



*Journ@l Electronique d'Histoire des  
Probabilités et de la Statistique*

*Electronic Journ@l for History of  
Probability and Statistics*

Vol 9; Décembre/December 2013

**www.jehps.net**

## A CRYSTAL BEING...

MARC FERRO

We had never talked about it until then... I mean about the war in Algeria. It was still taboo thirty years after the fact, even among “metropolitans” from one side of the Mediterranean or another. And twice as taboo for someone who, like me, had participated in the “events” and who, at the time a teacher at the Oran high school, had been an active member of the French “Liberals of Algeria”. We, who knew how ignorant the mainland was about relations between Europeans and Muslims, were not going to reopen wounds that had barely begun to heal.

In any case, more largely, at the Association for research at the EHESS (AREHESS), Marc and I didn't talk about political problems. We worked on developing research, on advancing the School, on creating intellectual and convivial structures — all this in an environment that was slowly being eroded by individualism and that betrayed a certain detachment for an Institution that was actually admired by the whole world. Never, absolutely never, would we have taken the risk of endangering our cooperation with the slightest imprudent remark on a topic that was still a minefield in France.

Yes, for years we operated perfectly in concert. The third in our trio was a woman, Nadja Vuckovic, who was absolutely synchronized to our decisions and these silences, with a solidarity accompanied by a totally embraced reserve.

In truth, it wasn't worth talking politics and risking recalling Algeria...because, time after time, with problems that didn't have anything to do with Algeria, no more than they had to do with the politics of the mainland, we were always in agreement on decisions and actions that concerned the Association: the choice of articles destined to our *Lettre*, films to be created for the *Savoir et Mémoire* collection over the great masters of the EHESS, the newly elected to be invited so that they could publicize their research program, etc.

And this constant attention to the purpose of the AREHESS turned out to be the reproduction and the reflection, in that context, of the qualities that Marc showed during the

various sessions of the general assemblies of the School: the concern that the institution function honorably, that it support projects that gave it value, that its expansion not contradict the ethical demands of research.

This was the sense of State that Marc implicitly invoked so that the School could rise to the height of its ambitions and the principles underlying the independence of research. This insistence was accompanied by a smiling inflexibility and an unequivocal determination. Throughout his participation in the Association as in other settings at the School, one could not detect the slightest trace of personal self-interest in Marc.

Such rigor gave me great satisfaction. Especially, as in counterpoint, during the oral defense of diplomas, a different Barbut appeared, full of goodwill for the candidates whom, thanks to social mathematics, he had helped somewhat to bring out of the shadows and into the light...

And then came one day in 2000, when I was going over texts about the Algerian problem, rereading the list of the 121 who in 1960 refused to participate in the repression in Algeria, that I came across the name of Marc Barbut...

Here is that text:

The Manifesto of the 121 against the Algerian war (September 1960)

Published in *Le Monde* September 5, 1960, the Manifesto of the 121 had a great effect because of the large number of cultural icons who signed.

The Manifesto declared:

...the refusal to take arms against the Algerian people to be justified [...], along with the conduct of the French who thought it their duty to bring aid and protection to the oppressed Algerians in the name of the French people. [...]

Indeed, the cause of the Algerian people contributes decisively towards ruining the colonial system and is consequently the cause of all free men.

Due to the initiative of the modern times, the Manifesto was signed firstly by Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, as well as by Jean Pouillon, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Francis Jeanson, Robert Barrat. This list of original signatures contained, among others, the names of the publishers François Maspero, Jérôme Lindon, Eric Losfeld; the scholars and professors Jean-Pierre Vernant, Marc Barbut, Louis Gernet, Laurent Schwarz. André Mandouze; writers, filmmakers and comedians, Alain Resnais, Henri Lefebvre, Simone Signoret, Vercors, Clauade Roy, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Jean-Louis Bory, André Panigel, Daniel Gélín, François Châtelet, Nathalie Sarraute, Jean-François Revel.

Marc had never told me of this involvement, this gesture that had left its mark upon History. I was so happy to see my intuition confirmed, that we weren't only close in our daily work, and that this implied also that deep down we were cut from the same stock.

Still, I confess it today, my joy was accompanied by a secret reservation.

These 121 who still deserve our recognition today, they truly took their time becoming indignant and resisting. This text dates from September 1960. Repression, assassination attempts, torture had been going on for many years. How many victims had there been, especially of torture...

But then, just as discreet as Marc, his spouse Claude brought me an old file that has since disappeared...

There I found the letter, dated March 15, 1957, from the Council of Investigation of officers of the reserve, concerning Marc Barbut, calling him before the Council.

Whereas Barbut, Marc, Jean, Marie, reserve artillery lieutenant, was reproached for having resigned his rank and requested a new position as a soldier 2<sup>nd</sup> class, he tendered his resignation with the following statement:

I think in fact that the French army dishonored itself in Algeria, and I refuse to be one of its officers.

In this way, three and a half years before others publicly expressed their indignation, Marc Barbut, determined and without pomp, undertook alone an act of resistance to defend the principles of our republic.

Fifteen years later, he was decorated with the Legion of Honor.