

The French Resistance

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Olivier Wieviorka's invaluable study of the French Resistance, *Histoire de la Résistance 1940-45* (Paris: Perrin, 2013), has been translated by Jane Marie Todd and published by Harvard University Press. It offers a rigorous, comprehensive history of the evolution of the Resistance, the diversity of the movements involved and the deep divisions that marked them, and challenges the simplified images that have come to dominate the representation of the Resistance in France, and no doubt more widely. In this regard *The French Resistance* will be of particular interest to readers of this list, since the final chapter is devoted to tracing the evolution in the collective remembrance of the Resistance. Wieviorka identifies two main stages in the development of the memory of the Resistance, and relates them to the historical context and the political necessities and strategies of the time. Immediately after the war, de Gaulle ensured that the resistant would be defined in military terms as the combatant who had fought the Germans internally, as the Free French fought them externally. This narrative represented the French not as defeatists or *attentistes*, not as victims and certainly not as collaborators, but as mobilised around the struggle against the nazis, a narrative that both de Gaulle and the Communist Party were keen to promote, the former to support postwar reconstruction of national unity, the latter to obscure its actions during the sombre years of the Germano-Soviet pact. This focus on the active role of resistance fighters ignored the forms of resistance of civil society and the suffering of those who were not fighters but victims, including deportees and Jews. Ceremonies, joint military parades, films such as the *Battle of the Rails* (1946) contributed to forging the legend of the *nation résistante*, incarnated in the unity of the internal and external fighters.

With the death of de Gaulle in 1970 and the discredit cast on his legacy by sections of the right, angry at the abandonment of Algeria or nostalgic for Vichy, the heroic narrative began to unravel. A new generation was impatient with the myths of the past: when Pompidou forbade the television screening of *Le Chagrin et la pitié*, this had the effect of precipitating audiences into the cinemas of the Left Bank where it was shown. Long-silent voices began to make themselves heard: the increasing intervention of Jews, of the leaders of Resistance movements outside of the Gaullist-Communist axis; films such as *Lacombe Lucien* (1974); biographies of Resistance leaders (Jean Moulin, Lucie et Raymond Aubrac) that cast doubt over aspects of their action or even their loyalties, contributed to major changes in the representation of the Occupation and the Resistance.

The resulting shift saw the figure of the deportee, and notably of the Jew, come to the fore of the memory of the Occupation. In the 1980s texts presented to the parliament fundamentally changed the legal definition and the popular conception of the resistant. Now the full range of civil actions was recognised, whether distributing the clandestine press or helping Jews. Resistants became less combatants against the nazis than pioneers in the struggle for human rights and democracy against totalitarianism.

Reflecting that the Resistance is still an obligatory reference in political life - noting the prominence that President Sarkozy gave to memorialising Glières, or his plan for schoolchildren to 'adopt' a child who died in deportation - Wieviorka concludes that its legacy suffers however from this memorial confusion and the changing legal definition of the resistant. The political diversity of the members of the resistance movements added to the confusion as its ex-members adopted widely divergent positions on the issues that marked the post war period.

To each president, his Resistance: President Hollande, in his speech on 8 May this year to the Concours National de la Résistance which mobilises young people around the 'principles' of the Resistance, stated that the programme of the Conseil National at the end of the war aimed to organise society 'autour de la justice, de la couverture des risques essentiels et puis du progrès [around justice, protection against essential risks and progress]'. A significant watering down of the ambitions of the Conseil National – and in the reference to 'la couverture des risques essentiels' a rewriting of its programme to justify reduction of the *Etat providence* to a minimal coverage of 'essential' risk that chimes with the new austerity promoted by the Socialist government.

I note – for any historians interested in researching this period – that Hollande promised in his speech to open the archives of the Ministry of the Interior for 1940-1945 so that historians may 'continue to enlighten us about what happened and thus fight against the evils that threaten us: revisionism, the corruption of memory, forgetting, erasure.'

Liz Rechniewski