability to practice history as an objective sport may have 'hazardous' consequences, as boundaries blur and insistences are misplaced:

it has generated – and still generates – competition between victims, groups experiencing their relationship with the past as rivalry rather than complementarity (Wieviorka, 2010, 18-19).

In these comments, then, we find the assertions which exclude laypeople from contributing to the construction of the past, in particular because of their reliance on memories which, according to Rousseau, cannot be part of an 'approach to knowledge' (Rousseau, 1998, 22) He continues:

Memory falls within the register of identity; it carries affect along with it. It tends either to idealise or demonise the pasts which it reconstructs. It can compress or stretch time, and ignores any form of chronology, at least any rational form (Rousseau, 1998, 22-23).<sup>18</sup>

I agree, but positively. Memory is a source of epistemological interest and, indeed, knowledge, about the past. Rousseau is right: what is remembered and what is recounted depends a great deal – perhaps entirely? – on affect: on feeling, and on feelings.

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<sup>18</sup> In a similar vein, he writes in *Face au passé* (2016) that 'contemporary memory is often deployed in the emotional register' because it is 'essentially a victim-memory' ('une mémoire essentiellement victimaire') (22); the phrase identifies his link between emotion and memory, but pushes memory back into the realm of victims and their competitive rivalry: memory is emotional because we are speaking of victims' memories. My position would be that memories are emotional whether or not they are victims' memories, and regardless of who or how one might define oneself as a victim, or not.

Given that I see a crucial role for affects in structuring social relations, the fact that memory and affects are inextricably entangled seems no bad thing. Affects are widely recognised as a generative force which produce lives, societies and therefore history (Fox, 2015, 302). I see a productive value in analysing how the past as memory is affective, being both affected by the world, and affecting the world. In other words, feelings are induced and they have consequences. Narrative (including how and what we idealise or demonise) is also knowledge, and its structures tell us much about social meaning and value (see, e.g. Bruner, 1991). Time, including chronology, is wholly relative, and serves various functions in memory and narrative which reward exploration (see Portelli, 1991). The three memory stories used in this article recognise a desire on the part of non-elites to contribute to making history; they do so not in violent competition; nor do they need an overarching analysis – that is not their purpose. To follow Keith Jenkins, ‘The past has no legitimate gatekeepers [...] No-one owns the past nor has a monopoly on how to appropriate it’ (Jenkins, 2008, 70). These oral narratives are perspectives on the past. Can they give us certain knowledge about past realities? Probably not, but what can? But they do show us how affective flows relating to the past generate feelings which precipitate action.

Third, Rousso wrote that the teacher’s task is to generate a version of the past ‘accepted by the greatest number’. This ambition is reflected in Wieviorka’s comment: that the diversity of conditions across the wartime years in France has ‘thwarted the emergence of a shared memory’ (Wieviorka, 2010, 21). It is unclear why a widely accepted, ‘shared memory’ should be a goal. Evidently, certain experiences were shared by many, and certain interpretations are accepted by many. Reams have been written on the ‘collective’ memory of the Second World War, usually as symbolic representation, bound into top-down commemorative practices. But these goals – a widely-accepted interpretation and a national, shared memory – allude to a project which, simply, is not mine. I seek neither the ‘general’ nor the ‘national’, nor to fix the past into an authoritative interpretation. I prefer instead the ‘interminable openness of the past to countless readings’ (Jenkins, 2008, 70). I seek history in the people who inhabited the past, their heterogeneous multiplicity and the endless possibilities of their existences.

Two problems emerge from a reluctance to engage with historical actors. First, there is the danger of a self-reflexive historiographical stultification, where what is deemed important in the past can only be determined from within the historical establishment. Historians are appraised, qualified and promoted by their peers. Pierre Laborie has described the historiographical practices around the French wartime past as a ‘paralysing doxa’ (Douzou & Laborie, 2016, 157) which constrains creative engagement. And second, with a broader societal remit, philosopher

Jean-Michel Chaumont has written that the lack of recognition afforded to certain historical actors has consequences:

These beings, inhabited by resentment and frustration, are rarely serene, and sometimes formulate their expectations with such violence that they arouse a strong defence, even from their sympathisers (Chaumont, 1997, 334).

He sketches here an affective flow: feeling ignored, marginalised, forgotten leads to feelings of resentment or frustration which, when expressed, perhaps forcefully, generate defensive feelings. This may alter alliances, generate new feelings perhaps now of betrayal, and heighten the affective intensity of the whole situation<sup>19</sup> (Massumi, 1995; Ahmed, 2014, 119). Those feelings have consequences for the mental or physical wellbeing of the parties involved (they are not ‘serene’), and they ripple outwards impacting on social relations and behaviours. Mark Salber Phillips urges us to see the ‘immense ideological consequences’ of sentiment in social relations: he says we must recognise the ‘central role’ of the emotions ‘in social communication and moral judgement’ (Phillips, 2008, 52-3). Emotions enable us to make assessments about others’ situations which may permit or inhibit our compassion, itself a spur to act or not (Phillips, 2008, 53). A negative flow of resentment and frustration may not only impede compassionate or empathetic understandings, it could lead to isolating tendencies, which grow their own sets of feelings. Chaumont notes that ‘repairing wrongs happens above all through the revision of discourse within the dominant culture’; if that culture is unable to accommodate or include, there may occur:

the formation of ghettoised sub-cultures, whose members redistribute among themselves the esteem they cannot get from outside. However, the problem is that it is precisely from the exterior that recognition is most sought, and the kind of reinforcement that members of a sub-culture can give to each other can only be palliative (Chaumont, 1997, 343-4).

The three cases in this article show individuals finding ways to combat what they see as forms of silence, forgetting, omission and discrediting which emanate from dominant cultural positions. In these cases, dissatisfaction finds a positive, constructive outlet. But other cases exist in relation

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<sup>19</sup> Massumi writes of the ‘collapse of structured distinction into intensity’ (87): intensity here is understood as a heightening or dampening of feeling around a particular object which goes beyond the realm of language. Hamilakis (2017, his emphasis, 174-5) writes that ‘at specific moments, certain planes of the past [...] voluntarily or involuntarily, acquire *sensorial intensity and affective weight*’; he notes that *which* ‘temporal instances become sensorially and affectively dominant’ via this intensity and weight, is a question of politics.

to the Second World War and particularly the persecution of the Jews in France, but also elsewhere, where dissatisfactions radicalise into resentments that accrete in dark corners, assisted in the present by social media and the internet.<sup>20</sup> My point is not that everyone's memory-history is true, correct or accurate, or equally interesting, or equally traumatic, or even that everyone deserves an equal amount of attention; or, indeed, that historians should jump when angry citizens click their fingers. To see it in those terms perpetuates unhealthy hierarchies. My point is to highlight the generative power of *feeling* forgotten, denied, discredited, silenced or omitted, to inspire action, and to suggest that there is a value in listening – we do not have to agree, but we should foster discussion. Paying attention may see danger averted.

## **SPEAKING AND DOING**

### **Speaking against silence: Rachel's story**

The analysis of three cases begins with Rachel: the Jewish girl who escaped from round-ups and deportation, suffered as a hidden child and lost both her parents to the death camps. Histories of surviving the Holocaust are swathed in layers of silence and silencing: the dead silence of the murdered, the dumb-struck silence in the face of scale and barbarity, the repressed silence of trauma, the imposed silence of being ignored or told not speak, the fearful silence in the face of denial and disbelief. Every act of remembering and speaking of this past is an act of breaking silence. However, Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer have pointed out that dominant tropes of *watching* (not listening) to survivors have given rise to 'a troubling implication: that silence and muteness are more telling and forceful than verbal narratives' (Hirsch & Spitzer, 2010, 398): from a psychoanalytical perspective, the 'unspoken and unspeakable' is where 'ultimate' truth lies.<sup>21</sup> The moment where the witness breaks down, distress embodied but unarticulated, has become privileged in analysis. Yet it could be argued that this is another kind of silencing: the silencing of the witness who wishes to speak, who can speak, who has found the words and the means to transmit experience, or aspects of it.

Rachel's story is extraordinary in terms of the events which led to her survival. Her move out of silence in the latter part of the twentieth century is in keeping with much Holocaust witnessing.

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<sup>20</sup> My concern is about festering resentments over perceived past wrongs which seed intolerance and violence. The point is to be aware, rather than to amplify falsifications and prejudice. See, e.g. Albertini & Doucet, *La Facebookosphère* (2016) for an analysis of how the French far right functions on the web.

<sup>21</sup> Psychoanalytic tropes dominate literary-type analyses of Holocaust testimony.

Henry Greenspan notes that despite a fair amount of speaking out immediately after the war, soon ‘the world and public opinion moved on’: the world stopped listening (Greenspan, 2001, 5). Silence was not just self-imposed; pressures came from outside the Jewish community and from within: it was better to forget, to move on, to think of the future (Greenspan, 2001, 12). The period of ‘public silence’ is generally understood as ending around the time of the Eichmann trial (Hirsch & Spitzer, 2010, 392). It took maybe twenty or thirty more years for many ‘private silences’ to break and for people, particularly the child generation, to voice their experiences. Rachel’s story is part of this movement out of silence.

In the interview, Rachel does not speak explicitly of having been silent or silenced, but we do learn that she had talked about her experiences only privately.<sup>22</sup> It was her eldest grandson, she said, ‘who gave me the courage to bring all of this back up to the surface’: it was *for* him that she began to speak, privately and later publicly. After a shocking national event in 1990 – the neo-Nazi desecration of a Jewish cemetery in southern France – the teacher of Rachel’s seven-year-old grandson asked the class whether they understood what had happened.<sup>23</sup> Her grandson raised his hand: ‘I know’, he said. The next day, Rachel received a phone call: her grandson, who had never been *told* what had happened to his grandmother, but whose ‘ears were flapping’, had recounted what he knew of her story, and moved the class to tears. Could Rachel come in and speak to them? From then on, her grandson told her: ‘Write your history! Go and explain! Everything’s going to be forgotten. Young people have to know about this so we can fight – fight against intolerance, against exclusion.’ Rachel’s subsequent work includes speaking over and over to schoolchildren, participating in documentaries such as one for the BBC prior to her 2008 interview, or for *Nous étions des enfants* in 2011,<sup>24</sup> and vigorous involvement in associations for the memory of Jewish children. Eva Hoffman has written of the ‘urge to rescue, to repair and salve’ among the children of victims of the Shoah, which ‘can transform itself [...] into the re-creative

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<sup>22</sup> Rachel was interviewed on TV channel Arte’s current affairs programme *28 Minutes* in September 2018: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCOWv8ty6vQ>. In the short film preceding the interview, Rachel speaks explicitly of an external pressure not to speak of her childhood, and to move on.

<sup>23</sup> The cemetery in Carpentras was attacked on 8 May 1990: for a short news report on the event, see <https://fresques.ina.fr/jalons/fiche-media/InaEdu01851/la-profanation-du-cimetiere-juif-de-carpentras.html>. See also: F. Schneider, ‘Carpentras, 10-15 mai 1990: polysémie d’une profanation’, *Le Temps des Médias*, 6.1 (2006), 175-187, accessible online at <https://www.cairn.info/revue-le-temps-des-medias-2006-1-page-175.htm>. This event is by no means isolated. Indeed, as I write today (February 2019), eighty tombs have just been desecrated with swastikas in a Jewish cemetery in Quatzenheim (Bas-Rhin). See the report in *Le Monde* [https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2019/02/19/alsace-environ-80-sepultures-d-un-cimetiere-juif-profanees-a-quatzenheim\\_5425276\\_3224.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2019/02/19/alsace-environ-80-sepultures-d-un-cimetiere-juif-profanees-a-quatzenheim_5425276_3224.html).

<sup>24</sup> Film produced in 2011 by Jean-Gabriel Carasso: [http://www.film-documentaire.fr/4D ACTION/w\\_fiche\\_film/41450\\_1](http://www.film-documentaire.fr/4D ACTION/w_fiche_film/41450_1)

and reconstructive urge, into the desire for creativity and meaning'. (Hoffman, 2010, 413) Rachel embodies this quest.

Norquay states that 'what is worth remembering and what is not is reflected in the practices of commemoration (such as public monuments and holidays), reconstruction (such as documentaries, exhibits), and socialization (such as school curricula and teaching practices)' (Norquay, 1998, 3). In her tireless work, Rachel has been fighting to make the Shoah – its victims, its perpetrators, its mechanisms – *worth remembering*. That it has been a fight to remember, and a fight for justice, is evident. She spoke of having recognised, even as a little girl before the war, that the anti-Semitic insults she had heard were wrong: 'when I heard that word', she said, 'I was like a fury. I went into battle with the boys, they hit me, but I hit them back'. Fighting gave her resolve. She said: 'I have a very loving memory of my parents. I think that that is what made me able to fight afterwards' – *afterwards* when as a girl she needed the strength to face danger and sorrow, but later, into her eighties, to raise awareness of the Shoah. From the start, her story tells us that justice is worth fighting for.

The story Rachel tells in her 2008 interview sounds well practiced – which is to detract nothing from it. It is a story bursting with multiple traumas, including her two arrests, her mother's 'rejection', her dislocation, abuse and threat, as well as deep loss. The listener senses that she needs to keep the story on track, perhaps because if it overflows emotionally, it risks not being told at all. Telling remains the priority. The story is told with pace and control; Rachel stands for the witness who can and will speak. The story moves along its groove; the interviewer's questions are well received if they help it along. Asked whether her parents were naturalised, the response was 'good question'; later, asked how she learnt of her parents' death, the response was emphatically 'very good question'. But when the interviewer broached a topic the story was not yet ready for, she was held back: 'I'm coming to that.' The story's completeness matters, which is why it is carefully emplotted. Further meta-comments alert us to its structure: speaking of census of Jews in 1940, Rachel notes that at that point of the story 'people' (her audiences) 'always ask' why the Jews put their names down on Vichy's census; similarly, later, about being moved from safe-house to safe-house, she remarks: 'children often ask me "why didn't these people keep you?" I tell them that the neighbours knew that I wasn't their child, and by having me there, they put themselves in danger.'

Why does completeness matter so much? This is not just an account of Rachel's experience, or an act of bearing witness. It is both a lesson about the past and a tool for constructing the future. When I listen, I hear Rachel teaching us about balance; the scales of justice must be weighted on



both sides, even if one side ultimately tips further. Balance shapes several parts of the story. There are two concierges: one who betrays them, and the ‘good woman’ who later finds them somewhere to hide. There are two kinds of policeman: ‘there were those who did it zealously, who came to get us [...] and those who turned their heads so as not to see us escape.’ There are two kinds of foster carer: the abusive, anti-Semitic woman who threatens Rachel with denunciation, and the others: the couple who took in her sister, her later foster carers and their daughters, and the woman who cared for her cousins – who was recognised as Righteous Among the Nations.<sup>25</sup> Importantly, as this is a story of breaking silence, she says that this kind foster family ‘helped me get my courage back, who let me express myself again’. In a powerful image, Rachel evokes her headmistress’s embrace as she welcomed her pupil back to school in Paris. She says ‘I remember it as a very emotional day because lots of little girls were missing’. Rachel’s tangled pathway through danger and into sorrow ended in a confrontation with those silent, empty seats. Her courage to speak, to express herself, to create and reconstruct, and to fight, became the courage to speak against the obliteration of her family, her classmates and so many others.

Rachel became one of the founders of the first Association for the Memory of Deported Jewish Children (Associations pour la mémoire des enfants juifs déportés – AMEJD), which, since 1997 has put up plaques in schools across Paris.<sup>26</sup> Because of ‘actor-witnesses’ or ‘historian-activists’ like Rachel – and, indeed, the more well-known Serge Klarsfeld (e.g., Klarsfeld, 1996) – who have researched and campaigned so vehemently against forgetting, there has been a shift in what is remembered, by whom and how. Rachel’s first steps were taken inside the family, in a private context. As the listening climate has shifted, a move outward to networks of shared experience could then take place. Rachel is listed as the President of the Bureau of the Comité de l’Ecole Tlemcen, the name adopted by the AMEJD of the twentieth *arrondissement*.<sup>27</sup> In 2003, local AMEJDs united under a government-backed umbrella, the National Council for the Memory of Deported Jewish Children (Conseil national pour la mémoire des enfants juifs déportés – COMEJD).<sup>28</sup> Closely following the processes outlined by the Popular Memory Group, the reach has become national, and now includes Rachel’s book, films and television appearance on Franco-German television channel Arte in September 2018. Rachel’s desire to share ‘how it was’

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<sup>25</sup> Andrée Pasquier who cared for Rachel’s cousins is listed on the list of those honoured as Righteous Among the Nations: <https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/pdf-drupal/france.pdf> (p. 53).

<sup>26</sup> Each AMEJD for the Parisian *arrondissements* has its own website, for example the 11th *arrondissement* <https://amejd11e.wordpress.com/> or the 18th <https://amejd18e.wordpress.com/>.

<sup>27</sup> The Comité Tlemcen’s website can be accessed at: <http://www.comitetlemcen.com/Rachel.html>.

<sup>28</sup> The Council’s website can be accessed at: <https://comejdfrance.wordpress.com/>

is a lesson, not just in the starkness of hatred, violence and loss, but about human kindness too, about justice and about resilience.

## Speaking against a slur: Anne-Marie's story

I now turn to Anne-Marie, the daughter of a railway resistance activist. Her motivation to be interviewed in 2012 was a clear response to her dissatisfaction with a version of past events put forward in the public sphere. In 2008, journalist Françoise Laborde published a book some phrases of which railed against the 2007 railway strikes in defence of state pensions and retirement ages. Laborde wrote:

But nobody dares to recall that the trains of death which took Jews and resisters to the extermination camps were never held up by strikes and were always on time, all accounts settled up front by the nazis. Without French trains, how could deportation have taken place? (Laborde, 2008, 95-98)

Laborde also claimed that the railway resistance had been exaggerated into myth by the French Communist Party.<sup>29</sup> The points are not unworthy of examination, but they wrongly castigate hundreds of people; there were strong objections to her caricatural invective and manipulation of the past to attack public sector pensions. Her comments, which received widespread media attention, were part of a wider set of controversies touching the SNCF in the 2000s. In 2011 SNCF president Guillaume Pepy, president of the SNCF, officially recognised the train company's role in deporting Jews from France.<sup>30</sup> A number of legal proceedings began. Aït Amor writes:

Such public attention gave rise to a feeling of incomprehension and indeed of indignation among former railway workers who had been in post during the war years; they could not understand these accusations which seemed entirely at odds with what they had lived through (Aït Amor, 2018, 70).

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<sup>29</sup> One example often cited about how Communist memory bled into the railway memory of resistance is via the popular film by René Clément, *La Bataille du Rail* (1946); for further information see <https://fresques.ina.fr/jalons/fiche-media/InaEdu01207/la-bataille-du-rail-rene-clement-1946.html>

<sup>30</sup> For an article about Pepy's speech, see [https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2011/01/25/bobigny-la-sncf-doit-s-expliquer-sur-son-role-dans-la-shoah\\_1470065\\_3224.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2011/01/25/bobigny-la-sncf-doit-s-expliquer-sur-son-role-dans-la-shoah_1470065_3224.html)

Laborde's words catalysed Anne-Marie into action, so strong was her feeling that her father's life and work were being discredited. She stated explicitly that she had agreed to be interviewed because of what had been said about the *cheminots* on television. She called Laborde's work 'shameful' in its reduction of railway resistance to an instrument of Communism, and its characterisation of resisters as 'terrorists'; she denounced these ideas as 'lies' and as 'scandalous'. In indignation she cried: 'Everything has been forgotten!' – what, and by whom? To cite Naomi Norquay again:

forgetting is often socially organised. What is worth remembering and what *is* to be remembered can be determined and regulated by larger social forces and structured and maintained through authoritative discourses (Norquay, 1998, 3).

In this interview, Anne-Marie puts forward a small-scale counter-action against the 'larger social forces' which, in an ideological battle against public sector pensions, discredited the railway resistance. She also asserts a strong position with regard to the deportation of Jews. She makes no larger claim beyond her father's experience; but her father's experiences, attitudes and actions stand – in her story – to break down the totalising accusations which tar all with the same brushes. Her interview can be seen as an attack from below on an authoritative discourse in the public arena.

This motivation gives rise to certain emphases in the story: the imprint of the accusations are felt in the ways that Anne-Marie wishes the listener to understand the nature of her father's resistance, and his attitude of compassion towards Jews. The first way to understand her rebuttal is through her assertion that her father was not a Communist, nor was his resistance 'politically' motivated, that is, understood as allied to any political party. The documents in her possession gave his 'entry date' into the network Service Secret de la Défense Nationale as 1 March 1941. First, this was before the 'official' entry of the Communists into any form of resistance; they had to wait until Operation Barbarossa had definitively broken the terms of the Moscow-Berlin pact (although individual Communists resisted before then). And second, Anne-Marie sees his resistance as pre-dating this documentary evidence: she asserts here the limits of archival knowledge, and of 'official' versions: the truth, she believes, can be surmised but not proven. She dates 'his first act of resistance' as happening during the exodus of May-June 1940 when he left his family to save a train from being bombed in Bar-sur-Seine. He was injured and the family lost contact with him as he was treated in hospital in Saint-Étienne. Here, she believes, he became involved with the Polish resistance network F2, based in France. She had no 'papers' to confirm

this, but confidently stated that 'he was already involved by then'. He was not a Communist, she said, and his resistance was not at all 'political'; it was anti-German:

there were all of those, you must be aware of it, all those who make out they'd been great resisters and everything, there were resisters who resisted for political reasons.

Not being 'political' made him less reckless, in her eyes. She said emphatically that when the proposed sabotage of a particular train, rumoured to be carrying Hitler, was put forward:

Dad had resisted it, he'd resisted it, he'd argued with them, saying that first there would definitely be two or three decoy trains [...] and second [...] how many people would be shot for it, how many hostages?

She characterised his resistance as sensible not rash. Anne-Marie noted that Communists also deserve credit for their resistance, but that they did not resist from the beginning.

Furthermore, Anne-Marie highlighted his total dedication: a dedication which cost the family so dearly. At school, she noted, 'they told us we had to make sacrifices'; her sacrifice was the loss of her father to his resistance activities. She described him as pulled in two directions: he grew vegetables, raised rabbits, cycled far and wide to get eggs and butter, made new soles for their shoes from old tyres. He would fall asleep at the table, and when he was arrested, she said, 'he was at the end of his strength from having done so much'. But his resistance took priority. Anne-Marie's story abounds with moments where her father left them. At every air raid, he went to the station, perhaps making notes to pass to the network. This caused tension: 'Mum was crying, saying "But Paul, stay with us, stay with us", and he would leave, there you have it, he'd leave.' Hesitantly, she said 'the atmosphere was a little bit sour because Mum thought that he left us a great deal'. Even his own arrest was linked to this compulsion. Anne-Marie spoke of his arrival at her uncle and aunt's house to which she had been evacuated. He was exhausted:

I remember that at the table, my uncle – his words have stuck in my head – 'Paul, you must stay, you must not leave, Paul, you must stay'. And Dad said 'No, no, I have to go back'.

He wished his daughter goodbye, and left. She never saw him again. The discrediting of the railway resistance is even more painful to Anne-Marie in the face of such a loss.

Importantly, too, she remarks upon her father's recognition of the injustice facing the Jews, and describes a number of his actions to dissociate him from complicity. She makes her points with

different kinds of evidence. First, she had the evidence of her own experience. On one occasion he took her to see a vandalised synagogue; she said 'he explained to me what they were doing to the Jews'. Second, she described his emotional response to seeing trains of deportees: 'I remember extremely clearly Dad, several times, he'd come home saying 'My god, if you could see the poor people', I have a memory of it, the tears in his eyes.' She repeated later 'he'd said to us "the poor people, if you could see the poor people", he had tears in his eyes as he spoke. That's an exact memory'. She labels the memory not as general, but as precise. Third, she presents the evidence that he collected letters dropped from the deportation trains and sent them onwards to their destinations. She said 'people replied to him. There, you see those documents, the two letters': the proof is given to the interviewer. Fourth, she wonders about a published memoir of a young woman deportee. At her father's station, a railway worker had told the women in the wagon 'Be brave, my girls, they're beaten at Stalingrad!' which filled them with great hope. She cannot be certain it was her father, and confirms that there were other courageous railway workers too. Finally, she gives the evidence which moves her to tears: the words of a former neighbour who telephoned her condolences when Anne-Marie's mother died. 'You know, Annie', said the neighbour, 'your dad was really someone quite extraordinary.' She explained that Anne-Marie's father had alerted his neighbours to what he had seen but, she said, 'people didn't believe it'. Her words shift blame decisively away from him.

In presenting this portrait of her father, Anne-Marie challenges the damaging narrative put forward in Lagarde's book and elsewhere. But the listener has a sense that this is not the whole motivation. In relation to the Holocaust, but not without relevance here, Eva Hoffman has written of the 'haunting' of the child generation, and the heavy burden of 'rescuing' their parents over and again (Hoffman, 2010, 409-10). Anne-Marie described how in the post-war years, she had retreated into silence, the grief over her father's death overwhelming the family. Her father had sworn her to secrecy over their visit to the synagogue:

He told me at the time not to tell anybody. Well, I only spoke about it much later – , but *much* later [...] perhaps forty years later. I spoke a little bit about it at home, and once I wrote it down.

Many things were taboo in the heavy atmosphere as she lived alongside her mother's deep depression. Of her father's last goodbye, she said

And there, I never saw him again. [...] I didn't speak about it for a very long time. I never asked my uncle and aunt anything, never, I would never have asked them what

he'd said to them. He must have come to tell them something. My uncle was also in the Resistance, but well, we never mentioned it. Never, I never spoke of it again, it was – , never, never, never. It was finished, finished, never to Mum, never – . Afterwards I blocked it out. You must never speak of it.

The trauma of abandonment and bereavement, bottled up for years exploded, in Hoffman's words, like a 'time delayed bomb', years later as a compulsion to know and a compulsion to tell (Hoffman, 2010, 407). Years before Anne-Marie had seen her father's name, by chance, on a memorial in the Var, far from her home; why was it there? She began to research, and slowly uncovered his resistance activity. In *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), Freud proposed that to accomplish the process of mourning – to grieve and then move on – you have to know what you have lost (Hoffman, 2010, 411). Perhaps Laborde's attack acted as a catalyst to speak out against the discrediting of his memory; but for Anne-Marie, the compulsion to know arose from years of silent haunting.

### **Speaking for the record: Grégoire's story**

Finally, I will turn to Grégoire, who narrowly escaped a bombardment as his train of evacuee children pulled out of the Gare de Vaise in Lyon. In Rachel's story, we saw how layers of silencing were broken by survivors like her telling the stories of their pasts. We saw the impact on remembering of the shift in the listening climate in the later twentieth century. With Anne-Marie, we saw how a direct discrediting of certain resistance activities prompted her desire to speak out against an authoritative public discourse. Grégoire's story is less explicitly linked to the dynamics of national memorial culture articulated around resistance and collaboration/persecution; however, it is the dominance of these categories in historical, media and other public discourse which has occluded parts of the French wartime experience which do not fit neatly into either category. As I and others have suggested, the Allied bombing of France was for many years omitted from the national history.<sup>31</sup> While work existed on the bombing of Normandy and Brittany, the rest of the country's ordeal under the bombs received little scholarly attention. This changed in the mid-2000s, but too late for most of those for whom bomb-related disruption, trauma, injury or bereavement were defining features of the era. My bombing

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<sup>31</sup> In 2009, Jean-François Muracciole described the Allied bombing as 'the last "black hole" in French collective memory of the Second World War' (Muracciole, 2009, 174). Works which have gone some way towards plugging this hole include Baldoli & Knapp (2012) and Dodd (2016).

research suggested that the ‘absence of a public, national discourse on the Allied bombing of France has left people [...] with unresolved memories’ (Dodd, 2016, 2). How can survivors find comfort, or honour the dead, when such events are scarcely acknowledged? By and large, then, this is a story of omission. But I also note Grégoire’s perception of a refusal to engage with his history on the part of those with the authority to help him, a refusal which he sees as tainted with the discrediting of his memory.

In the interview Grégoire recorded with the AHICF in 2012, the memories of the events of 26 May 1944 pour from him in a rush. The interviewer struggles to understand the logistics of how, why and where the children were moved to and from; indeed, there is a certain amount of muddle in his excited speech. Yet what is clear, despite the muddle, is that this memory is powerful. In the newspaper articles which he shared with the interviewer, a more measured version of events is put forward: Grégoire told the journalist that had pondered the problem of the train-driver’s identity for fifty years, but it was only ‘these past few years’, in the mid-2000s, when, his wife said, he had begun to ‘devote all his spare time to it’.<sup>32</sup> In December 2010 he made a plea in the local newspaper for other children from that train to step forward. What had become an obsessive quest grew from a need to rectify a double forgetting: first the details were either unknown to the children aboard the train, or were fading in memory. And second, there was no recognition of the men he saw as heroes who had saved the children’s lives. In the interview, Grégoire asserts the memories he does retain as accurate, stating ‘and well, there – I remember it like it was today, eh’. The memory of being in the station, being on the train as the air raid siren sounded was clear. He also asserts his reliability as a witness, stating ‘I’ve not invented anything’. His defensiveness is understandable, given the extent to which he feels he has faced a refusal to engage with this story. He remarks: ‘The station, it exploded, the church – , there, where there were the most victims, that’s what they talk about the least.’ The few historical accounts of the bombing have indeed focused more on the bombs which fell closer to the city centre, around the Gare de Perrache, along the Avenue Berthelot, and in the industrial south of the city.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> I. Brione, ‘Rescapé d’un bombardement en 1944, il recherche celui qui lui a sauvé la vie’, *Le Progrès*, 27 December 2010 <https://www.leprogres.fr/ain/2010/12/27/rescape-d-un-bombardement-en-1944-il-recherche-celui-qui-lui-a-sauve-la-vie>

<sup>33</sup> For example, Benoit, ‘Le bombardement de Lyon du 26 mai 1944 ... et sa récupération politique’ (2017) pays more attention to the area around Perrache. Isabelle von Bueltzingsloewen’s analysis (2016) focuses on the destruction of the Olida factory in the 7th arrondissement - see <https://books.openedition.org/pur/46938>. Her map of Lyon, she notes, does not include Vaise, although she states in a footnote: ‘The Vaise district was severely damaged’ (335).

Yet Grégoire insisted on the importance of what happened at the Gare de Vaise. He speaks on behalf of the evacuees, and on the behalf of their descendants. Grégoire battles against the dismissal of this case as too small, too unimportant to count. He repeats a striking point twice in his interviews, in relation to the disobedient train driver: ‘There are five hundred, six hundred children who owe him their lives. They’ve had five hundred or six hundred families [...] I absolutely want people to know. Because, I’m telling you, it was certain death.’<sup>34</sup> The human meaning of this event cannot be historicized: it extends into the present through children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He repeats ‘All of France should know! No, but it’s true’ – an insistence in the face of potential refusal – ‘they’re important people’. The numbers involved enable Grégoire to insist on the heroism of the train driver: the ‘important people’ are both the heroes and the survivors. Again, later, he cries: ‘I want them to be thanked – everyone should know! Well, it’s important, isn’t it?’ He seeks reassurance from the interviewer, from the listener, that these acts and these lives mattered and continue to matter.

What created this defensive insistence? He saw himself as forced to turn historian, confronted – having knocked – with a number of closed doors. His frustration was evident. In the first instance, he felt his memories were discredited. He commented:

Well, I’m telling you that no-one wanted to believe my history, no-one. Even the historians. I’ve done all the archives. Departmental archives, archives – , I’ve been twenty times!

This feeling of not being believed accounts for some of the emphases in his narrative: he remembered clearly, death was certain, it was important, it was true. Having had no luck with the archives, nor the ‘pile of books’ he found there, he tried a different tack:

I telephoned historians, those historians, they ask you to leave a message, but they don’t respond. They don’t give a damn. There’s nothing in it for them.

Not just disbelieved: he felt ignored, dismissed. Was he entirely wrong to see these historians’ priorities as controlled by self-interest, their research following the reliable lines for professional success? He cited another culprit: ‘We’ve got a Museum of the Resistance in Lyon – nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing at all. Do you understand?’ The museum is the Centre de l’Histoire de la Résistance et de la Déportation which, since the mid-2010s (after Grégoire’s quest), has hosted several exhibitions focused explicitly on French daily life in wartime, but its preoccupations are

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<sup>34</sup> In the interview, Grégoire believes that around five or six hundred children were on the train. The newspaper reports state four hundred.



those which its name suggests.<sup>35</sup> While Grégoire's comments may seem hyperbolic, the emotional intensity around this quest testifies to the potency of feeling ignored when the stakes seemed so high.

Grégoire took the research on for himself. He said: 'I've had to scabble around everywhere.' He contacted the local newspaper which launched an appeal. Grégoire commented in the interview 'I can't be the only witness!' He was contacted by about fifty of the former evacuees, but the real prize came in the form of a phone call from a journalist:

Oh! My God! I cried. Like a kid. I couldn't speak. *Oh là là*, I cried. Do you understand? All of a sudden, after sixty years? Well, I was completely choked up. He said to me, 'Listen, I'll call you tomorrow, we'll set up a meeting'.

Through the intervention of the grandson of a former railway worker, the identity of the driver became known: the children and their descendants owed their existence to Gabriel Filhol, who had died in 1976.<sup>36</sup> On 26 May 2014, Grégoire and a group of former child evacuees unveiled a plaque to this man and his colleague Joseph Prenat at the Gare de Vaise. To understand fully the meaning of this commemorative act for Grégoire there is a crucial factor in the affective flow around the events of 1944. In his interview Grégoire showed a sharp understanding of the precarity of life. He said: 'Me, well, I'm the child of parents who were in a genocide. Out of forty people in my family, on my mother's side, there was no one left.' Both his parents had witnessed the brutal violence of the Armenian genocide as children. His father told him never to forget either

the good, or the bad. If someone does well by you, you thank them. You mustn't forget, you thank them. If someone does you wrong, you – , you don't forget. To forget is to betray, he told me [...] It's a question of honour.

Memory connects histories, across places, times and through people. What drove Grégoire was a wholly immaterial conviction: to honour. He did not seek financial compensation, he asked nothing material for himself, nor did he want a place in some supposedly clamouring hierarchy of victims. He sought to recognise someone's courage, to value their humanity, to do justice to the memory of his own parents and their ancestry. He wanted this history to exist because he

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<sup>35</sup> The museum can be accessed at <http://www.chrd.lyon.fr/chrd/sections/fr/musee>.

<sup>36</sup> F. Guttin-Lombard, 'Il retrouve la trace de son sauveur grâce à un lecteur du *Progrès*' 30 December, 2010 <https://www.leprogres.fr/actualite/2010/12/30/il-retrouve-la-trace-de-son-sauveur-de-1944-grace-a-un-lecteur-du-progres>

thought it mattered. Here is the evidence of what emotions do, what actions they generate, what effects they have in lives, in societies and in history.

## CONCLUSION

There are a variety of reasons why the oral history project – as upheld by associations such as the International Oral History Association (IOHA) or the Oral History Society (OHS) – did not catch on in France.<sup>37</sup> As some historians take great pains to point out, oral *sources* are simply banal; they are just another kind of source (Duclert, 2002, 75). To cite Dominique Aron-Schnapper: ‘Let’s stop talking about oral history! In the same way that there are written archives, we should speak of oral archives’ (cited in Descamps, Weber & Muller, 2006). Yet it is strikingly clear that the distinction between ‘oral history’ as an approach and ‘oral sources’ or ‘oral archives’ is not one of method; it is an ideological distinction. Oral history is not about ‘doing things to sources’; it is an active, creative and dialogic process of speaking and listening. In their reluctance to expand the boundaries of a positivistic methodology, the most authoritative value-generators around historical culture have been stubbornly deaf. This seems a particular shame given that so many of the wartime generation – a fascinating period, if not one of ‘national coherence’ or consensus – are now gone. Influential scholarship remains largely tied to a structuralist ‘social scientific’ project of top-down analyses of post-war memorial culture. And by failing to listen, dominant historical discourse may foster sentiments of resentment, shame and exclusion.

Chaumont notes that ‘the means to fight this exclusion perhaps lie in broadening the frames of recognition’ (Chaumont, 1997, 344). In this article I have sought to broaden the frame to incorporate notions of feeling, animated by ideas from cultural studies and affect theory. An anti-positivist source, insofar as they require a certain kind of listening against the grain and an attunement to intensities which are felt or sensed rather than observed, feelings nonetheless are shown not only as imbricating past and present, but as mediating between individuals and

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<sup>37</sup> Laurent Douzou proposes some of these in ‘From oral history to a so-called “ideology of testimony”: autopsy of a step backwards’ (2015). In 2013, Philippe Joutard noted that ‘the resistance within French university historiography towards oral history is profound’ (Joutard & Granet Abisset, 2013, 195). My experience and perspective are that while oral interviews are now routinely collected, archived and often used in France (although undergraduate and post-graduate training is rare), there is nonetheless a difference in emphasis between French historians and oral historians in many other countries, particularly around issues of objectivity and (activist) ideology. The French manner of engagement with ‘oral sources’ attaches a great deal of value to formal archive building, which poses a new set of questions around intervention, power and control over meanings, access and contextualization.

collectives, and driving action and change. Of course, feelings can be read, heard, seen and felt in all sorts of sources about the past (Roper, 2014). I work with oral history because it provides opportunities to solicit and engage with historical actors, to affect their lives, and my own, and to attempt to grasp and maybe unravel – at least in part – the interpenetrating entanglement of events, experiences, feelings, assumptions, knowledges, temporalities, desires and voices inherent in the ‘ongoingness’ (Berlant, 2011, 54) of the past.

It has not been my intention to identify specific emotions other than a sense of dissatisfaction bound up with ideas of forgetting. Rousso has written that the politicized language around memory in contemporary France works towards ‘the valuing of memories and the condemnation of “forgetting”’ (Rousso, 2016, 99). With his inverted commas, he distances himself, as though ‘forgetting’ is not quite real. Certainly, Anne-Marie, Grégoire and Rachel have not forgotten, but they have – in various ways, at various moments, for various reasons – *felt* forgotten. I remind myself, however, that Rousso’s focus, like Wieviorka’s, is on politicization, on instrumentalization, on vectors of memory, on the public structures of commemoration, symbolic recognition, compensation, and legal condemnation. Yet in paying attention to these ‘amateur’ critics, their perspectives and their actions, I show that the affective flow of feeling around this past blows, like a wind, into the gaps between top-down, dominant and public interpretations and bottom-up, private and low-key ones. This flow connects media discourse with family photo albums; it seeps into the emplotment of a memory story; it animates intersubjective relationships between interviewers, interviewees, wider audiences, and professionals; it provokes the desire to speak and act. Rachel spoke out in the 1990s after a collective silence both externally and internally imposed; she has continued to speak for nearly thirty years, to act, and to fight the silences of loss and absence, as well as denial and disbelief. Anne-Marie broke a silence imposed by sorrow, grief and even, maybe, anger, when she recounted her father’s story. But she also spoke to counter a discrediting which had a certain narrative currency at the time of her interview. Grégoire too spoke on behalf of others, to break not only a silence he saw as imposed by History, but to bring to light a heroic, everyday act with existential consequences for thousands in the present. In each of the three stories, the insistent ‘liveness and the lived-ness’ of the past (Highmore, 2018, 47) – unfolding in the present, experienced really, by real people – is inescapable and worth hearing.

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