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Introduction

When the French Senate voted to commemorate the Algerian War on March 19th, 2012 an old yet enduring struggle of memorialization was unearthed. While this vote was originally slated for 2002, the French Secretary of State for War Veterans postponed it, declaring, “40 years later is still too soon.” Although this date joins July 14th, November 11th, and numerous others in commemorating French actions at home and abroad, it remains steeped in controversy. This legislative act and others, such as the *loi Taubira*, raise a question of agency: who decides historical memory and for whom is it decided?

Beyond symbolic commemorations exist physical memorials and sites of memory. In a country where monuments define the landscape, what role do these memorials play? Conversely, what is the significance of absent memorials and un-enshrined historical events? What metaphorical memorializations—cultural, literary, artistic—fill this void? As Rwanda marks 20 years since its 1994 genocide and Maghreb countries reconstruct their national identities following the Arab Spring, one must also ask what acts of remembrance have developed outside of France? The spectrum of memorialization—from sites to literature, from personal to collective—is defined by its inherent complexity and incessant negotiation of actors, authors and audience.

For the 18th Annual Graduate Student Conference, the UCLA Department of French and Francophone Studies explored the processes, functions and manifestations of memorialization in literature, arts and related fields. In addition to the papers presented by students from various countries and departments, the conference featured a keynote presentation by University Distinguished Professor Richard Golsan of Texas A&M University. His lecture entitled, “What Does Vichy Mean Today?,” discussed the power and corruptibility of memory and the ways in which a skewed interpretation of the past can impact modern political decisions. Through a focus on the Vichy Regime and the way it has been redeployed/rethought within the current French political arena, Professor Golsan underscored the key themes of our conference. In addition, he participated in a roundtable discussion that included Professor Laure Murat of UCLA and Peter Tokofsky of The Getty Museum. Moderated by Professor Patrick Coleman of UCLA, this lively exchange focused on the role of museums and memorials in shaping and complicating personal and collective memory.

The following papers exemplify the themes discussed throughout our two-day conference. The first paper, submitted by Priscilla Charrat, examines how postmemory functions in the works of Boualem Sansal, Leïla Sebbar, and Patrick Modiano, where silence and active forgetting are prevalent. The author demonstrates how memory is proselytized within the texts through the use of “lieux de mémoire” and argues for the transformation of these texts into “lieux.” The author’s choice to include three novels in her study of silence and postmemory highlights the universality of intertextuality in memory formation. This intertextuality is likewise taken up by Marion Kühn in her analysis of Roger Magini’s *Revoirs Nevers* and Alain Resnais’s *Hiroshima mon amour*. Continuing the analysis of events during World War II, Leticia Villaseñor examines French President Jacques Chirac’s public apology for the Vel d’Hiv roundup within the framework of Jacques Derrida and Vladimir Jankélévitch’s notions of forgiveness and pardon. The final submission in this volume, written by Caroline Mosser, engages a similar turn to the past in 19th-century nationalist discourses, which recentered French identity around an historic and idealized past characterized by *La Chanson de Roland*.