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REVISITING THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE RESISTANCE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ITS LOCAL DYNAMICS

CLAIRE ANDRIEU

Recent years (2013–2019) have witnessed the publication of three academic syntheses regarding the resistance movement in France, as well as an historical dictionary of the Resistance (2006).¹ Two of these books have been translated, one from English to French and the other vice versa. There are many reasons why historians have shown an interest in the Resistance but the recent revival is worth considering in its own right. This may in part simply reflect the evolution of the historiography. Between the 1970s and the 1990s, research in the field consisted mostly of conference proceedings, including monographs and edited volumes.² By the turn of the century, however, this had given way

- 1 Olivier Wieviorka, *Histoire de la Résistance, 1940–1945*, Paris: Perrin, 2013; and *The French Resistance*, translated by Jane Mary Todd, Harvard University Press, 2016, Robert Gildea, *Fighters in the shadow, A New History of the French Resistance*, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: 2015, and *Comment sont-ils devenus résistants? Une nouvelle histoire de la Résistance, 1940–1945*, Paris: Les Arènes, 2017; Sébastien Albertelli, Julien Blanc and Laurent Douzou, *La lutte clandestine en France, Une histoire de la Résistance, 1940–1944*, Paris: Seuil, 2019; François Marcot, ed., avec la collaboration de Christine Levisse-Touzé et Bruno Leroux, *Dictionnaire historique de la Résistance*, Paris: Robert Laffont, Bouquins, 2006.
- 2 See the monographs on Franc-Tireur (Dominique Veillon, 1977), Libération- Sud (Laurent Douzou, 1995), Défense de la France (Olivier Wieviorka, 1995), and Libération-Nord (Alya Aglan, 1999), as well as the series of six conferences held

to a need for synthesis. Similarly, one might see recent interest in the Resistance as a natural response to twenty years (1970–1990) of research on the phenomenon of collaboration, research that transformed the historiography of the war years. More fundamentally, the phenomenon of resistance remains particularly difficult to grasp in both quantitative and qualitative terms. This is part of its attractiveness for researchers. Finally, it is necessary to restate the obvious: the Resistance was a form of warfare and the memories of former enemies naturally inform the historical narratives in which it figures. No wonder, then, that it has given rise to divergent interpretations.

The Resistance: myth or reality?

One of the more salient points of contention dividing historians concerns the place of the Resistance in society. In his synthetic overview of the matter, Olivier Wieviorka resolutely depicts the Resistance as the work of an isolated minority.³ While this position partly reflects the author's explicit choice to focus solely on the organized Resistance, leaving aside the social environment in which it operated, it may similarly be found in the work of Robert Paxton and Philippe Burrin.⁴ Other scholars, by contrast — a group among whom I include myself — maintain that the organized Resistance could not have survived and developed without the help and support of the general population.⁵ This

by the IHTP (Institut d'histoire du temps présent) and published as *La Résistance et les Français* (with specific subtitles) between 1993 to 1997.

- 3 Olivier Wieviorka, *Histoire de la Résistance*, *op. cit.*, pp. 102–106 in the French edition.
- 4 Robert Paxton, *Vichy France, Old Guard and New Order: 1940–1944*, New York: A.A. Knopf, 1972; Philippe Burrin, *France under the Germans: Collaboration and Compromise*, transl. by Janet Lloyd, New York: The New Press, 1996.
- 5 Scientific committee of the *Dictionnaire historique de la Résistance*, « Avant-propos», in François Marcot, ed., r.), *Dictionnaire historique de la Résistance*, pp. VII–XI. François Marcot, «Comment écrire l'histoire de la Résistance?».

is the position taken by the contributors to François Marcot's *Dictionnaire historique de la Résistance*, as well as by Sébastien Albertelli, Julien Blanc, and Laurent Douzou in their recent book, *La Lutte clandestine en France*. For the latter, there is no symmetry to be observed between collaboration and resistance. Collaborationists met with the hostility of the population and remained isolated; some of them eventually took refuge in Germany. Those involved in the Resistance, by contrast, moved among the population "like fish in the water." To recognize this is to shift and expand the frontiers of the Resistance as a phenomenon.

The other main point of contention concerns the memory of the Resistance. Since the 1980s, an analysis long championed by a far-right minority and originating in the Petainist milieu after the Liberation has become part of the academic doxa.⁶ From 1947 on, the critique of a supposed "resistancialism" has been a way to denounce the purge of collaborators without appearing to target the Resistance. In *The Vichy Syndrome* (1987), Henry Rousso adopted the neologism "resistancialism" under a slightly different spelling to designate the manner in which memorialists have embellished the history of the Resistance, as the Gaullist and Communist parties did severally.⁷ Such was the academic and popular success of the "resistancialism" concept and the analyses in which it appeared that both have been treated as established truths in school textbooks from 2004 to 2019.

Yet the resistancialism thesis is not a matter of total consensus. While Olivier Wieviorka and Robert Gildea both adopt the mainstream analysis,

Le Débat, 2013/5, n° 177, pp. 173–185. Sébastien Albertelli, Julien Blanc and Laurent Douzou, *La Lutte clandestine en France*, *op. cit.*, p. 10, pp. 208–210, pp. 222–226.

- 6 Cécile Vast, «La Résistance: du légendaire au mythe», in François Marcot, ed., *Dictionnaire historique de la Résistance*, pp. 1017–1020; Pierre Laborie. *Le chagrin et le venin. La France sous l'Occupation, mémoire et idées reçues*, Paris: Bayard, 2011.
- 7 Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*; translated by Arthur Goldhammer, Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1991.

Gildea's book nevertheless qualifies it in certain ways. Speaking of the "myth of the French Resistance," the author twice underscores the fact that a myth is not the equivalent of "a fiction that never happened," and his summary of the different stages of the "dominant narrative of the Resistance" suggests that the succession of narrative stages has not come to an end.⁸ Others, however, reject the resistancialism thesis outright. They include François Marcot and the contributors to the *Dictionnaire historique de la Résistance* and the authors of *La Lutte clandestine en France* (Albertelli, Blanc and Douzou).⁹ These historians invert the argument, showing how resistancialism as a historical concept is itself a myth constructed in the 1980s. Indeed, given the great diversity of the phenomenon, the very notion of "a" memory of the Resistance seems dubious. Moreover, the specificity of the experience of clandestinity and repression is difficult to transmit in a free world, particularly given that arrest often led to torture and concentration camp internment. The divisions among historians are particularly evident in what concerns the ceremony organized in 1964 by General de Gaulle in tribute to Jean Moulin. Was this ceremony merely "the apotheosis of the Gaullist narrative," "the culmination of what Henry Rousso called the 'resistancialist myth',"¹⁰ or was there another side to the story? Albertelli, Blanc and Douzou show how, inspired by Malraux's address,¹¹

8 Robert Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows: A New History of the French Resistance* Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2015, p. 2, p. 19 and p. 474.

9 See Cécile Vast, «La Résistance: du légendaire au mythe», Pierre Laborie, *Le chagrin et le venin*, Sébastien Albertelli, Julien Blanc, Laurent Douzou, *La Lutte clandestine en France*, Chapter "Une mémoire impossible?", François Azouvi, *Français, on ne vous a rien caché. La Résistance, Vichy, notre mémoire*, Paris: Gallimard, 2020.

10 Robert Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, p. 452.

11 Speech by André Malraux, "Transfer of Jean Moulin's Ashes to the Panthéon," 19 December 1964, https://ocw.mit.edu/courses/global-studies-and-languages/21g-053-understanding-contemporary-french-politics-spring-2014/readings/MIT21G_053S14_Andre.pdf. Laure Moulin, *Jean Moulin. En préface: discours d'André Malraux*, Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1969.

this ceremony was also a “closed door,” “a message accessible only to a minority sharing a common experience.”¹² The “people of the night” are at the heart of the speech. The image of the “poor tortured king of shadows” watch[ing] [his] “people of shadows rise up in the June night disfigured by torture” and the “poor, unrecognizable face of that last day,” reminded former resisters of their own experience of clandestinity, prison, torture and concentration camps.

Part of a broader effort to compare wartime societies,¹³ the present contribution offers a case study that, I argue, sheds particular light on this debate and, in so doing, contributes to our understanding of the historiography’s past evolution and possible future. Most generally, I argue that the Resistance can be understood as a social movement of national scale,¹⁴ and that reducing its memory to a matter of quasi-political point scoring misses the essential point.

A return to everyday field observation: the St Eflam Affair, Fall 1941.

Studying the way French people received downed Allied airmen offers us an opportunity to reopen the question, what is Resistance and how is it generated? As a whole, the case of the Resistance illustrates the difficulty involved in identifying a social movement in situations in which a significant number of militant acts do not take place in the framework of an organization. On the one hand, you have a series of spontaneous actions; on the other, a global organization culminating in the formation

- 12 Sébastien Albertelli, Julien Blanc, Laurent Douzou, *La Lutte clandestine en France*, *op. cit.*, pp. 366–371.
- 13 Claire Andrieu, *Tombés du ciel. Le sort des pilotes abattus en Europe, 1939-1945*, Paris: Tallandier/Ministère des Armées, 2021.
- 14 Claire Andrieu, “La Résistance comme mouvement social,” in Michel Pigenet et Danielle Tartakowsky, eds., *Histoire des mouvements sociaux en France, de 1814 à nos jours*, Paris: La Découverte, 2012, pp. 415–426.

of the National Council of the Resistance in 1943. The question is how do we move from a multitude of acts of resistance to Resistance with a capital R? I shall focus on this multitude, especially at the local level.

Sources dating from the events themselves lend themselves especially well to this undertaking. In particular, we possess the debriefings of Allied soldiers and aviators who managed to flee France between 1940 and 1944 with the help of the civilian population. As their men returned to Britain and supplied their accounts, the British (and, later, Americans) began to draw up lists of helpers. After the war, some 34,000 helpers were thus recognized as such in France. On the other hand, we also have access to a number of rulings by German military tribunals. Among the arrested helpers, a minority was tried in accordance with Nazi-German law. The traces of those trials can still be found in the archives.

Studying the day-by-day, even hour-by-hour timetables of improvised resisters shows the emerging process of the Resistance.¹⁵

Night of Sunday to Monday, September 29th, 1941

Around 1.30 AM, a Blenheim Bristol [a bomber aircraft] made a forced sea landing in the bay of St Efflam, North Brittany. This light bomber was on its way back from a bombing operation against the port of St Nazaire. As it flew over the German Luftwaffe base at Morlaix, it was badly hit. The night was pitch dark and the pilot looked for a place to land on the sea — a less risky way to land. He succeeded in posing the plane without too great a shock. As it removed the lifeboat, the crew noticed that the plane was not floating; it was lying on the sand and the sea was three feet deep. The crew hid in a bathing hut in a wood that ran along the beach.

- 15 Sources: Rapport du préfet des Côtes du Nord, 22 March 1942, reproduced at the website of the Comité pour l'étude de la résistance populaire en Côtes-du-Nord. *Gericht Kommandant für Gross-Paris, Abt. B, Feldurteil*, 17 juillet 1942, SHD, GR 28 P8 / 44, dossier 52. Fondation pour la mémoire de la déportation, deportee database. Roger Huguen, *Par les nuits les plus longues*, Ouest-France, 1986, p. 33–35. Marguerite de Saint-Laurent, *Recherches concernant les aviateurs alliés échoués sur la plage de St Efflam, le 29 septembre 1941*, 1995, manuscript, 79 p.

Monday

In the morning, people went to the beach to see the plane. Mostly women and young girls. The pilot decided to show himself and spoke in broken French to a young girl of about 15 years old. She returned with her older sister, aged 17, who spoke a little English, and showed them a trapdoor allowing them to hide in a small space right under the roof. Later in the day, the girls' mother, aged 40, came with food and hot tea. This Thérèse Leduc also brought a letter written in English by an Englishwoman who lived in the neighborhood. According to the pilot's report, written in mid-1945, the letter stated that the messenger was the local person in charge of escape routes and that she would see to it that they reached Spain.

Between Monday morning and Wednesday, the three airmen remained hidden in the wood, where the French women brought them food and drink. As the Germans searched for them, they displayed the usual *Bekanntmachung* poster, threatening all who aided the enemy with the death penalty. Moreover, a reward of roughly 10,000 francs was offered for any information leading to the airmen's arrest.

Tuesday, September 30th

The Germans raided the château of Leslac'h, the family home of the Saint Laurents, but found nothing.

Wednesday, October 1st

On Wednesday, the women gave the airmen civilian clothes and led them to a ruined mill in a more isolated valley.

Friday, October 3rd

On Friday evening, two other people, a 45-year-old woman named Marie de Saint Laurent and her 19-year-old son arrived at the mill to take them to their home, walking several hours through hilly forest country. Marie de St Laurent was a mother of ten and had been a widow for two

years. She was a representative of Brittany's widespread minor nobility. She lodged the men alternately in her château and in a cave in the forest. Two other women, Marie de St Laurent's daughter and her sister-in-law, also helped take care of the men. They stayed there for four days, seeing only women, except for René, Marie de St Laurent's son, who was already playing a minor role in the organized Resistance, and two men who called in to see the airmen.

Monday, October 6th

The German search intensified.

Tuesday, October 7th

Due to the presence of Germans on the road, a woman physiotherapist was unable to pick up the aviators in her car.

Wednesday, October 8th

Alexandrine Tilly, the physiotherapist, returned and took the airmen to two farms in Langoat, a village located 30 km away. One was run by a widow and her brother, the other by a man and his two sons. They stayed there until October 14th. They were photographed for a second time, this time by a professional photographer (the first photos, taken by René de Saint Laurent, were of poor quality), and given false identity papers, another sign that the organized Resistance was already active in the region. A doctor came to see them, as did a retired gendarme and his wife, a schoolteacher. The Langoat farmers had already sheltered two British soldiers for nearly an entire year (August 1940–summer 1941). In September of that year, the latter made it to the "Free Zone" with the help of the same people, who would later help the three airmen travel to Nantes, where they waited for an opportunity to cross the demarcation line.

October 14

Either Alexandrine Tilly, the physiotherapist, or Georges Le Bonniec, a garage owner in Bégard, a nearby village, drove the three men to the railway station of Guingamp. Garage owners, like medical or paramedical personnel, had a special *Ausweis*, authorizing them to drive a car. Georges Le Bonniec escorted the men in the train all the way to Nantes. There were Germans on the train and the British presented themselves as deaf-mutes. It was necessary to change trains in Rennes. At 9 PM, they arrived in Nantes, where they were welcomed in the apartment of a woman in her mid-thirties, who lived with her sister and sister's son, a young boy. Two or three evaded Polish soldiers were already hiding with them. These two women, Théotiste Epron and Marie-Christine Seidel, were experienced helpers.

October 20th

Two French communists, acting on the party's orders, assassinated the German commander in Nantes. This triggered the execution of over 100 French hostages in Nantes and Paris. Nantes was searched thoroughly.

November 10th

Although in hiding, the airmen were discovered and arrested. They were taken to the Fresnes prison near Paris and left in solitary confinement until February 1942. They were then again interrogated before being sent to Stalag Luft III in Sagan, Poland, a prisoner-of-war camp for airmen.

February to April 1942

Between February and April, the whole chain of solidarity with the Allies was arrested. Twenty-eight people were sent to prison, including those who had helped the other British soldiers who passed through the same villages. The helpers were sentenced by a German military tribunal in Paris.

July 13th, 1942.

On the first page of *Ouest-Éclair*, the regional daily, it read: “Thirty Bretons brought before the German Military Tribunal for having sheltered English airmen.” A warning to the Bretons against doing so again, this trial became known as “the trial of the 30 Bretons.”

July 17th, 1942

The verdict was rendered. The punishments handed down to the accused, fourteen men and fourteen women, were as follows:

Six of the defendants (three men and three women) were given the death penalty. The three men, among them Le Bonniec, were beheaded in Cologne, in 1942 and 1943. The last to be beheaded was Abbot Jean-Baptiste Legeay, a member of *Georges France 31*, who had helped evacuate the airmen from Langoat.

22 people were given prison sentences, ranging from six months to ten years, and twelve of them were ultimately sent to a concentration camp.

Altogether, ten of the defendants died, three of them by execution and seven others in concentration camps. The accused were all condemned for concealing members of an enemy army, support for or complicity with the enemy. In addition to these charges, seven of them were found guilty of espionage.

Among these 28 defendants, thirteen had directly assisted the three airmen who came down off the coast of St Efflam. In this latter affair, Abbot Legeay was alone in being charged with spying. The other twelve were condemned as helpers. Of the six women who were deported — Françoise Allain (the schoolteacher), Théotiste Epron, Thérèse Leduc, Alexandrine Tilly, Marie de Saint Laurent and Marie Le Cozannet (the farmer from Langoat) — only three survived the camps. Saint Laurent, Tilly and Le Cozannet never returned. The daughters of Leduc and Tilly were released after having served their prison sentences. Among the five men, the toll was heavier. None returned from Germany. Two were beheaded, as we have seen, and three died in concentration camps: Le Gac, the farmer from

Langoat, Le Cozannet, Marie Le Cozannet's brother and L'Hénolet, a bailiff in a nearby village who had helped provide false papers.

Building the Resistance or a society in resistance?

This case study underscores one of the multiple inception processes associated with the Resistance and reveals a society ready to resist.

The people mentioned above constituted a *de facto* network. None of them knew all of its members though each knew at least two other members. Starting with stage 2, during which the airmen spent a week in two nearby farms, the airmen followed the same route with the same people who had previously overseen the evacuation of two other British soldiers. An organized routine was gradually taking shape.

The activities of Thérèse Leduc, Marie de St Laurent and Alexandrine Tilly added three links to the preexisting chain. This was the Resistance in utero. In all of this, women played a decisive role. At stage 1, during which helpers were forced to improvise blindly in response to the various emergencies, there were seven women (Leduc and her two daughters, Saint Laurent, her daughter and sister-in-law, Tilly) and just one young man (René). When one adds stage 1 and stage 2 (St Efflam, followed by Langoat and Nantes), this proportion becomes eight to five. As was often the case in the Resistance, the women were the initiators. Yet women constituted only 30 percent of the helpers recognized by the Allies.

The British Military Intelligence Service immediately took note of this readiness — nay, desire — to help the Allies, an observation seconded by its American counterpart starting in 1943. In the *Manual of Evasion* that was supplied as part of the evasion lectures given to British and American airmen, 90 percent of the French were said to be willing to extend their help.¹⁶ Altogether, more than 30,000 French citizens received the title of

16 See Claire Andrieu, “Le comportement des civils face aux aviateurs tombés en France, en Angleterre et en Allemagne, 1940–1945,” in Pierre Laborie and

helper after the war. Just as remarkable — and yet another specificity of the Resistance — is the fact that repression failed to deter the population from continuing to help the Allies. After the war, the latter honored more than 500 helpers in the department of Côtes du Nord, where St Efflam and Langoat are located. Still, the cost of helping was heavy. As a whole, about 14 percent of helpers were deported, to say nothing of those who were arrested and released, or arrested and shot. A quarter of these deportees were deported together with a member of their family. Repression of this type of Resistance has sometimes weighed very heavily on the families.

This set of features — the improvisation that characterized the earliest stages of aid, the role of women and families, the quasi-systematic nature of the assistance offered — suggests that the entire society was involved in resistance, that it was in fact a “resisting society.” This expression calls for clarification. It goes without saying that the people of France were not involved in around-the-clock resistance. We have yet to determine the proportion of the population that took part or the frequency with which they performed acts of resistance (as opposed to acts of accommodation or even collaboration). Until we do so, however — and assuming that such a social arithmetic is possible — the contours of this resisting society must remain undefined.

In the case under consideration, it is also worth noting that resistance was to some degree randomly generated by the airman’s arrival at St Efflam, with new activists pitching in alongside more experienced ones (the farmers in Langoat), some of whom were members of a network in contact with the British Intelligence Service (Legeay in *Georges France 31*). The escape line upon which they came to rely was then being developed piece by piece from below and without any advanced planning. When it was nipped in the bud, it still had no name. The fact that other

François Marcot; eds, *Les Comportements collectifs en France et dans l'Europe allemande, 1940–1945*, Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015, pp. 113–123.

helpers subsequently resumed the work of this inchoate network shows that the Resistance was, in part, self-generating.

It is my argument that this group of roughly 30 individuals were indeed members of “the Resistance.” Their case illustrates, not just the manner in which unorganized and organized local resistance were intertwined, but also how each was mutually reinforcing. Acts of resistance and the Resistance itself as a structured movement jointly developed in what was a reciprocal process. Resistance was essentially a bottom-up, grassroots process. Its local dynamics allowed top-down organizational activity to become established and subsequently become a social movement on a national scale.

The (provisionally) shaky foundations of Resistance historiography

If the history of the Resistance is the weak link in the history of the Occupation, the Vichy Regime is its strong suit. This reflects the situation of its archives: the regime did not destroy the documents it so abundantly produced, and which have over the past forty years gradually been made available to scholars. The archives of the occupier, by contrast, are far less satisfactory and exist only in fragmentary form in France and Germany. Most of its archives were either intentionally destroyed or lost in various transfers. Moreover, few French historians read German. But the worst situation is that of the archives of the Resistance. The written traces of clandestinity are rare, scattered, and discontinuous. It is thus no surprise that, from the strictly professional point of view of the historian’s craft, the greatest works of Occupation historiography concern the Vichy regime. Many academic publications privilege Vichy over the occupier (despite the latter’s political and military preeminence) and the Resistance, which lags behind both. What results is in many respects a partial and distorted academic portrait of occupied France.

Due to the selective manner in which research objects are chosen,

however, the history of the Resistance is itself distorted. Those aspects of the Resistance that tend to receive attention are not coextensive with the Resistance as a whole. Until now, studies of the Resistance have cast it in a positive light, focusing on those of its aspects that persisted for the duration of the country's Occupation and Liberation. While working on the history of the National Council of the Resistance, I myself participated in the construction of this historiography.¹⁷ Contemporary works involuntarily rely upon a success story, that of the groups created in 1940 or 1941 and that continued to expand throughout the Occupation. The trajectory observed by these inspiring stories, which were of course not without their setbacks and tragedies, is put into sharp relief by the manner in which these groups appear to organically develop from their initial nuclei. This growth process took place via horizontal enlargement and the absorption of small organizations that were willing to join what, from 1943 onwards, became a sort of "oligopoly" of resistance. At the same time, the organizational chart of the Resistance became increasingly hierarchical as the founders and pioneers present from day one found themselves at the summit of a federative structure at the national level. The fact that these "leaders," many of whom were drawn from the Parisian elite, produced memoirs in the postwar years has only reinforced interest in organized resistance.

The fact that so many history books favor an "organo-centric" approach, in which the Resistance is inevitably presented from above, reflects their reliance on these memoirs as well as on the archives produced by organizations that survived the conflict. This is why we know so much more about the movements of the Southern Zone than about those of the Northern Zone and much more about Resistance movements themselves than about intelligence networks or evasion lines. Had historians focused on the movements of the Northern Zone, intelligence

17 See, for example, Claire Andrieu, «Le programme du CNR dans la dynamique de construction de la nation résistante», *Histoire@Politique*, 24, septembre-décembre 2014 <https://www.histoire-politique.fr/index.php?numero=24&rub=dossier&item=225>

networks or escape lines, the history of the Resistance would have now appear much less linear, more firmly anchored across all groups of French society and, as a whole, much more tragic. Instead of a portrait of the Resistance in its glory, we would have a portrait of it in its suffering.

Finally, concepts forged in the 1980s now appear less relevant. Take, for example, those of resistancialism and civil resistance. As I remarked above, the term “resistancialism” has been used to depict the Resistance as a myth and exaggeration. To the degree that large portions of the Resistance have yet to be the subject of academic study or entered into the national memory, however, the claims of resistancialism demand to be revisited. The assistance provided to Allied soldiers and airmen, for example, while living on in local memory, has no place in its national counterpart. It has simply not entered the “national grand narrative.” Far from being embellished or exaggerated, it has not even been acknowledged at the level of the national media. The question thus arises: whose memory has been inflated and to what degree?

The notion of civilian resistance was first put forward in Jacques Semelin’s 1989 book, *Unarmed Against Hitler: Civilian Resistance in Europe, 1939–1943*.¹⁸ At the time, Semelin felt that the military history of the Resistance occupied an outsized place in the bibliography. His book thus focuses on non-military case studies of resistance in several European countries. The problem with the concept of civilian resistance is that it does not take into account the severity of repression. A man or a woman who deliberately exposes him or herself to immediate death, torture, or deportation is a civilian of a special type. The minority of resisters who were tried by the German Army, men and women alike, often told their judges they had simply been doing their “soldier’s duty.” As a history professor with no experience of activism in prewar years, but who was later on shot by Germans for his “civilian resistance,” wrote in

18 Jacques Semelin, *Unarmed Against Hitler: Civilian Resistance in Europe, 1939–1943*, Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1993.

the summer of 1940, “I wish, in any case, we had more blood to pour.”¹⁹ It is the specificity of this engagement under totalitarian or authoritarian regimes that is neglected by the notion of “civilian resistance.”

Decompartmentalizing the history of the Resistance, revisiting the history of its memory

Studying the debriefings of escaped airmen and the recognition files of individual helpers, independently of whether or not they were members of a recognized group, contributes to decompartmentalizing the history of the Resistance. This approach transcends the history of organizations and opens the way for other research fields. A central feature of the spaces of resistance thus revealed is the ever-repeated first moment of resistance — a time and place independent of any organization, when all that mattered was to take immediate action despite the real danger involved in doing so. Shedding light on the sheer recursivity of these acts of resistance by studying the helpers will underscore the decisive role played by local dynamics in its spread. These dynamics attest to the existence of a general and continuous resistance, from the summer of 1940 until the Liberation.

The bottom-up approach also contributes to renewing the history of memory. Instead of defining the memory of the Resistance by reference to its status as the “dominant narrative” of the war years, instead of looking from above at the competition of war memories, this approach reveals what is very much the exposed nerve of all memories of the Resistance: the experience of repression, suffering, and grief. It is the history of this specific set of emotions that analyses of the succession of cycles of memory so often miss. To restore its deepest meaning to the history of memory, we must revisit memory from the perspective of the emotions that are at its source and the manner in which they evolved over time.

19 Marc Bloch, *Strange Defeat: A Statement of Evidence Written in 1940*, transl. by Gerard Hopkins, New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999.