

## Les Inconnus de la Resistance: letters to *L'Humanité*, 1984

Robert Gildea

On 15 May 1984 the Communist daily *L'Humanité* invited its readers to send in their personal memories of resistance to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of France. The first reply arrived the next day and altogether 409 testimonies were received. Between 5 June and 30 August 1984 the paper published 348 accounts sent in by readers. These were collected in a book, entitled *Les Inconnus de la Résistance*, which came out in December 1984. The original letters were deposited in the Musée de la Résistance nationale which opened at Champigny-sur-Marne on 8 May 1985.<sup>1</sup>

This phenomenon, and these letters, may be read in two ways. Firstly, they may be seen as an attempt by a beleaguered French Communist Party to regain legitimacy by drawing on its credentials of resistance during the Second World War. In 1945 the Communist Party had been the largest French political party, drawing on the narrative that they were *the* party of resistance to the German occupation, 75,000 of whose militants had been executed by the Germans or Vichy. This legitimacy, however, was undermined by two factors. First, it had to explain the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939, a deal with Hitler which threw French communists into confusion and had them banned. Not until Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941 were communists able to rejoin the resistance as patriots. Second, with the onset of the Cold War in 1947, they were increasingly perceived as the enemy within, loyal to Moscow rather than to France. Recognition as resisters was vital not only for honour but to access services, and communists were frequently denied this recognition on the grounds that their resistance had been political, to promote communism, rather than military, for France.<sup>2</sup> The knife was turned in the wound by revelations in 1970 and 1980 that during the war Georges Marchais, the general secretary of the PCF, far from resisting or even having been sent as a forced labourer to Germany, had volunteered to work there in a Messerschmitt factory.<sup>3</sup> Electorally, the Communist Party also went into a decline. In 1981 it was overtaken as the largest party on the Left by President Mitterrand's Socialist Party. Four communist ministers sat in the 1981

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<sup>1</sup> Floriane Benoît and Charles Silverstre (eds), *Les Inconnus de la Résistance* (Paris, L'Humanité/Messidor, 1984)

<sup>2</sup> Robert Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows. A new history of the French Resistance* (London, Faber & Faber, 2015), 446-7, 454-5

<sup>3</sup> Robert Gildea, *France since 1945* (Oxford, OUP, 2002), 77; Philippe Robrieux, « Dictionnaire biographique », in *Histoire intérieure du parti communiste*, t. IV, *Biographies, Chronologie, Bibliographie*, Paris, Fayard, 1984.

Union of the Left ministry but after Mitterrand's U-turn to the centre they refused to serve in the Fabius ministry of 17 July 1984.

To deal with this historic decline and marginalisation, *L'Humanité* decided to reclaim the Communist legacy of resistance by appealing over the heads of politicians to ordinary party members. In an early version of 'crowd-sourcing' it drew upon stories sent in by its readers in order to resurrect the narrative of popular resistance that would retrieve its reputation *the* party of the Resistance. In his preface to *Les Inconnus de la Résistance*, leading communist Roland Leroy suggested a parallel between the communist revival after the blow of the Nazi-Soviet Pact and a revival that was possible today:

Au début de la guerre, beaucoup de gens dans notre pays ne donnaient pas cher de l'existence du Parti communiste. Peu de communistes restaient organisés. Un certain nombre avaient été désorientés. Mais ils surent alors réorganiser leur parti et en faire le ferment indispensable de la lutte de la classe ouvrière et de l'union de notre peuple.<sup>4</sup>

By soliciting the memories of resistance activity of ordinary working-class people, the party hoped to redefine its resistance identity and reassert its claim to be the dominant force in the union of the left.

This redefinition was important not only for the established members of the Party but for younger generations like that of 1968 who knew little or nothing about the war and often criticised the French Communist Party as 'Stalinist'. A. Ducos, a communist in the Paris region, recalled talking as a thirteen-year old boy to maquisards in the Lot-et-Garonne and told the paper:

Il est bien que l'on rappelle les souvenirs de cette période [...] que l'on rende un grand honneur au Parti des 70,000 morts ou fusillés [...], à un parti si décrié, si sali depuis 40 ans. Cela est nécessaire surtout auprès des jeunes générations qui ignorent les sacrifices de nombreux camarades durant l'occupation et qui nous prennent surtout pour un parti qui atteint à la liberté.<sup>5</sup>

The second way to read this phenomenon is as an intervention in the debate over how to write the history of the Resistance. Writing this history had long been in the hands of former resisters. Given the closure of the official archives for fifty years, it was based on the testimony of former resisters, under the auspices of Henri Michel's Comité d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale. Henri Michel published the first textbook account of the

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<sup>4</sup> Roland Leroy, 'L'oeuvre populaire', in *Les Inconnus de la Résistance*, 9

<sup>5</sup> Musée de la Résistance, Champigny, *Les Inconnus de la Résistance* collection, letter of A. Ducos, 93190 Livry-Gargan, 7 July 1984

resistance in 1950 and other volumes on the ideas of the Resistance in 1954 and 1962.<sup>6</sup> Working at a distance from this ‘official history’, two former resisters, Henri Noguères and Marcel Degliame-Fouché, wrote a ten-volume history of the resistance between 1967 and 1982, based on 170 written or oral testimonies.<sup>7</sup> In 1978, however, the torch passed from amateur resisters to professional historians under François Bédarida, who set up the Institut d’Histoire du Temps Présent (IHTP). In 1986 Bédarida defined resistance as ‘clandestine activity [...] undertaken by volunteers organising themselves to fight the domination (and usually the occupation) of their country by a Nazi or fascist regime or its satellites or allies’.<sup>8</sup> In numerical terms, he suggested that resistance organisations in Europe were composed of a small minority of 1-3% of the population. However, he conceded that they had much wider support in society, and he alluded to Mao’s expression that they were the water in which the organised resisters swam. At the same time Bédarida set out to discredit the trustworthiness of testimony, either written or oral, in the name of the primacy of written archival sources. Concluding an IHTP round table in 1986, he declared that ‘the Resistance, which hitherto had been seen as the chosen territory of oral history now appears as the site of the triumph of written history’.<sup>9</sup>

After that, a debate took place about whether the Resistance was composed of a small organised groups, counting a few per cent of the population, doing intelligence work, printing propaganda, organising escape lines or sabotage, or whether it was a much wider movement including ordinary people who delivered flyers, went on patriotic demonstrations, and occasionally hid resisters and Jews who were being hunted by the authorities. Olivier Wieviorka argued in 2013 that ‘l’armée des ombres a au total rassemblé de trois cent mille à cinq cent mille hommes et femmes, soit environ 1 % de la population’.<sup>10</sup> François Marcot took issue with him, arguing that the Resistance was not just an ‘organisation’ but a broad ‘movement’ in French society.<sup>11</sup> Neither, however, addressed the question of how far their respective interpretations relied on official documentation, and how far on first-person

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<sup>6</sup> Henri Michel, *Histoire de la Résistance* (Paris, PUF, Que sais-je ? 1950); *Les Idées politiques et sociales de la Résistance: documents clandestins, 1940-1944* (Paris, PUF, 1954); *Les courants de pensée de la Résistance* (Paris, PUF, 1962)

<sup>7</sup> Henri Noguères, Marcel Degliame-Fouché and J.-L. Vigier, *Histoire de la Résistance en France*, 5 vols (Paris, R. Laffont, 1967-81)

<sup>8</sup> François Bédarida, « L’histoire de la Résistance : lectures d’hier, chantiers de demain », *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire*, 11, juillet-septembre 1986, 80

<sup>9</sup> Les Cahiers de l’IHTP, 4 (June 1986). *Questions à l’histoire orale. Table ronde du 20 juin 1986*, 104

<sup>10</sup> Olivier Wieviorka, *Histoire de la Résistance, 1940-1945* (Paris, Perrin, 2013), 437

<sup>11</sup> François Marcot, ‘Comment écrire l’histoire de la Résistance ?’, *Le Débat*, 177, 5/2013, 173-185

testimony. Oral history in particular long remained a no-go area for French historians who were keen to defend their ‘scientific’ status.<sup>12</sup>

What is significant about *Les Inconnus* is that, while professional historians were debating the pros and cons of the use of testimony, *L’Humanité* was demonstrating what might be done with the written testimonies of ordinary people. Charles Silvestre, one of the paper’s journalists and co-editor of the collection, was aware that testimony could be dismissed as ‘stories’ or anecdotes rather than ‘facts’ but argued that these first-person accounts had a human immediacy and that what they were offering was not an objective truth but the subjective truth of actors and witnesses.

Les récits qui constituent ce livre ressemblent parfois à de véritables nouvelles, certains diraient même à des fictions [...] Sur la Résistance il existe des ouvrages à caractère historique plus scientifiquement documentés, plus complets. Mais dans ces écrits il y a quelque chose d’infiniment précieux: la vibration de l’humain [...] “Les Inconnus de la Résistance” sont les chroniqueurs de leur propre histoire. Si les témoignages ont ainsi et si vite afflué, s’ils ont cette qualité reconnue, c’est bien encore qu’il n’est guère aujourd’hui de besoin plus pressant, plus moderne, que le besoin de communiquer ‘sa’ vérité.<sup>13</sup>

This brings us back to the two ways in which the testimonies in *Les Inconnus de la Résistance* may be read. On the one hand, it is possible to track an editorial process – either in the choice of letters published, or in the cuts made - that sought to underline the heroic feats of communists, right from the outbreak of war in 1939, supporting the claim that they were the first party of the Resistance. On the other hand, the original testimonies offer many and diverse accounts of the way in which resistance activity was engaged in and experienced by ordinary people.<sup>14</sup>

An analysis of the 348 testimonies published in 1984 shows that 143 or 41% speak to the narrative of heroic resistance of a largely military kind, often emphasising early resistance in 1939-41, while 205 or 59% provide evidence of everyday resistance activity in the community. This category includes the distribution of flyers, sheltering resisters, POWs or STO draft-dodgers on the run, help offered to persecuted Jews, ‘passive resistance’ such as petty sabotage which working for the Germans, symbolic resistance such as parading patriotic colours and demonstrating on key anniversaries, women’s resistance and children’s

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<sup>12</sup> Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, 12-15

<sup>13</sup> Charles Silvestre, ‘L’histoire à la première personne’, *Les Inconnus*, 13

<sup>14</sup> Letters in the original collection are footnoted as ‘Les Inconnus’, with the number of the letter; published letters are given as *Les Inconnus*, with the page number.

resistance. The table also shows the number and proportion of accounts in each category sent in by women. These average 24% and vary between 5% of the stories of passive resistance, and 78% of stories of women's resistance.

	number of cases	% of cases	accounts by women	% of accounts by women
<b>heroic resistance</b>				
communist resistance in 1939-41	20	5.8	2	10
communist sacrifice	43	12.4	7	16.3
heroic combat	80	23.0	5	6.25
<b>everyday resistance</b>				
distribution of flyers	10	2.9	1	10
shelter and support	30	8.6	4	13.3
help to Jews	30	8.6	11	36.7
passive resistance	21	5.8	1	5
symbolic resistance	34	9.8	4	11.8
resistance by women	50	14.4	39	78.0
resistance by children	30	8.6	9	30.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>348</b>		<b>83</b>	<b>23.9</b>

The letters prioritised for the collection privileged the heroic narrative, and cases of resistance before 1941 were especially prized. A letter from Raymond Yann, a retired cabinet-maker from Seine-Saint-Denis, recalled that in September 1940 a Young Communist flyer circulated in his Paris factory called 'From Mad King [Charles VII] to a Treacherous Marshal', attacking Pétain's policy of surrender. He concluded: 'I am telling this story once again to underline that the Communist party, of which I was not a member at the time, was one of the first to take the fight to the occupier'.<sup>15</sup> René Roy, a communist militant from

<sup>15</sup> *Les Inconnus de la Résistance*, 43

Seine-et-Marne who had been deported to Buchenwald at the age of twenty, forwarded a letter from a woman whose son had been arrested in September 1940 for spreading communist propaganda and was subsequently shot. His covering letter, which was not published, was persuaded that this account would ‘démolir le mensonge ébruité qui consiste à prétendre que les communistes n’ont commencé la résistance qu’en fin 41, après l’entrée en guerre de l’Allemagne contre l’URSS’.<sup>16</sup>

A substantial tranche of published letters, 43 in all or 12.4%, told stories of communist sacrifice – that is of communists who gave their lives for the resistance. This fed in to the narrative of the Party of the 75,000 *fusillés*, although the real number was far lower. That said, the message of *L’Humanité* was that very ordinary, anonymous people had died for the cause, and that both contemporaries and subsequent generations owed them a debt of gratitude. Marcel Naime of the Belleville district of Paris recalled demonstrating on 14 July 1942 with a tricolour flag near the Place de la République. His friend Louis, ‘membre de notre Parti bien avant la guerre’, was arrested and died under torture, without giving the name of any leaders of the Francs-Tireurs et Partisans. ‘C’est à mon avis un héros anonyme ou presque’.<sup>17</sup> Before leaving on a mission near Lyon from which he did not return in June 1944, a communist resister from Bordeaux called ‘Max’ had given his photo to a comrade, Pierre-Yves Lesage, who now wrote from the Pyrenees. Lesage said that he did not know Max’s real identity and that for him he was ‘un martyr inconnu’. The photo published in *L’Humanité* nevertheless provoked three more letters from comrades in Bordeaux, the Côte d’Azur and the Paris region who identified him as Armand Gilli and retold different aspects of his story, building up a collective memory as they went.<sup>18</sup>

Communicating the message of heroism to young people was clear in the case of a class of Lorraine schoolchildren from Lunéville, who wrote to the local council asking why a street and a football stadium were named after two brothers, Henri and Lucien Heckler. They were told that they were young draughtsmen, communists and footballers who had been drafted for STO in Germany but refused to go back after a period of leave and gone to lay low in the Massif Central, at Tulle. They were two of nearly a hundred hostages hanged by the Germans in Tulle on 9 June 1944 in reprisal for a resistance attack. The mayor of Lunéville told the schoolchildren ‘Henri et Lucien, jeunes travailleurs communistes, aimaient

<sup>16</sup> René Roy, letter of 3 June 1984, forwarding that of Hélène Dussault-Biver, unpublished

<sup>17</sup> Marcel Naime, 75009 Paris, *Les Inconnus*, 174

<sup>18</sup> Letters from Pierre-Yves Lesage, Henri Pernot, Alain Pinna and Charles Gadou, *Les Inconnus*, 57-9

la vie, l'amitié, leur travail et leur pays, la France. Ils étaient innocents et sont morts en martyrs'.<sup>19</sup>

The largest tranche of published letters – 80 or 23% - praised the heroic resistance of communist comrades, short of sacrificing their lives. They were designed to show qualities of comradeship, bravery, and the popular nature of the movement. Comradeship was demonstrated by accounts of freeing imprisoned resisters from prison and stories of fighting together in the communist Francs-Tireurs et Partisans Français (FTP or FTPF). Battles with French collaborationists in the Milice were retailed as much as battles with Germans. Robert Gardet explained how resisters based in a steelworks near Clermont-Ferrand had to execute a Milicien who was denouncing and profiteering, concluding 'C'était EUX ou NOUS!'<sup>20</sup> Particularly important were letters about the popular struggle that culminated in the Paris insurrection of August 1944. Guy Léger of Pantin recalled with plenty of local colour that a barricade was built at Bobigny 'à la hauteur des numéros 26-30 de la rue de l'Internationale (rebaptisée rue des Iris par l'occupant) entre la boutique du boucher et celle du charbonnier. C'étaient des habitants du quartier qui tenaient la barricade'.<sup>21</sup> *L'Humanité* was keen to make clear that the paper itself, which had gone underground during the Occupation, was also a player in the insurrection. The mayor of Stains told the story of a 19 year-old FTP militant, Roger Gautre, who picked up a thousand copies of the 24 August 1944 edition which carried the headline, 'A chacun son boche'. He was stopped by a group of retreating SS soldiers who beat him up and shot him. Fittingly, the paper related, 'Il tombera sur son paquet d'*Huma*'.<sup>22</sup>

A powerful message of the letters is that, however heroic, communist resisters could not subsist without support in the wider community. Lucienne Harouel from the Somme related how her FTP husband had been sheltered by some Catholic peasants when he was obliged to lie low. Her message was that patriotism was thicker than ideology. 'Ils savaient que nous étions athées, eux au contraire étaient tous croyants [...] Jamais entre nous nous n'avons senti cette différence, chacun respectait l'autre'.<sup>23</sup> Editing, however, might turn stories of support in the community into stories of heroism. René Ribault, a retired schoolteacher from Poitiers, who had commanded an FTP maquis in the Lozère, was keen to

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<sup>19</sup> Maurice Claude, mayor of Lunéville, to children of CE1, Ecole d'Alsace, Lunéville, 12 Feb. 1982, 'Les Inconnus de la Résistance', 51a, published in *Les Inconnus*, p. 41

<sup>20</sup> *Les Inconnus*, 53

<sup>21</sup> *Les Inconnus*, 180

<sup>22</sup> *Les Inconnus*, 185

<sup>23</sup> Lucienne Harouel, Beaucamps-le-Vieux (Somme), letter of 4 June 1984, 'Les Inconnus', 155, *Les Inconnus*, 158

draw a link between eighteenth-century Camisard resisters and twentieth-century communists. In the Cévennes, he said, ‘les maquis n’étaient pas tellement nouveaux. La terrible repression des ‘Fous de Dieu’ au temps de l’absolutisme royal avait engendré la Résistance, la solidarité’. He wanted to thank his peasant neighbours, Yvonne and Léon, who shared their food with the maquis. Yet the only part of the letter published by *L’Humanité* related the maquis’ heroic attack on the prison of Nîmes in the spring of 1944, in order to release some of their comrades.<sup>24</sup>

A small number of letters were about what might be called passive resistance. These may be seen as everyday acts of resistance within a context of accommodation with the German occupation, as defined by Philippe Burrin.<sup>25</sup> They were acts of foot-dragging or minor sabotage which call to mind the everyday practices of Michel de Certeau or James Scott’s ‘weapons of the weak’.<sup>26</sup> Often there was a dimension of *gauloiserie* to the account, relating a clever, funny or subversive gesture to befuddle or get up the noses of the occupiers. Robert Paris of Nevers, formerly a builder, was required in 1943 to install a septic tank in the Longwy police station that had been occupied by the Germans. Having done a professional job, he then blocked the drainage with an empty back of cement, so that within a few days the contents backed up into the cellar with a terrible smell. He boasted, ‘Je reste fier de cet ultime (ils m’arrêtèrent peu après) et malodorant acte de sabotage’.<sup>27</sup> Pierre Chevrier from the Essonne said that he had been requisitioned to fill holes left by Allied bombing at the airport of Brétigny-sur-Orge. To slow the process he and his mates threw their tools into one of the holes and covered them. The Germans were furious, but all they could do now was to fill the holes by hand, sod by sod.<sup>28</sup>

More significant than passive resistance was symbolic resistance, which accounted for 34 or nearly 10% of the testimonies. This may be defined as expressing the continuity of the Republic abolished by Vichy and of the French nation divided and occupied by Germany, whether by parading the national colours, retrieving busts of Marianne or singing the *Marseillaise*. It was saved for key moments of commemoration, such as 1 May, 14 July or 11

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<sup>24</sup> ‘Les Inconnus’, 59, *Les Inconnus*, 45

<sup>25</sup> Philippe Burrin, *Living with Defeat. France under the German occupation, 1940-1944* (London, Arnold, 1996), 1-4, part III

<sup>26</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley & London, University of California Press, 1984); James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak. Everyday forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1985)

<sup>27</sup> *Les Inconnus*, 24

<sup>28</sup> *Les Inconnus*, 24

November, in order to express a collective solidarity around the Republic and nation. Some risk was involved, since the Germans banned demonstrations and national symbols in the Occupied Zone, and Vichy banned republican symbols and appropriated national days to propagate its own ideology of Work, Family and Fatherland.<sup>29</sup>

One date that was particularly significant for communists was 1 May 1941, when the flying of tricolours and red flags in the minefields of northern France was a first gesture of patriotism and revolution against German occupation, and developed into strike action on 26 May. Its significance was increased by the fact that it preceded the German invasion of the Soviet Union by several weeks. A former miner Ovide Legrand from Paris recalled organising the strike of 1 May, and flying tricolour flags from the electric wires. He did this with his young Polish miner friend, Lucien Miemezic, with whom he regularly swam in the Deule Canal but who was deported after the strike. His account was accompanied by a photo of him, Lucien and other comrades in bathing trunks.<sup>30</sup> Also significant were strikes and demonstrations on 11 November 1943 to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armistice, and the defeat of Germany. Marcel Geoffroy wrote from the Allier to recall a strike that day in a small ceramics factory at Digoin (Saône-et-Loire). ‘On a défilé dans la cour de l’usine en criant “1918, 1918!”’, as Germans watched from the other side of the railway line. As a result a trade union was formed and the boss presented with a list of demands which turned him ‘aussi pâle que les évieriers qu’on lui fabriquait’.<sup>31</sup> On 14 July 1943 Madeleine Martin paraded in the Val d’Oise with her two friends, all of them aged twenty, wearing each a red, white or blue dress. They were accosted by members of the Milice but ‘applaudis par de braves gens’.<sup>32</sup> On 14 July 1944 nurse Suzanne Neige and other staff at the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris flew a tricolour from the chapel tower, provoking a German tank to crash into the courtyard and make them remove it.<sup>33</sup> The son of Léon Rousseau, a former employee of the meter factory at Montrouge, forwarded a piece written by his father about the strikes and demonstrations in the southern *banlieue rouge* on 14 July 1944, which led to two demonstrators being shot by the Germans. As a result a cortege of ‘600 à 700 personnes, en majorité des femmes, allèrent rendre hommage aux fusillés sur le lieu de leur exécution’.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Robert Gildea, *Marianne in chains. In Search of the German Occupation* (London, Macmillan, 2002), 161-2

<sup>30</sup> *Les Inconnus*, 111

<sup>31</sup> *Les Inconnus*, 132

<sup>32</sup> Madeleine Martin, St Leu-la-Forêt, letter of 2 June 1944, in ‘Les Inconnus’, 190; *les Inconnus*, 112

<sup>33</sup> Suzanne Neige, Montrouge, letter of 16 July 1984, in ‘Les Inconnus’, 203, unpublished.

<sup>34</sup> Léon Rousseau, Montrouge, letter forwarded by his son, 29 Aug. 1984, ‘Les Inconnus’, 389, *Les Inconnus*, 171

Resistance by women may of course fit into any category of resistance, but there was a gendering of resistance activity which makes it possible to explore the phenomenon of women's resistance, including the boundaries that were transgressed and the ways in which it was talked about. Nearly 15% of cases relate to resistance by women, and three-quarters of these accounts were written by women. But where men's accounts often demonstrated bravado, women's accounts were generally much more modest.

A minority of women were said to undertake armed resistance. Over the heading 'La première combattante' is a police identity photograph (full-face and profile) of a severe working-class woman, Micheline Grouwier, taken when she was arrested in November 1942. Sent in by a colleague, Gisèle Joannès of Gentilly, it explains that she was sacked from a Paris clothing factory that was working for the German army after she sowed a revolver pocket into a pair of trousers. It described how Micheleine then joined the FTP, took part in an attack on 20 September 1942 on a hotel occupied by Germans and shot dead a German officer in the rue Violet, Paris XV. She deported to Ravensbrück, 'sans que ses tortionnaires aient réussi à lui arracher le moindre renseignement'.<sup>35</sup>

Contrasting with this story is Antonin Cubizolles' account, entitled 'La Jeanne d'Arc du 152e RI', of Ginette Nirouet, a maquis nurse who in October 1944 had joined the 152<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of the First French army driving towards Germany. She is described 'une jolie fille' with 'un visage ovale légèrement bronze. Des traits réguliers, un petit nez régulier, des yeux bleus, des lèvres fines prêtes à sourire'. An artist's impression suggested a young woman in a helmet, wearing lipstick, and appeared next to the famous anti-British Vichy poster of Joan of Arc rising from Rouen in flames, with the caption 'Les Assassins reviennent toujours sur les lieux de leur crime'. Cubizolles lovingly told the story of her death in action after she refused the order that women should go to the rear. 'Il m'a fallu des années pour apprendre que la 'Jeanne d'Arc' du 152e s'appelait en réalité Ginette Colette Nirouet, née le 25 mai 1926 à Paris', he regretted. 'Qui m'aidera à retrouver sa tombe? Qui m'aidera à lui faire rendre les honneurs qui lui sont dus?'<sup>36</sup>

Fighting women were rare, and *L'Humanité* was fond of other tropes of women in the resistance. One was the liaison agent, using her feminine wiles to deflect attention. Joseph Rossi, carrying plans of parachute landings on the Vercors, told how the bus he was

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<sup>35</sup> *Les Inconnus*, 21

<sup>36</sup> *Les Inconnus*, 18-10

travelling in arrived at a German checkpoint on the outskirts of Grenoble. The young women next to him asked, “Tu as des ennuis? Ne sachant trop que dire, je ne pus qu’acquiescer. “Donne-moi tes papiers”. Ils prirent la route de son corsage. Les Allemands n’osèrent aller aussi loin’.<sup>37</sup> A second was the revolutionary woman, the *sans-culotte*’s wife, who came onto the streets to demonstrate for bread, in the tradition of women’s march to Versailles in October 1789. Rosette Remacle told the story of a women’s march for bread in Marseille in May 1944, after rations were reduced to 150 grams per day. However, she highlighted not her own role but that of ‘ma camarade Jeannette Doro, minuscule et pétulante’, who confronted a German officer ordering them to disperse ‘avec son accent inimitable par écrit, “Ouais, demain on rassira gratis”’.<sup>38</sup> Third, there was the ‘woman at the door’, highlighted by Rod Kedward, sheltering POWs, *réfractaires* and resisters and seeing off inquiries from Vichy and the Germans. A favourite was the peasant grandmother who sheltered maquisards and was not afraid of the Germans because she has endured so much grief. Jos Le Coze took refuge in the Breton farmhouse from which his fellow maquisards had moved on and recalled the conversation with the obstinate old woman:

Elle m’offrit un café et du pain car j’avais bien faim. Puis je lui demandais si elle n’avait pas peur des Allemands: ‘Non’, dit-elle. ‘Mais s’ils apprennent qu’il y a eu ici un maquis, ils brûleront la ferme’. ‘Bah! On la reconstruira après la victoire’, dit-elle. ‘Mais, dis-je, ils pourraient vous fusiller’. ‘Je suis assez vieille pour faire une morte, dit-elle, et je ne regrette rien. Je suis de nouveau prête à accueillir les patriotes s’ils veulent revenir.’<sup>39</sup>

On occasion, *L’Humanité* gave itself permission to attribute a bravado to women that they did not exhibit themselves. In a piece headed ‘Dynamite pour les lapins’, a woman called Louise from the Nord explained that her communist husband was a POW and that in 1943 the FTP had asked her to work as a liaison agent. She said that she carried messages and later dynamite that she hid in hollowed-out sugar-beet. Stopped by the Germans one day, she said, ‘c’est pour mes lapins’, and got away with it. In fact the story was not a first-person account by Louise but an account by Louise about a woman called Jeannette from a mining village near Douai. Jeannette was too modest to tell the story herself and confessed in the

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<sup>37</sup> Joseph Rossi, Vif, Isère, letter of 13 Aug. 1984 in ‘Les Inconnus’, 251; *Les Inconnus*, 37

<sup>38</sup> *Les Inconnus*, 115

<sup>39</sup> Jos Le Coze, letter on 8 June 1944, *Les Inconnus*, 118; *Les Inconnus*, 162

original version, 'Je n'ai pas grand chose à raconter', even though her bravery was exceptional.<sup>40</sup>

One of the tasks of women was to mourn the dead and to tend to their graves, but this was not something *L'Humanité* wanted to talk much about. It did not publish the testimony of H  l  ne Dussault-Biver of Essonne about the execution of her son D  d   and his friend Isidore Grinberg, who were part of a communist commando group close to Pierre Georges. While her son was decorated, Isidore's body was thrown into a common grave. She signed off, 'Et maintenant je vais m'occuper des tombes abandonn  es'.<sup>41</sup> Even less did it want to talk about the desperate anger of women. Roger Michaud of Gentilly wrote in about a concierge, C  lestine Gasnier, nicknamed Tante, who had been the housekeeper of communist heroine Danielle Casanova and took her parcels and received messages when she was imprisoned at Fort Romainville, before her deportation. After the liberation of Paris Tante found the body of her son Georges, who had been killed by the SS, in the ditch of the Ch  teau of Vincennes. What the paper did not publish was Michaud's account of her reaction, perhaps because it was not in appropriate for a mother in mourning: 'Je la vois et je l'entends encore, quelques jours plus tard, hurlant son d  sespoir et sa haine, boulevard Voltaire, au passage d'un camion de prisonniers allemands qui riaient car, pour eux, la guerre   taient finie.'<sup>42</sup>

Accounts of resistance by children number 30 or 8%. Most of these were written by the children themselves, in their maturity. Some reflected on their own *na  ivit  *, such as Claude Laurence, a child in care aged sixteen who dismantled explosives attached to stakes in Normandy, not because they hindered Allied landings but because they wounded the cows.<sup>43</sup> Some poignantly related to absent fathers, arrested for resistance activity. Jacqueline Gryelec, born in 1939, was only two when her father was arrested and interned at Mauzac in the Dordogne. She enclosed a third birthday card sent from the camp by her father and recalled how she rode on the back of her mother's bicycle, with messages and flyers hidden in her knickers.<sup>44</sup> Some related to schoolchild escapades, such as the attempts of Roger Pernot and his friends to undermine the Vichyisme of the   cole Normale of Lons-le-Saunier by painting a Lorraine cross on the school flag and switching the official portrait of P  tain for one of de

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<sup>40</sup> Anonymous account, 'Je n'ai pas grand chose    raconter', 'Les Inconnus', 34; *Les Inconnus*, 21'

<sup>41</sup> 'Les Inconnus', 237; see also note 16

<sup>42</sup> 'Les Inconnus', 365

<sup>43</sup> *Les Inconnus*, 42

<sup>44</sup> Jacqueline Gryelec, n  e Fournier, letter of 16 Aug. 1984, 'Les Inconnus', 342, unpublished

Gaule.<sup>45</sup> Outside school, the railway apprentices of Béziers were humiliated by a lycéenne with satchel who was first to lay her wreath at the war memorial under the noses of the Germans and the Vichy police on 11 November 1943, shaming the boys into action.<sup>46</sup>

That said, just as the model of a female resister for *L'Humanité* was Joan of Arc, the ideal child resister for the Communist party was modelled on Gavroche, the cheeky and fearless urchin of Victor Hugo's *Misérables*. This image was embodied by Serge Gras, who at the age of thirteen fought on the barricades during the Paris insurrection of August 1944. He became the mascot of Colonel Fabien's 'bataillon de la jeunesse', which was incorporated into the 151<sup>st</sup> infantry division for the invasion of Germany. *L'Humanité* published a picture of snub-nosed Gras in helmet and uniform being decorated by a rather patronising General de Lattre de Tassigny, commander of the French First Army, a week before the boy was killed in action.<sup>47</sup>

Communist resistance during the war was highly cosmopolitan. Resistance in France was part of an international struggle against Nazism and fascism that began with the Spanish Civil War. Many resisters were foreign, having come to France as economic migrants, political or religious exiles, or fleeing invading armies. The Communist party had an umbrella organisation for foreigners, the Main d'Oeuvre Immigré (MOI) and this developed a resistance wing, the FTP-MOI. In the years after the war, however, the Communist Party was keen to counter accusations of loyalty to Moscow by highlighting its patriotic role in the Resistance. It was not until the early 1980s that foreign resisters who had been active in cities such as Lyon and Toulouse found each other again and began to tell their common story.<sup>48</sup> In *Les Inconnus* there are multiple references to the role of foreign resisters in the collection, but the editing tends to minimise their contribution, to cloak them in anonymity, or to pass off their achievements as those of French communists.

In a piece entitled 'Trois étrangers', J. Bergougnieux from Antony wrote about three foreign resisters in the Lot. One was a former officer in the Spanish republican army called 'Gallarza'; one was a German anti-Nazi, nicknamed 'Plastique'; and the third was a Pole, whose name he did not remember. 'J'en ai honte', he continued. 'En avril 1944 le maquis du Lot avait occupé la petite ville de Carjac sur laquelle convergeaient des GMR [Gardes

<sup>45</sup> Roger Pernot, Lons-le-Saunier, letter of 22 July 1984, 'Les Inconnus', 215; *Les Inconnus*, 124

<sup>46</sup> Claude Pascal, Béziers, undated letter, 'les Inconnus', 39; *les Inconnus*, 46

<sup>47</sup> *Les Inconnus*, 141-2

<sup>48</sup> Annette Wieviorka, *Ils étaient Juifs, résistants, communistes* (Paris, Denoël, 1986); Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, 461-2

Mobiles de Réserve] de partout. Avec une mitrailleuse tu gardais le pont de Salvagnac. Tu l'as gardé jusqu'à ta mort'.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Alcide Storini wrote from Antibes to recall that she was nine when her mother returned horrified from Nice on 7 July 1944 to report that two resisters had been hanged by the Germans in front of the Galeries Lafayette. 'A nos deux martyrs, 'Torrin' et 'Grassi'', she wrote, 'je leur dois le droit de raconter en quelques lignes le souvenir de cette journée d'horreur. Ils se sont sacrifiés pour que nous puissions continuer de vivre'. What neither she nor the editors clarified, however, was that while Séraphin Torrin was Provençal, Ange Grassi was an Italian mason, one of the many anti-fascist Italian resisters involved in the French Resistance.<sup>50</sup> A third example was a letter from Berlin from Gerhard Leo, a former German anti-Nazi resister in Toulouse, now an East German journalist. He had been freed from a train taking him to Paris for certain trial and execution by the FTP maquis of Corrèze, which he then joined. After the attack on Tulle, the maquisards retreated, but Gerhard's leader, 'Lieutenant Michel' was captured by the Germans and hanged at nearby Uzerche. Leo was concerned that a plaque to a 'résistant inconnu' marked the spot but that he wanted to pay tribute to Michel by giving him his real name, Édouard Chauvignat, from Libourne. What is significant is the honour paid by a foreign resister to a French resister; not until he published his memoirs in 1997 was the extraordinary story of Gerhard Leo himself told.<sup>51</sup>

Accounts in *Les Inconnus* offers interesting perspectives on the persecution of Jews and Jewish resistance. They provide insights into how far the non-Jewish population manifested hostility to Jews, how far they participated in their rescue, and how far they simply stood by. The recent work of Jacques Semelin has argued that since 75% of Jews in France were not killed, the difference was made by the generous 'little gestures' of the French population, proving them with food, hiding and help to escape.<sup>52</sup> Much more difficult for *L'Humanité* to relate was the question of Jewish resistance, often the resistance of foreign Jews, which might detract from the patriotic narrative of French communists.

There are 30 stories of the rescue of Jews being hunted by the authorities, nearly 9% of the total. For example, Marcelle Robineau wrote from the Yonne to say that had run a clothing workshop in Paris and in 1943 had a sixteen year-old Jewish apprentice called Ida.

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<sup>49</sup> *Les Inconnus*, 93

<sup>50</sup> 'Les Inconnus', 267; *Les Inconnus*, 147

<sup>51</sup> *Les Inconnus*, 91-2. See also Gerhard Leo, *Un Allemand dans la Résistance. Le Train pour Toulouse* (Paris, Éditions Tirésias, 1997)

<sup>52</sup> Jacques Semelin, *Persécutions et Entraides dans la France occupée. Comment 75% des Juifs en France ont échappé à la mort* (Paris, les Arènes-Seuil, 2013), 797

She had two brothers aged fourteen and eight at the local school. Just before Christmas 1943 their parents were arrested and police came to the school to arrest the children. M. Poulet the head teacher, swore that they had gone home but in fact sheltered Ida and her older brother for the rest of the war. ‘Donc, grace à M. Poulet, qui risquait la mort ou au moins la déportation – ce qui était la même chose – pour avoir caché deux enfants juifs, ces deux enfants ont été sauvés.’<sup>53</sup>

A good many accounts, however, express the powerlessness of ordinary French people to do anything to stop the deportation of Jews. They manifested Roger Lugand of Vigneux-sur-Seine told the story of a deportation train guarded by German soldiers waiting at Bercy station in the summer of 1943, at the same time as a delivery of fruit and vegetables. A huge lorry-driver brought a handful of apples to the outstretched arms of the deportees, and was copied by other workers until the Germans became aggressive. Denise Coupe from Paris recalled collecting messages thrown from deportees’ trains rumbling past their house in the Seine-Saint-Denis with her mother and sister and sending them on to families when they could. Lucienne Mitton of Montreuil said that she had gone with a Jewish woman whose husband had been arrested to meet a train of Jewish internees being transferred from Drancy to a camp at Beaune-la-Rolande. They accompanied the prisoners from the train station to the camp and tried to spirit some of them away to the forest of Orleans. ‘Triste bilan’, she concluded, ‘deux rescapés seulement, et nous ignorions leur nom et les suites de leur evasion. Aujourd’hui encore je souffre de n’avoir pas été dans un groupe de résistants.’<sup>54</sup> The ‘little gestures’ of which Semelin speaks were therefore often more about solidarity than about the actual rescue of Jews.

By contrast, there was a reluctance to give too much credit to foreign Jewish resistance. Around this time the Communist Party was being accused of sacrificing foreign communist (and often Jewish) resisters of the FTP-MOI, notably the Manouchian group, by sending them on the most dangerous missions. This accusation was dramatised in Serge Mosco’s 1985 *Terroristes à la retraite* and gave rise to fierce debate.<sup>55</sup> At the same time the leading role of Henri Rol-Tanguy in the FTP was being challenged by the reputation of Joseph Epstein (Commandant Gilles), who was shot by the Germans in on 11 April 1944.

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<sup>53</sup> ‘Les Inconnus’, 236; *Les Inconnus*, 77,

<sup>54</sup> *Les Inconnus* 23, 32, 77

<sup>55</sup> Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, 463-4

A 'petite annonce' by Dany Schwatz of Paris showed a photograph of an FTP-MOI group which had liberated Toulouse. He asked anyone who recognised themselves to contact him. He also wished to thank two Protestant women social workers who had helped him escape from a round-up (*rafle*) the internment camp of Gurs in August 1943. This was the only clue to the fact that he was a Jewish resister who had been interned as a foreign Jew.<sup>56</sup>

'Comme je suis d'origine israélite - les Allemands me l'ayant rappelé', wrote Paul Schwatz of the Val de Marne, 'je fus obligé de passer dans le groupe des jeunes juifs de la MOI', and sabotaged Jewish businesses that worked for the Germans. The message of the editors too was that the FTP-MOI was a parallel resistance movement with its own Jewish concerns. What is cut out of the published account is Schwatz's story of how as a Young Communist of the Marais district he had taken part in the anti-German demonstration of 13 August 1941 which led to the arrest and later execution of Henri Gautherot and Samuel Tyszelman, the latter Jewish, which provoked the first assassination of a German soldier by Pierre George's group of young communist fighters.<sup>57</sup> Also excised was Schwatz's statement that 'J'ai travaillé avec Marcel Rayman et [Wolf] Wajsbrot, ils passèrent aux FTP de la MOI dans le groupe Manouchian'. Marcel Rayman, a young Polish-Jewish communist, was the pin-up of the Manouchian group, whose mass execution on 21 February 1944 arguably detracted from the glory of French communist resistance.

One story *Les Inconnus* did not publish at all. This was the account of the resistance activity of Maurice Lacazette, an FTP leader executed in Nantes on 25 August 1943, by his widow, Régine Lacazette, née Gurfinkel. It was in fact written in 1959 and forwarded by her second husband, since she had died in 1973. In her modesty she included few details of her own resistance activity, except to say that she was brought up in the Warsaw ghetto, came to Paris after leaving school in 1928, attended Sciences-Po and worked for the metalworkers' union, where she met her husband. At the time of his death, she said, 'je travaillais avec le Commandant FTPF Gilles (Epstein de son vrai nom, d'origine polonaise), un autre héros, fusillé en février 1944. J'assurais à ce moment-là jusqu'à vingt rendez-vous par jour, dans tous les coins de la région parisienne, sans aucune note, sans aucun plan'.<sup>58</sup> One may only speculate as to why this letter was not published. It was not a direct response to the 1984 call, having been written much earlier. More importantly, it gave too high a profile to the foreign

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<sup>56</sup> *Les Inconnus*, 113

<sup>57</sup> Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, 88-9

<sup>58</sup> 'Les Inconnus', 355

Jewish communist (and women's) resistance that might be seen to undermine the narrative of patriotic French communist resistance.

A study of this collection of letters highlights the tension between a rich documentation of spontaneous, sporadic and symbolic resistance, and the heroic resistance of organised communists, especially through the FTP. Plenty of evidence is provided of resistance as resistance as a 'movement', as François Marcot calls it, or what I have called 'everyday resistance', or the 'resistance of the penumbra', moving out of the shadows of underground resistance into the half-light.<sup>59</sup> There are stories of passive resistance and also of symbolic resistance, subtly reaffirming the identity of the Republic and the nation. There are plentiful accounts of resistance by women, which was often gendered, as was the way in which they told their stories. All these accounts, however, were subjected to the editorial decisions of *L'Humanité*, which was keen above all to paint a heroic picture of communist resistance, for those who remembered the war, for the younger generations, and for a wider public. This resistance was deemed to have started long before 1941 and was highlighted in a bid to shake off the incubus of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, and reached a climax with the Paris insurrection of August 1944, which was promoted as the great achievement of the communist resistance within France, in full spate when the tanks of General Leclerc arrived. Little-known individuals or groups were promoted to the ranks of heroes and martyrs. Women and children were also portrayed as heroes, particularly when they personified the communists' favourite tropes: the *sans-culotte's* wife, Joan of Arc, the old witch, or Gavroche. Most challenging were stories of foreign and especially foreign-Jewish resistance. In the mid-1980s, these stories were beginning to be discussed in the public realm but the Communist Party, still desperate to assert its patriotic credentials, kept doggedly to the familiar narrative of French communist resistance.

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<sup>59</sup> Robert Gildea, 'Lettres de correspondants français à la BBC (1940-1943) : une pénombre de la résistance ?', *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 125, Jan.- Mar. 2015, 61-76