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Audrey Mallet, *Vichy contre Vichy. Une capitale sans mémoire*. Paris: Belin, 2019. 297 pp. 24.00€. (pb). ISBN 979-2-410-00961-3.

Review by Richard J. Golsan, Texas A&M University, College Station.

Given France's fascination with the traumatic memory of the "Dark Years" over the last several decades, it is surprising that, until now, there has not been a comprehensive history written of the provincial municipality that has come to symbolize that historical moment of compromise and shame: Vichy. Audrey Mallet's excellent book, *Vichy contre Vichy: Une capitale sans mémoire* remedies that situation.

Although the bulk of *Vichy contre Vichy* focuses on the history of the town during World War II, its designation as the French state's capital, its cultural and social life under Pétain, and its participation in the regime's oppressive and eventually murderous policies, Mallet first provides the reader with an overview of the city's origins and history. That history is fascinating in itself.

Vichy's hot springs were first discovered in 52 BCE. The town that grew up around the springs was named Aquis Callidis by the Romans. As the town grew, its name evolved. In the fourteenth century, it became known as "Vichy." As Mallet explains, the town's fortunes improved markedly in the sixteenth century, when King Henri IV created the General Surintendancy of Baths and Fountains of the Kingdom. Shortly thereafter, the first formal bathing establishment was constructed at Vichy, which attracted France's royalty and nobility for annual cures. Among those who frequented Vichy was Madame de Sévigné, who suffered from rheumatism.

The nineteenth century saw another major uptick in the town's fortunes. In 1812, the population of Vichy stood at some eight hundred inhabitants. By 1873, that number had increased to 6000, and by 1889, Vichy claimed 10,500 inhabitants. Emperor Napoleon III, seeking to rival Germany's famous spas, ordered the refurbishment of the town, as well as the construction of a railway line to Vichy, in order that more guests could visit the town annually. Among the regular visitors were French colonists from North Africa and elsewhere, who vacationed in Vichy to recover from the rigors and maladies associated with colonial life. This explains in part why and how Vichy became a center for support for, and agitation on behalf of, Algérie Française during the Algerian war.

To accommodate Vichy's ever-expanding clientele (some 100,000 visitors annually by the start

of World War I), hotels, private residences, as well as cultural and entertainment facilities were established. By 1910, there were 140 hotels in Vichy, as well as numerous villas available to guests. The town's famous casino and opera house were constructed, the opera house attracting internationally renowned artists and musicians. There were also chic restaurants and expensive boutiques. In the 1930s, Mallet reports that Vichy boasted fort-eight jewelry stores, thirty-two clothing stores, eighteen fur stores, forty-eight grocery stores and forty-five butcher shops. During the Dark Years, a Louis Vuitton boutique was on the ground floor of the Hôtel du Parc, Pétain's residence. The Vuitton family, admirers of the Marshall and his regime, also designed propaganda pieces including a famous bust of Pétain himself (p. 39).

As Mallet reports, the idea of using Vichy as the capital of France's new collaborationist government came from Raphaël Alibert and Paul Beaudouin. Clermont-Ferrand, where the government had been briefly housed, proved inadequate, first because there were not enough hotels up to the tastes of the ministers, and second, because the presence of a large population of syndicalists and workers made it potentially inhospitable.

While the choice of Vichy with its hotels and luxurious accommodations, its population of well-versed professionals in the service industry, and its relative isolation made it almost ideal for government officials and diplomatic missions, the latter's presence was nevertheless financially hard on the townspeople. Wealthy spa visitors were now squeezed out and government rationing added to the financial hardships. Nevertheless, as Mallet reports, the townspeople as a rule proved extraordinarily supportive of the regime. Wealthy bourgeoisie rubbed elbows with the regime's elite, and Pétain was idolized by adoring crowds, who gathered to watch his comings and goings. Even Resistance groups, for the most part, were Pétainist (even though, after the war, many claimed they weren't, for obvious political reasons.)

As the war progressed and the Pétainist regime became increasingly oppressive and brutal, Vichy became more sinister. Collaborationist, fascist groups like Jacques Doriot's Parti Populaire Français were around the capital from the outset of the Occupation. But it was later, with Pétain's creation of the Milice under German pressure and the arrival of murderously antisemitic operatives like Pierre Poinot and his band, who arrived in the spring of 1944, that things got much worse. The capital became a center of denunciation, arbitrary imprisonment, torture, summary executions, and deportations of Jews to the east.

Because of its financial resources, the Milice recruited well. And along with the Gestapo, their enhanced financial resources persuaded significant numbers of Vichysois to denounce their Jewish and Resistance neighbors. For the denunciation of a Jew, one could receive 1000 francs; for Gaullist or Communist, 3000 francs.

In keeping with the regime's own, home-grown antisemitic policies, the mistreatment and expulsion of Jews began long before the implementation of Hitler's Final Solution, in the summer of 1942. Mallet notes that, while a number of French municipalities were very serious about the expulsion of Jews from their midst, at Vichy, "l'ampleur des mesures d'expulsion fut particulièrement impressionnante" (p. 112). The capital of the French state, after all, had greater numbers of security forces than most towns and cities available to carry out its ambitions. Combined with later efforts of the Germans, the Milice, and other groups, by 1944 there was only a "handful" of Jews remaining of a population that in 1940, numbered several thousand (p. 112). In defense of their town after the war, many Vichysois pointed to Jews who

had been undisturbed during the Occupation. Among them were the tailor Rappaport and the pharmacist Maurice Benhamou—but these were favorites of members of the regime's élite.

After the Liberation, Mallet writes, Vichy and its townspeople did their best to restore their image. As elsewhere in France, they participated actively in postwar purges, and even participated in the kinds of excesses that occurred elsewhere. Moreover, they began to present themselves as victims of the regime and its excesses, like the rest of France. After all, they argued, they had not chosen to house Pétain's government. A photographic exhibit of the Milice and its crimes was put on in Vichy shortly after the Liberation to emphasize the townspeople's suffering. Many efforts were undertaken to embrace Gaullism, to little avail. The General refused to visit the town, despite entreaties. It is at this point in the town's history that the meaning of Mallet's subtitle becomes clear, although the phrase "without memory" becomes most *à propos* later. For example, Mallet observes that according to a poll taken in the mid-1990s, 95 percent of the townspeople believed that the Hôtel du Portugal was a hotel "like any other," even though it had housed the Gestapo during the Dark Years. Indeed, the cries of those being tortured in the basement of the hotel could be heard by Vichyssois as they walked by.

If Vichy's dark, politically compromising past had ended with the Liberation, it is possible that the shadow that still seems to hang over the town would not be present. But, as Mallet discusses in the final chapters of her book, from its many years serving vacationing and recuperating colonists, especially from North Africa, the town went on to become, in the 1950s and early 1960s, a hotbed of support for Algérie Française. General Raoul Salan, leader of the OAS visited frequently, his favorite hotel being the Hôtel Royal. Salan is also buried in Vichy. Younger Algérie Française activists also began to congregate and to live there. The young Jean-Marie LePen was a visible agitator, as was a young French literature professor, Robert Faurisson. To encourage and facilitate direct contact with the Algerian colonists, a direct air route was established between Vichy and Algiers. And, as Mallet observes, it wasn't just the presence of well-known figures and agitators associated with Algérie Française that earned the town its reputation in this regard. Polls indicated that the townspeople were highly supportive of the cause as well.

As this summary of *Vichy contre Vichy* suggests, Mallet's book is an extraordinary resource for those wishing to understand the town's rich history, its "reality" so to speak, behind the myth. Indeed Mallet also discusses the townspeople's aggrieved sense that somehow, the name of their town has been highjacked to represent and, indeed, embody a reality that these townspeople reject as their own. It is true, for example, that despite other compromises, the town refused to commemorate Philippe Henriot, Vichy's propaganda minister, following his assassination by the Resistance in summer 1944.

Despite its many strengths, *Vichy après Vichy* does suffer from shortcomings. Especially in the later chapters, the book becomes a bit repetitive. The story of Robert Faurisson is told more than once, as is that of Robert le Condé, another neofascist. Lucien Rebatet, the infamous *Je suis partout* journalist, is referred to as "Louis Rebatet" (p. 41).

But these are minor quibbles. All in all, *Vichy contre Vichy* is a remarkable and necessary book for all those interested not only in the Dark Years, but the politics of agitation associated with Algérie Française. It is also essential reading for all those interested in the vicissitudes of the

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always-complex interplay of history and memory.

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