



WER IST WALTER?

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Edited by

Elma Hašimbegović, Nicolas Moll and Ivo Pejaković

The Making of Resistance Heroes: Examples from France

Matthias Waechter

“France needs a myth; and in this very moment, France is too humiliated to find this myth in an idea or a formula; it needs to be embodied by a man”, wrote Pierre Brossolette, one of the most important figures of the French Resistance, in spring 1942.¹ For him, there was only one man who could personify the Resistance and thus serve as the desired myth: Charles de Gaulle, the man who had been the first to call the French to resist against German occupation with his radio speech delivered from London on 18 June 1940. It appears that France is not the only country where resistance against Nazism and Fascism has produced hero myths. In Germany, protagonists of the attempt to assassinate Hitler on 20 July 1944 like Claus von Stauffenberg, or key figures of the White Rose (*Weißer Rose*) student movement like Hans and Sophie Scholl have been magnified to heroes of anti-Nazi resistance.² In Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito became the object of a pervasive personality cult around his role as the leader of the revolutionary uprising between 1941 and 1945.³ Hero myths, this seems obvious, are not born, but made; they are the product of conscious myth-making through political, societal and cultural actors. Some hero myths only generate after the period of resistance is over, as in the case of the German figures Stauffenberg and the Scholl siblings. Others, like de Gaulle, are made into heroes during the resistance period.

Before we look more closely into French examples of myth-making, we should address general questions about the functions of hero myths:

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- 1 Pierre Brossolette, “Rapport politique”, in *Pierre Brossolette, Résistance (1927-1943)*, textes rassemblés et présentés par Guillaume Piketty (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1998), 111-139.
 - 2 Cf. Katie Rickard, “Memorializing the White Rose Resistance Group in post-war Germany”, in *Memorialization in Germany since 1945: Difficult pasts*, eds. Bill Niven and Chloe Paver (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 157-167.
 - 3 Marc Halder, *Der Titokult. Charismatische Herrschaft im sozialistischen Jugoslawien* (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2023).

Why are resistance movements likely to produce hero myths? Which political and societal needs are addressed by such myths? Firstly, one can say that heroes serve as models. Their actions and individual decisions should guide other citizens to make the right political and moral choices in troubled times of defeat and occupation. Secondly, the making of hero myths always implies a reduction of the complexity of personalities. Myth-making blurs the inner contradictions, the emotional tensions, doubts and errors inherent in all human lives and creates figures of unambiguity, of political purity and moral flawlessness. Heroes, thus, are not ordinary, commonplace human beings, as the cult around them turns them into immortal figures endowed with exceptional virtues. Thirdly, heroes are supposed to provide identity to a group, in our case nations or political movements. Situations like military defeat, occupation, radical political change always produce crises of collective identities. The citizens tend to doubt their nations, feel humiliated, and disunited. A hero myth is supposed to rally the citizens around one venerated individual and thus restore their belief in the future of the collective.⁴

When we now look more closely at the case of France during World War II, two observations should be made: Firstly, the extremely rapid and devastating defeat in the summer of 1940 had a destabilising and depressing effect on the mood of the French population. For many citizens, it was unbelievable that a nation that had won World War I, called one of the strongest armies of the world its own and governed the world's second largest colonial empire, could be subdued within only a few weeks. The humiliating conditions of the armistice, which left roughly two thirds of continental France in the hands of the Germans, added to this frustration. Not only did the country experience defeat, but it also underwent a pervasive domestic change, as a new political authority engaged in collaboration with the German occupants and abolished the 70-year-old Republic by replacing it by an authoritarian "French State". The second observation is closely related to these circumstances: In order to comfort the French population in this deeply unsettling situation, the new political authorities developed a ubiquitous personality cult around the new leader of the country. That

4 Closer development of this concept of myth: Matthias Waechter, "Mythos", *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 11 February 2010, http://docupedia.de/zg/waechter_mythos_v1_de_2010; See also: Jane L. Bownas, *The Myth of the Modern Hero: Changing Perceptions of Heroism* (Liverpool: University Press, 2017).

figure was Marshal Philippe Pétain, an aged protagonist of World War I and hero of the Battle of Verdun, who now stood atop the “French State” with dictatorial powers. He was presented as the saviour of the fatherland, who had selflessly taken up the task of resurrecting France in the moment of its deepest humiliation. In his speech announcing the armistice, he promised “to give his life to France to alleviate its misfortune”.⁵ Posters of a stern-looking Pétain were displayed all over the country, replacing the traditional symbol of the Republic, the “Marianne”, in town halls throughout France. French citizens were summoned to follow him as a father-like leader (*Chef*), who had taken painful but inevitable decisions for the survival of the nation. The new authoritarian regime, which had its capital in Vichy, presented a radically one-sided narrative of French history, discarding the heritage of the revolution and the Republic as decadent and destructive, driven by hostile forces such as Jews, Freemasons, and foreigners. Vichy France celebrated the monarchical tradition, the army, the family, and order as the only elements that could provide identity for the French.⁶

De Gaulle: Symbol, prophet, liberator

Thus, any person or movement opposing Pétain and his collaboration policy had to confront the pervasive hero cult that the new authorities had displayed and which found broad support among the French population.⁷ This challenge was particularly acute for Charles de Gaulle, who wanted to build up an alternative political authority from his exile in London, but was completely unknown to the citizens in the home country. The history of Gaullism began on 18 June 1940. With his call for resistance from exile in London, de Gaulle not only entered the history of World War II, but also in French national memory. By calling for resistance, he saw himself as part of a great patriotic tradition, reincarnating the great figures of French history who had acted heroically in comparable situations of extreme danger to the fatherland. As a leading figure of the resistance, he updated the memory of

5 Philippe Pétain, “Appel du 17 juin 1940”, in *Discours aux Français. 17 juin 1940-20 août 1944*, textes établis, présentés et commentés par Jean-Claude Barbas (Paris: Albin Michel, 1989), 56-57.

6 Cf. Didier Fischer, *Le mythe Pétain* (Paris: Flammarion, 2002).

7 Cf. Pierre Laborie, *L'opinion française sous Vichy* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1990).

such figures and sought to appropriate them. He *was* – in his own opinion – Joan of Arc, he *was* Clemenceau, he *was* Carnot.⁸

He also embodied – according to his own perception – the synthesis of different, even contrary traditions of French history. Since the revolution of 1789, two political and ideological currents had opposed each other; the revolutionary-republican, secular France rivalled its monarchist, anti-revolutionary and clerical counterpart.⁹ De Gaulle did not align with either side, but pretended to reconcile the *deux France*, or two Frances. At the same time, he positioned himself as a symbol of this synthesis, a symbol of all the positive traditions of national history. In the first half of 1941, an illustration was produced that quickly became widespread. It showed the general in front of two warlike female figures: on his right, Joan of Arc on horseback with her sword drawn, and on his left, a revolutionary female figure with her breast bared, modelled on Eugène Delacroix's famous painting "Liberty Leading the People".¹⁰ The illustration thus referred to de Gaulle's cherished synthesis between the myth of Joan of Arc and the cult of the Revolution, showing the general as the one who united and embodied these two traditions.¹¹

This self-portrayal by de Gaulle and his London circle became increasingly popular from the winter of 1941/1942; it was more and more adopted by the underground resistance press in France. In January 1942, the clandestine newspaper *Libération* called him the "symbol of the reconstruction of our country"; a few weeks later, *Combat* praised him as "the one who symbolises resistance against oppression. The French liberation movement

8 At the Casablanca conference in 1943, de Gaulle, according to Cordell Hull, told President Franklin D. Roosevelt: "I am Joan of Arc. I am Clemenceau." See: Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, vol. 2 (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1948), 1206-1207. Lazare Carnot was a protagonist of the French Revolution and organised the massive recruitment of soldiers in 1793.

9 The problem of the *deux France* has been systematically examined in the collective work *Les lieux de mémoire*. See for instance the contributions by Jean-Louis Ormières, "Les rouges et les blancs", and Marcel Gauchet, "La droite et la gauche", both in *Les lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, 3 vol. (Paris: Gallimard, 1984-1992), 2395-2432 and 2533-2601.

10 Le Général de Gaulle (not dated), photograph, National Archives/*Archives Nationales* (Paris), F la 5220. The illustration appeared on the 4 August 1941 cover of the US magazine *Time*; it is thus probable that it was created in the first half of the year 1941. Cf. Ernest Hamlin Baker, "De Gaulle. Already he rules two-fifths of the French Empire – by mileage", *Time*, 4 August 1941, <https://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19410804,00.html>. All quoted internet sources were last accessed 3 April 2024.

11 As to de Gaulle's attempt to link the myth of Jeanne d'Arc with the revolutionary tradition: Charles de Gaulle, "Discours prononcé à Londres au déjeuner de la chambre de commerce française, 6.1.1942"; in *Discours et messages*, vol. 1 (Paris: Plon, 1970), 167.

is deeply attached to this symbol.”¹² During the same period, considerable parts of the population seem to have accepted de Gaulle’s value as a symbol. This can be seen, for example, in the letters that French people from all walks of life sent to BBC radio, which was the most important Resistance media outlet. Here, de Gaulle – whose radio speeches were followed devoutly – was a symbol of hope, regained courage, and patriotism.¹³ The fact that De Gaulle was unknown and remote made it possible for him to become a projection screen for various needs and desires of the citizens. The, “prayers” to the General, which were already circulating in France around Christmas 1940, are a good example of this:

Our Father de Gaulle who art in England
Glorified be Thy name.
May your victory come on land, on the seas and in the air
Give them today their daily bombardments
And give them back a hundredfold the suffering they have inflicted
on the French.
Do not leave us under their rule, deliver us from the Germans [boches].¹⁴

At the same time, de Gaulle presented himself as the prophet who had foreseen France’s defeat in his critical military writings since the 1930s and then had prophesied victory against Nazi Germany since 18 June 1940. The first biography of the General, written in 1941 by Philippe Barrès, the son of the famous writer Maurice Barrès, was also based on this leitmotif.¹⁵ The course of the war could thus be described as a gradual fulfilment of de Gaulle’s prophecies. In this sense, the Gaullist resistance movement annually celebrated his return on 18 June as a day on which it was possible to see how the Resistance leader’s predictions were coming true. Towards the end of the war, the mythological roles of symbol and prophet increasingly

12 “Le Général de Gaulle, l’Étranger et Nous”, *Combat*, March 1942; “Vers la libération”, *Libération (Sud)*, No. 5, 20 January 1942.

13 Cf. “Les Français écrivent au Général de Gaulle”, *Service Presse et Information*, February 1940, Institute for Contemporary History/*Institut d’Histoire du Temps Présent*, ARC 074-5.

14 “Tracts clandestins publiés en France”, National Library Paris/*Bibliothèque Nationale Paris*, Rés.G. 1476 I-VII. Other variations of the “prayer” to de Gaulle are in this collection.

15 Philippe Barrès, *Charles de Gaulle* (London: The Continental Publishers and Distributors LTD., 1941).

gave way to that of the saviour and liberator of the fatherland, the roles he inhabited when he entered Paris in August 1944. In the months of the “libération”, the cult surrounding de Gaulle reached a culmination point; he was worshipped, sung about, and painted as a hero of world-historical stature, as if he was sent by God. As a man without clearly defined political, social and cultural affiliations, he increasingly became the embodiment of the entire nation in the myth-making of the liberation period.¹⁶

Colonel Fabien: The archetypal communist partisan

Charles de Gaulle was obviously not uncontested in his aim of leading and embodying the resistance against German occupation and collaboration. His most powerful rival was French communism, which by the end of the war provided the biggest number of armed fighters and played a strong role in the Resistance’s political organisation. The French Communist Party (*Parti Communiste Français* – PCF), however, had to struggle with the handicap that it belatedly entered resistance. Bound by instructions from Moscow and the Non-Aggression-Treaty between Stalin and Hitler, the overwhelming majority of party members avoided any action against the occupation, as long as the Soviet Union had not yet been attacked by Germany. Only after 22 June 1941 and the beginning of the Soviet-German war, did the PCF fully join the resistance, at which point de Gaulle and his followers had already established a solid underground organisation.

Communism’s entry into resistance was symbolised by a violent act: On 21 August 1941, the partisan Pierre Georges, later known by his *nom de guerre* Colonel Fabien, assassinated a German officer at the Barbès-Rochecouart metro station in Paris. It was the first time that a member of the occupation troops was shot on open streets by a French citizen. The shooting at Barbès-Rochecouart marked a turning point in the relationship between the occupation troops and French citizens, which had been relatively peaceful to that time. The German military command ordered a severe retaliation for the killed officer; all French political prisoners were declared “hostages” of the occupation forces and close to 100 of them were executed in the following weeks. A fatal cycle began, as communist

16 Cf. Matthias Waechter, *Der Mythos des Gaullismus. Heldenkult, Geschichtspolitik und Ideologie 1940-1958* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2006).

partisans would continue attacking occupation troops, and the Germans would execute many times more French “hostages” for each killed soldier. This confrontation altered the perception and presentation of the PCF and meant the beginning of an armed, popular uprising, markedly different from the Gaullist resistance, which was essentially verbal (in the form of de Gaulle’s radio speeches) and military.¹⁷

The gunshot of 21 August 1941 ideally fit into the biography of the perpetrator, Pierre Georges (or later Colonel Fabien). He had been continuously precocious in his political engagements. Born on 21 January 1919 in a Parisian workers’ neighbourhood, he grew up in a communist family, joined communist youth organisations, and encountered several problems as an adolescent when rebelling against exploitative and abusive employers. In October 1936, he lied about his age in order to join the International Brigades fighting in the Spanish Civil War. A report about his service reads: “In many circumstances, he showed courage, self-sacrifice and immense initiative, and proved to be an excellent marksman. He was eager to go to the front, but was held back because of his age.”¹⁸ After his return to France in 1938, he became a party official in charge of the Parisian youth organisation, and was arrested in 1939 because of underground activities for the now prohibited PCF. While the bulk of the party remained neutral in the first months after the armistice of June 1940, Georges again proved his precocity by organising opposition against Vichy and the occupation. After the gunshot at Barbès Rochechouart, he continued on with assassinations, acts of sabotage, and the formation of armed groups. His life resembled more and more that of an ideal partisan fighter. He was wounded, but resumed the fight immediately afterwards, he took up various identities to escape from persecution; when arrested by the police, interrogated and tortured, he avoided delivering any sensitive information. After escaping from prison, he arrived in Paris in June 1944, when the Allied invasion of Normandy had just begun. Under his *nom de guerre* Colonel Fabien, he was now a living legend, and became one of the chief commanders of the *Franc-tireurs et partisans* (FTP), the communist-led militia leading the popular uprising in the capital.¹⁹ With the

17 Cf. Stéphane Courtois and Marc Lazar, *Histoire du Parti communiste français* (Paris: PUF, 2000). See also: Franck Liaigre, *Les FTP. Nouvelle histoire d'une résistance* (Paris: Perrin, 2015).

18 Quoted in: Jean Maitron and Claude Penner, “Pierre Georges, dit Fredo, dit Colonel Fabien”, *Le Maitron. Dictionnaire biographique, mouvement ouvrier, mouvement social*, 31 May 2009 (last modified 30 January 2022), <https://maitron.fr/spip.php?article50415>.

19 Cf. Alber Ouzoulias, *La vie héroïque du Colonel Fabien* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1945).

liberation of Paris in August 1944, the competition between de Gaulle and the communists was exacerbated. Colonel Fabien became part of this conflict. Whereas de Gaulle insisted on his exclusive leadership over the armed combat against the Germans and wanted to entrust it into his professional exile army, the communists, and Fabien among them, strove for their independent, self-organised contribution to liberation. Fabien founded his own brigade mainly from Parisian workers, including women, foreigners, Jews, which went on to participate in pushing the Germans beyond the Rhine. It was in this context that Colonel Fabien was killed when a mine exploded close to his headquarters on 25 December 1944. The obsequies for the dead partisan were reminiscent of a state funeral. His coffin was laid out in front of Paris' city hall, where a huge crowd marched past him.²⁰

Memory battles after World War II

The conflict between Gaullism and communism, already nascent during resistance and in the days of the liberation, intensified after 1945. Both forces strove for a maximum of influence on postwar France's political development, buttressing their ambitions with the roles they played during the resistance. Whereas de Gaulle continuously claimed that he embodied the legitimacy of France since his call for resistance on 18 June 1940, the Communist Party invented a new narrative. It presented itself as the "party of the 75.000 shot dead (*fusillés*)", alleging that it had paid the highest death toll for the liberation of France. The number of 75.000 was highly exaggerated, as overall, roughly 25.000 resistance fighters of all political orientations were shot during the war. Under the auspices of the beginnings of the Cold War in 1947, the PCF, obedient to directives from Moscow, isolated itself from its partners of the resistance period, left the government and went into a principled opposition to the Fourth Republic. In the meantime, Charles de Gaulle, after having stepped down as leader of the provisional postwar government in January 1946, founded his own political movement, the Rally of the French People (*Rassemblement du Peuple Français* – RPF), which presented itself as the last resort of the French nation against rising

20 Cf. INA Histoire, "Les obsèques de Romain Rolland et du Colonel Fabien", YouTube video, 2:45, 20 March 2022 (from Journal Les Actualités Françaises, 1 January 1945), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9t14cgiB11M>.

communism. De Gaulle fiercely condemned the parliamentary Fourth Republic as a frail political system, fostering futile bickering between political parties and thus weakening France's position in the international system. The problem for the Fourth Republic and the parties supporting it was that together, the PCF and RPF represented roughly half of the electorate. Conversely, the problem for Gaullists and communists was that they opposed an incontestably legitimate political system, whose constitution had been ratified in 1946 by a referendum.²¹

To strengthen their legitimacy, communists and Gaullists focused again on memory and the role they had played in the resistance period. Both movements claimed that they had the sole right to embody the spirit of resistance, that they had contributed most to the liberation of France, and that this heritage legitimated their position in the postwar political arena. In this context, the role of resistance heroes and the commemoration of their acts played a key role. Those heroes were meant to embody the message that the movements wanted to convey in the deeply divided historical-political culture of postwar French society. Colonel Fabien's gunshot of 21 August 1941 was essential to the Communist narrative. The commemoration of this single heroic act aimed to erase the Communist Party's weak point, which was its late entry into the Resistance. Fabien was presented as the man who had started the real Resistance, the one who fought not just with words, but with a weapon in his hand. "He must be for all patriotic Frenchmen the living symbol of the first fighter of the armed Resistance on French soil, the image of the first Frenchman who dared to rise up, weapon in hand, in broad daylight and in the heart of Paris, against a Nazi officer", claimed the initiators of monument for Colonel Fabien.²² To mark the anniversary of his attack in August 1946, the scene of the crime (the Barbès Metro station) was adorned with a banner with the following inscription: "Fabien's revolver shot did more for the liberation of the fatherland than 100 speeches."²³

21 Cf. Pierre Nora, "Gaullistes et communistes", in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, 3 vol. (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 2489-2532. See also: Olivier Wieviorka, *The French resistance*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Harvard University Press, 2016), final chapter "A divided memory", 454-466; Robert Gildea, *Fighters in the shadow. A new history of the French resistance* (Harvard University Press, 2015), final chapter "Conclusion: Battle for the soul of the resistance", 445-481.

22 Letter of the "Comité parisien d'érection du monument Fabien" to the Prefect of the département Seine-et-Oise, 27 November 1946, National Archives/*Archives nationales* – Paris, Reg. F 1cI 231.

23 Henri Amouroux, *La France du baby-boom 1945-1950, Les photos retrouvés de l'AFP* (Paris: Agence France-Presse 1991), 50.

The Gaullist RPF, on the other hand, presented a highly personalised interpretation of the Resistance that foregrounded de Gaulle's role as the "Man of 18 June 1940". The exceptional achievements of the historically significant individual were put forward against the communist view, which focused on the masses. The Resistance's military aspects were emphasised, whereas the role of the internal resistance, most of whose protagonists had meanwhile turned their backs on de Gaulle, was deliberately diminished. This phase therefore saw a fundamental change in the De Gaulle myth's function; until then, it had always been associated with the claim of uniting the French and reconciling divergent traditions. With the founding of the RPF, Gaullism took on the form of a political party, and the General, who until then had always wanted to be above all parties, had to descend into the depths of day-to-day politics. The Cross of Lorraine, once the unifying symbol of a resisting France across all dividing lines, was chosen by the Gaullists as its party insignia and thus became the emblem of a specific political movement that fought the communists, who were branded as "separatists", and the party system. De Gaulle, whose mission to date had been the unity of France, was increasingly perceived as a divider of the country's political culture.

Jean Moulin: Belated hero of unity

With the regime change of 1958 and the establishment of the Fifth Republic, de Gaulle's role in France's political culture evolved again. He was no longer a dissenter, using his legitimacy from the resistance period as an argument against the existing constitution, but now, as head of state, he was in the very centre of the political system, guaranteeing the independence and unity of the nation. Still, the first four years of de Gaulle's presidency were marked again by deep divisions, caused by the Algerian war of independence. The Arab Muslim population of Algeria's fight for self-determination not only pitted French citizens of different political persuasions against each other, but also led to deep rifts between former resistance fighters. Thus, some former key figures of the resistance movement such as Georges Bidault and Jacques Soustelle fiercely opposed de Gaulle's policy, which led to Algerian self-determination, siding instead with the most intransigent defenders of French Algeria.

In this context, state authorities decided to organise a great commemoration of the resistance. The moment was chosen for 1964, which was labelled the “year of two anniversaries”: The 50th anniversary of the outbreak of World War I, and the 20th anniversary of the liberation of Paris. The idea of commemorating the two world wars together reinforced the idea that both wars were intertwined and represented two episodes of a “30-year war” in which France had fought to assert itself. By the same token, the motif of national unity was emphasised, as no event stood for France’s “sacred unity” as much as August 1914, when all political forces unanimously sustained the mobilisation of the country. The central event of the festivities was the transfer of Jean Moulin’s ashes to the Pantheon, a temple-like place in the centre of Paris where the nation commemorates its great men and women. In this commemoration, Jean Moulin, a personality who had previously not been prominently featured in commemorations of the Resistance, became the focus of attention. De Gaulle appointed Moulin, a former prefect exiled in London, as his representative in France with the task of unifying the dispersed resistance movements and bringing them under de Gaulle’s authority. In 1943, he succeeded in his mission, when the National Council of the Resistance (*Conseil national de la Résistance* – CNR), which assembled all different parts of the resistance movement, met for the first time and unanimously acclaimed de Gaulle as its leader. Shortly afterwards, though, the Gestapo arrested Moulin, after a member of the Resistance betrayed him. Moulin, however, remained steadfast even under severe torture and did not reveal anyone before he died from the injuries that his torturers had inflicted on him.

The protagonist of the ceremony transferring Moulin’s ashes to the Pantheon on 19 December 1964 was de Gaulle’s Minister of Culture André Malraux, a famous novelist and member of the Resistance. In his speech, Malraux praised Moulin as a symbol of national unity, a man with only one ambition: turning the resisting French (“*des Français résistants*”) into the French Resistance (“*la Résistance française*”).²⁴ Malraux celebrated the tortured Resistance leader not only as a representative of Gaullism, but also for the whole country. His speech concluded with the following words: “Youth of France, may you today be able to think of this man as

24 André Malraux, “Transfert des cendres de Jean Moulin au Panthéon. Discours prononcé à Paris le 19 décembre 1964”, in *La politique, la culture. Discours, articles, entretiens (1925-1975)*, présentés par Janine Mossuz-Lavau (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 297.

you would have touched with your hands his poor disfigured face of the last day, his lips over which no word had passed; on that day it was the face of France.”²⁵ Malraux’s formulation clearly demonstrated Gaullist historical mythology’s essence: the true “face of France” was not embodied by the majority of the population, who had adopted a wait-and-see attitude by silently rejecting (or tolerating) the German occupiers, but by the lone Resistance leader Moulin, who chose martyrdom rather than betrayal of his comrades. If Moulin was the “face of France”, then France was synonymous with the Resistance, and the Resistance was synonymous with de Gaulle, who had created it and given Moulin his authority. Malraux thus reduced the complexity of an entire epoch and, more specifically, the complexity of the resistance movement, to one figure symbolising France’s fate. Also, by making Moulin into a saint-like, selfless martyr of the resistance, the novelist Malraux drastically reduced the complexity of his personality, who was little known to most of the French population. Only after the transfer of his ashes to the Pantheon and Malraux’s speech did the man behind the myth become more and more known, notably thanks to his former assistant Daniel Cordier, who tellingly published his three-volume biography of Moulin under the title “The Unknown of the Pantheon”.²⁶

The attempt to establish Jean Moulin as the emblematic hero of the Resistance proved to be successful and durable. When socialist François Mitterrand started his presidency on 12 May 1981, he paid homage to Moulin by laying a rose on his tomb in the Pantheon, demonstrating that Moulin was not only the hero of Gaullism, but also a model for the Left, which was just gaining power. Today, Moulin is, alongside de Gaulle, the best-known member of the French resistance. 433 public schools have been named Jean Moulin, which makes him the third most popular school name in France (behind Jules Ferry, the founder of the French public school system, and the poet Jacques Prévert).²⁷ Jean Moulin is fifth-most present personality on street signs in France, with 2.215 streets or squares named after him (on the

25 Ibid., 305.

26 Daniel Cordier, *Jean Moulin. L’Inconnu du Panthéon*, 3 vol. (Paris: J C Lattès, 1993). Cf. Michel Fraissier, *Jean Moulin ou la Fabrique d’un héros* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2011) and Alan Clinton, *Jean Moulin, 1899–1943: The French Resistance and the Republic* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

27 Luc Bronner and Maúrice Vaudano, “De Jules Ferry à Pierre Perret, l’étonnant palmarès des noms d’écoles, de collèges et de lycées en France”, *Le Monde*, 18 April 2015, https://www.le-monde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2015/04/18/de-jules-ferry-a-pierre-perret-l-etonnant-palmares-des-noms-d-ecoles-de-colleges-et-de-lycees-en-france_4613091_4355770.html.

first place is de Gaulle, with 3.903 streets or squares, followed by Louis Pasteur, Victor Hugo and Jean Jaurès).²⁸ As far as de Gaulle himself is concerned, his place in collective memory is predominantly associated with the role he played in the Resistance. His merits as the “man of 18 June 1940”, as leader of the Resistance and liberator of the country, largely overshadow his later role in French politics, in which he was the founder of the Fifth Republic, President of the Republic for over ten years and peacemaker in Algeria.²⁹ Colonel Fabien, on the other hand, is a hero myth in decline, declining with the misfortunes of the PCF in recent years. The PCF has fallen from being the strongest political party after the liberation to receiving just 2,28 percent of the vote in the 2022 presidential elections. The PCF candidate was Fabien Roussel, whose parents gave him his first name “Fabien” in honour of Colonel Fabien. The impressive party headquarters building at Place du Colonel Fabien in Paris, designed in 1965 by the Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer, recalls the glorious period of the party, when it drew on its fame from the resistance period.

The ritual of transferring the ashes of Resistance heroes to the Pantheon has recently been taken up again, after a pause of several decades. When looking at the selected individuals, we can observe that the perception of resistance has changed. Thus, among the four figures of the Resistance that President François Hollande selected for a transferal to the Pantheon in 2015, two were women: Germaine Tillion and Geneviève De Gaulle-Anthonioz (the niece of the general), who had both joined Resistance groups in occupied France early on and were deported to the Ravensbrück concentration camp because of their clandestine activities.³⁰ Under President Emmanuel Macron, the remains of three Resistance activists were transferred to the Pantheon, and all three were born foreigners: Josephine Baker, the American-born dancer, had supported the Resistance by supplying information to secret services, hiding resisters and Jews in her French

28 Cf. “Le top 10 des noms les plus donnés à vos rues”, *Le Dauphiné libéré*, 17 April 2016, <https://www.ledauphine.com/france-monde/2016/04/17/le-top-10-des-noms-les-plus-donnees-a-vos-rues#:~:text=5,6>.

29 Opinion polls in recent years show that the majority of French citizens see de Gaulle more as a Resistance leader than as the founder of the Fifth Republic. Cf. Jérôme Saint-Marie, “Le Général de Gaulle et l’opinion publique”, *La Revue Politique et Parlementaire*, No. 1094-1095, 6 July 2020, <https://www.revuepolitique.fr/charles-de-gaulle-et-lopinion-publique/>.

30 Cf. “France president François Hollande adds resistance heroines to Panthéon”, *The Guardian*, 27 May 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/27/french-president-hollande-honours-female-resistance-heroes-in-pantheon>.

castle, and performing for the Free French troops in North Africa.³¹ The Resistance fighters most recently honoured in this way are Armenian-born Missak Manouchian and his wife Mélinée. Missak Manouchian was one of the leaders of the *Franc-Tireurs et Partisans – Main d’œuvre immigrée* (FTP-MOI), a group composed predominantly of foreigners connected to the communist-led resistance organisation FTP. Together with 23 comrades, Missak was arrested and killed by the German occupying forces in February 1944. In order to discredit the Resistance as a foreign conspiracy, Vichy France propaganda printed the infamous Red Poster (*Affiche rouge*), displaying Manouchian and nine of his – mainly Jewish – comrades as criminals having assassinated innocent French civilians. The tribute to Missak and Mélinée Manouchian in the form of their “pantheonisation” under President Macron in February 2024 can also be seen as a kind of reparation, intended to emphasise that the Resistance in France was not only a national, but a universal undertaking.³²

31 Cf. “Josephine Baker to be first black woman immortalised in France’s Pantheon”, *France 24*, 27 November 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20211127-josephine-baker-to-be-first-black-woman-immortalised-in-france-s-pantheon>.

32 Cf. “Manouchian’s induction to Panthéon celebrates French Resistance’s universalist spirit”, *Le Monde*, 29 June 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2023/06/19/manouchian-s-induction-to-pantheon-celebrates-french-resistance-s-universalist-spirit_6034044_7.html.

WER IST WALTER?

Resistance against Nazism, fascism, occupation and collaboration occurred throughout Europe during World War II. But how much do we know about this history in other European countries? Gathering 32 contributions and case studies on the history of this resistance, as well as on its transmission after 1945, especially in museums, the present book is an invitation to look at resistance in Europe in an interdisciplinary, international, transnational and comparative perspective. It is the result of the international research project “Wer ist Walter? Resistance against Nazism in Europe” which gathered historians, curators and other researchers mainly from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, France and Germany.



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