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Led by a Franco-Brazilian team of scholars in the humanities, social sciences, arts and literatures, this joint research project is developing a digital platform for Transatlantic Cultural History to be published in four languages. In a series of essays exploring cultural relations between Europe, Africa, and the Americas, it presents a connected history of the Atlantic space since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, highlighting the cultural dynamics of the Atlantic region and its crucial role in the contemporary process of globalization.

## Memories

[Cécile Coquet-Mokoko](#) - Université Versailles-Saint Quentin

[Jean-Sébastien Noël](#) - La Rochelle Université

☐ South Atlantic - North Atlantic - Africa - Europe - Caribbean - South America - North America

☐ The Atlantic Space Within Globalization - The Consolidation of Mass Cultures

Transatlantic memory and heritage evoke a permanent oscillation between universal and specific values, trauma and healing, individual experiences and collective narratives. Shaped by processes of selection and oblivion, the construction of memory is produced by communities inscribed both in particular territories and in spaces of transfer.

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From a transatlantic perspective, the themes of memory and heritage evoke a permanent oscillation between universal and specific values, trauma and healing, individual experiences and collective narratives. Shaped by a familiar process of selection and oblivion, the construction of memory is produced by communities that memorialize and pay tributes while being inscribed both in particular territories (a given block, neighborhood, town, region, or country) and in spaces of transfer.<sup>1</sup> Besides, the Atlantic is a space of circulation for individuals and groups, but also for narratives and cultural products fraught with heritage. In this respect, the practical means of transatlantic circulation and mobility, such as steamships, the media, the written press, iconography; the radio, TV and the Internet, represent key elements to take into account and analyze.

Over the past decade, on each side of the Atlantic Ocean, the field of memory studies took more and more space in academia, in response to the ever-increasing demand of civil society, which led the anthropologist David Berliner to designate it as a "memory boom".<sup>2</sup> As William Johnston also suggested, "the cult of anniversaries",<sup>3</sup> particularly between Europe and the United States, has possibly caused the emergence of a "Great Calendar" of commemorations, organizing time around memory. This notion is also related to its diachronic dimension, which leads scholars to analyze the contexts of (re)awakening of memory as well as interrogate periods of silence of the memory. For instance, Hasia Diner deconstructed the myth of the silence around the memory of the genocide of the European Jews in the United States between 1945 and 1962.<sup>4</sup> The "Memories" thematic section invites therefore analyses of the role of transatlantic circulation in memory politics (regarding the place of African Americans in those of West African states, for example); discussions of the political dimension of transatlantic memories (e.g. the state's role in the building of memorial sites or the institution of remembrance days, such as *Yom HaShoah*); the transnational dimension of these sites of memory and remembrance days.<sup>5</sup>

The field of trauma studies has already been mapped by a variety of scholars - historians, unsurprisingly, but also anthropologists and ethnologists, sociologists, geographers, cultural studies specialists - who have offered abundant bibliographical resources. Migrant legacies hark back to trauma, bereavement, and the scars left by mass-scale violence, such as slave trades, genocides, massacres and pogroms, economic violence (with forced migrations caused by hunger and poverty), systemic domination and denial of Othered cultures within state or colonial structures. A hands-on and emotional approach to memory phenomena<sup>6</sup> is behind the organized tours of emblematic sites of memory such as Gorée Island or Ellis Island, cemeteries,

plantations and museums (around slavery, African American or Japanese American heritage, or The National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama, where each of the counties where a lynching occurred is invited to reclaim the steel slab bearing the name of the victim, among the 4,400 on display.)



Entrance of the House of Slaves on Gorée Island. Photo taken by Eliot Elisofon during his trip to Africa from March 17 to July 17, 1970

Source : [Digital Public Library of America](#)



Aerial shot of Ellis Island, 1920

Source : [Gallica](#)

It is also of interest to analyze the consensus dynamics leading up to the prioritizing of certain stakes for memory sites and commemoration dates. In Europe in particular, it is necessary to address the prominent phenomena of minorities competing for the official recognition of their ancestors' traumas, as well as conflicts over policies of public commemorations, involving the activism of lobbies and community organizations that call for the acknowledgement of neglected legacies. This connection between memory and controversy also invites further investigation of those whom the French historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet designated as the "assassins of memory" - revisionists, negationists, Holocaust deniers - who contest the validity of an official memory narrative or refuse to make room for the social, political or media recognition of a socio-cultural group. Also included in the discussion are the fascination with the trope of the vanishing American Indian, the specter of foreign invasion in eugenicist writings, the anti-miscegenation rhetoric promoting a narrative of loss of identity, in contrast with the perpetuation of the mystique of the "Lost Cause" in the American South and in the rest of the U.S.A. as well as Canada or Europe. The essentialist temptations of appropriating legacies are also perceptible in the marketing and consumption of DNA tests, genealogy and

psychogenealogy. Contributors are therefore encouraged to keep sight of both the discursive and legal/judicial aspects of the treatment of memory.

# Pierre Vidal-Naquet

## Les assassins de la mémoire

« Un Eichmann de papier »  
et autres essais sur le révisionnisme



La Découverte/Poche

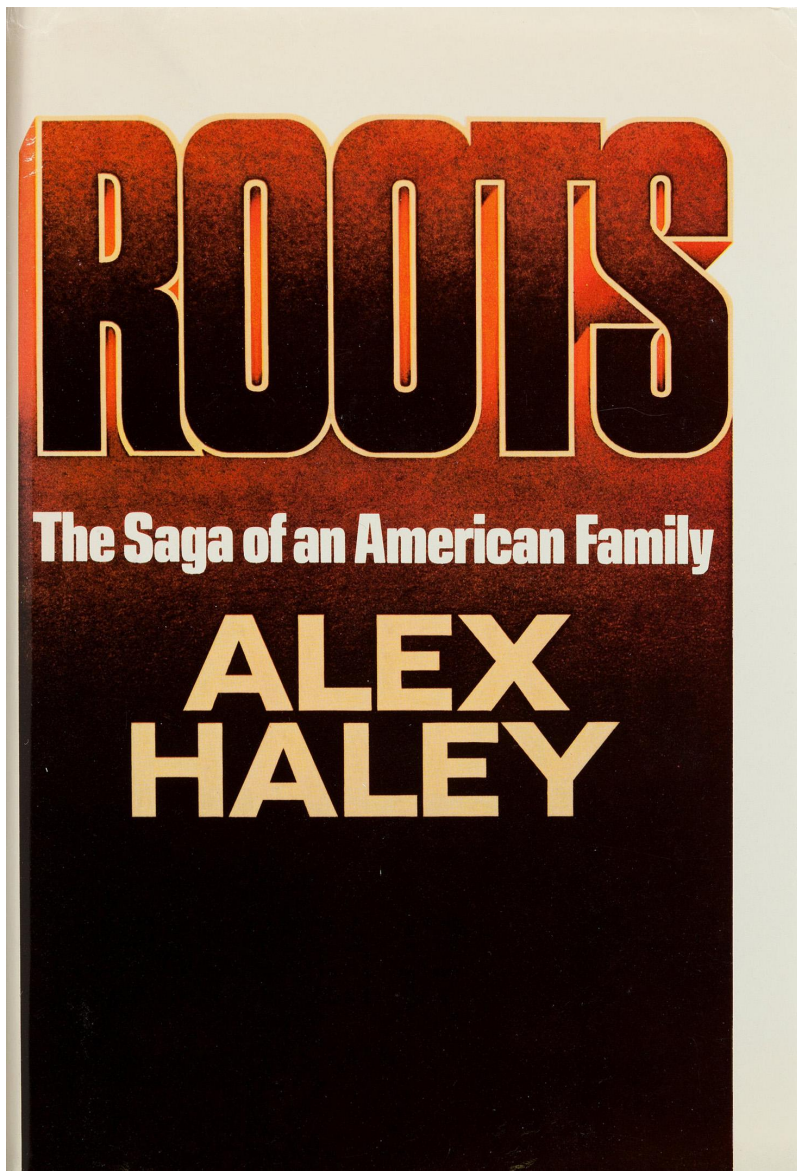


Front cover of Pierre Vidal-Naquet's book *Les assassins de la mémoire*. “*Un Eichmann de papier*” and other essays on revisionism, 1987

Source : [Éditions La Découverte](#)

Hopefully, this thematic section opens space for a multi-criteria discussion of the plurality of rhythms for commemorating on each side of the Atlantic Ocean, analyzing these phenomena as partaking in the processes of bricolage (as per Claude Lévi-Strauss' definition) and reinvention of memory. How do community networks and social clubs contribute to produce a transatlantic memory, as in the cases of the Lower East Side's *landsmanshaften*<sup>2</sup> or the groups of biracial children of Jewish and West Indian, African or African American parents? How are patterns of counter-transfers of memory exemplified in the reception of artistic and literary works such as Alex Haley's *Roots* with African audiences, in the popularity of learning Swahili in the U.S.A to reconnect with African ancestors or embracing a Kosher diet and culinary traditions to reconnect with the Jewish ancestors rather than out of religious beliefs?





Front cover of Alex Haley's novel *Roots*, 1976

Source : [Wikimedia](#)

To what extent is the reinvention of memory achieved via historical reenactments? The question of transforming sites of memory into tourist sites holds center stage, as well as the commodification of traditional worship ceremonies such as pow-wows and sweat lodges in the U.S.A, Dogon ceremonies set up in Mali for tourists from Europe or the Americas, or ceremonies of consumption of hallucinogenic mushrooms, peyote or ayahuasca under the supervision of shamans in Mexico, Peru or Ecuador.

[Touristic powwow in New Mexico](#)

Source : [YouTube](#)

The Atlantic space, understood as an active and dynamic matrix informed by competing processes of definition and redefinition, invites a revaluation of the stakes of memory by taking some distance from approaches restricted to national or area studies that might exclude postcolonial perspectives. Cross-perspectives and interconnectedness are therefore encouraged in order to go beyond comparative approaches.

Consequently, contributions may include the following themes, among other possible ones:

- Expressions of memory in artistic and literary productions as well as cultural practices
- Memory policies and institutions (memorials museums, research centers, archive collection, oral histories projects, laws instituting commemorations, legal aspects, legitimacy issues, conflicts over the official acknowledgement of community traumas)

- Rhythms, scales and "places", rootedness and circulations of transatlantic memories (anniversaries, commemorative calendars, creation of tourist sites and commodification of legacies, micro- and macro-historical approaches to memory sites)
- Political, ideological and legal aspects of the construction of memory (activist legacies, community heritage, negationist and revisionist critiques, the role of postcolonial/subaltern studies approaches in the construction of memories within the Atlantic space)
- Memories of bereavement and trauma (legacies of global wars and regional wars, civil wars, memories of mass violence such as the transatlantic slave trade, genocides, pogrom-related violence, silenced memories, processes of oblivion and remembrance, Toni Morrison's concept of "rememory")

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## Authors

- [Cécile Coquet-Mokoko](#) - Université Versailles-Saint Quentin

A scholar of African American Studies, I specialize in the study of folk oratory and traditions from the 19th to the 21st century. I taught in France and at the University of Alabama, where I did sociological fieldwork on the (self-)perceptions of interracial couples from a comparative perspective.

- [Jean-Sébastien Noël](#) - La Rochelle Université

Maître de conférences en histoire contemporaine à la Rochelle Université, Jean-Sébastien Noël étudie les circulations musicales entre l'Europe et l'Amérique du Nord. Sa thèse portait sur les expressions de la mort et du deuil chez les compositeurs de culture ashkénaze. Il s'intéresse actuellement sur l'émergence de réseaux, d'institutions et de festivals internationaux de musique contemporaine dans l'Ouest de la France. Ses travaux ont été soutenus par la Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah.

Assistant professor of contemporary history (La Rochelle University), Jean-Sébastien Noël studies musical circulations between Europe and North America (20th century). His Phd thesis dealt with the musical expressions of death and mourning by composers linked with Ashkenazy culture. His current research focuses on the emergence of networks, institutions and international festivals of avant-garde music in the West of France. His work has been supported by the Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah