

Transnational Soldiers vs Resistance National Accounts: the legend of la Nueve and the “Spanish” Liberation of Paris

Abstract

The reconstruction of the History of the Resistance in France, the memories of former combatants and their relatives, and an important culture industry have all been developed within a national context, thereby hiding the transnational character of this resistance over the years. This paper shows first how the French State came to “Frenchify” this Resistance and, decades later, civil society and that culture industry tried to “Spanishise” the Liberation of Paris through the construction of the legend of “la Nueve”. With this in mind, the current paper focuses mainly on a historical and memorial analysis of the French infantry company la Nueve, through the recollections and experiences of numerous transnational soldiers, in order to stress the "a la carte" reconstruction of its history, and highlighting the particular role played by the French-Spanish collective memory over the last twenty years.

Keywords

Resistance in France, Liberation of Paris, transnational soldiers, Second World War, la Nueve, history and memory.

*Paris! Paris outragé! Paris brisé! Paris martyrisé! Mais Paris libéré! Libéré par lui-même, libéré par son peuple avec le concours des armées de la France, avec l'appui et le concours de la France tout entière, de la France qui se bat, de la seule France, de la vraie France, de la France éternelle.*¹

It has been more than seventy-five years since the moment, on 25th August 1944, that General de Gaulle laid the foundation stone of the resistance myth², giving shape with those words to the highest expression of a political wish: to underscore the importance of France and the French in their own liberation, excluding women, foreigners and colonial soldiers. A period in which different historical-cultural interpretations of the resistance phenomenon have been responsible for underpinning a useful and dangerous tale which, in the global post-war era, allowed the French to overcome the trauma provoked by the confinement of foreigners in internment camps, the defeat of June 1940 and the complex reading of the occupation years.³

¹ Extract of General De Gaulle's speech at the Hôtel de Ville of Paris, 25th August, 1944. Paris! Paris outraged! Paris broken! Paris martyred! But Paris freed! Freed by itself, freed by its people with the support of the armies of France, with the support and the help of the whole of France, of the France which is fighting, of France alone, of the real France, of eternal France. Author's translation.

² Henry Rousso, *Le syndrome de Vichy, de 1944 à nos jours* (Paris 1990), p. 19.

³ I would especially like to thank my colleague Jorge Marco (Lecturer at the University of Bath) their remarks and support.

This “à la carte history”, conceived in order to reactivate with pride “occupied national identity,” was presented in a nuanced way after 1947 by the particular interpretation of the resistance past by the French Communist Party. Expelled from power that same year, therein French communists underscored the commitment of their comrades, over all others, to the extreme. Both, Gaullist and communist tales differed in multiple aspects, but they did coincide in one common strategy: burying foreign participation in the liberation, not just of Paris, but of all France. They did so by censuring systematically French post-war memories, minimising the participation of foreigners in the Resistance, and forging a positive construction: the image of a broad national consensus against the occupier.⁴

This paper analyses how the forgetting of transnational soldiers who contributed to the liberation of France, and positive constructions of those who participated therein, have conditioned the partial and mythologised recovery of the history of the Liberation of Paris. In general, it identifies and analyses the role of those transnational soldiers in the field, the way they were instrumentalised by French and American authorities, and how this conditioned their enlistment and combat. But it also emphasises the importance of

⁴ Olivier Wieviorka, “Du bon usage du passé. Résistance, politique, mémoire”, *Mots. Les langages du politique*, 32 (1992), pp. 67-80. See also, Olivier Wieviorka, *Une certaine idée de la Résistance: Défense de la France, 1940-1949* (Paris 1995); Jean-Marie Guillon et Pierre Laborie (eds.), *Mémoire et Histoire: la Résistance* (Toulouse 1995); Laurent Douzou (dir.), *Faire l’histoire de la Résistance* (Rennes 2010).

“popular memory”⁵ a culture industry and “invented traditions”⁶ by examining the case of “la Nueve”⁷ within the Spanish contribution as a whole to the Resistance in France during the Second World War. With this in mind, I will then reflect on the need to revisit a past which has been forgotten for decades, the selective nature of memories, the mobilisation of the past for particular interests, its commercialisation, its use for aesthetic reasons. Lastly, the present study emphasises that these “invented traditions”, added to the subjective and tardy study of the Spanish contribution to the European antifascist struggle have contributed to making the study of this participation random, delaying recognition for those who experienced it first-hand, and distorting the popular memory of this participation.

Transnational resisters vs the French “syndrome(s)”

As Henry Rousso stated in *Le syndrome de Vichy*, the 1960s was characterized by a complete Gaullist hegemony in both French politics and collective memory. This period was dominated by the Gaullist Myth of Resistance and the construction of a positive national account which extolled the massive contribution of French citizens to the Resistance, remarking that only few of them collaborated with the Nazis.⁸ The Algerian

⁵ Michael Kammen, *The Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York 1991), p. 10.

⁶ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge 1983).

⁷ This was the name by which the ninth combat company in the third battalion of the Ad Hoc Regiment of Chad was commonly known and which, in turn, formed part of the French second armoured division commanded, during the second global conflict, by General Leclerc.

⁸ Henry Rousso, *Le syndrome de Vichy, de 1944 à nos jours* (Paris 1990).

War (1954-1962), the generational shift heralded by the May 1968 revolts and the later retirement and the death of De Gaulle himself (1969-1970) shook the foundations of the myth.⁹ Nevertheless, the legend was reinvented, favouring the cult of a “new” figure: Jean Moulin¹⁰. Yet foreigners were still excluded from the national liberation account, even following the premiere and banning of *Le Chagrin et la Pitié* (1969) and the publication of *Vichy France* (1972).¹¹ What is more, one would have to wait until the second half of the 1970s for a story underscoring the importance of European antifascists and foreign Jews in the Resistance which managed to capture French public opinion for the first time.¹² This time, thousands of foreign combatants were indeed included in the “glorious” endeavour of national liberation. The French had managed to liberate themselves, counting on the support of thousands of foreigners whose participation had been hidden systematically for years. Two films in particular focused on the capture and murder of the

⁹ Richard J. Golsan, “The Legacy of World War II in France: Mapping the Discourses of Memory”, in Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner, and Claudio Fogu (eds.), *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (Durham 2006), pp. 73-101. See also Richard J. Golsan (dir.), *Memory, the Holocaust and French Justice. The Bousquet and Touvier Affairs* (Hanover 1996).

¹⁰ Jean Moulin, president of *Conseil National de la Résistance* murdered by the Nazis in 1943.

¹¹ Marcel Ophüls, *Le Chagrin et la Pitié*, (1969, 1971) Norddeutscher Rundfunk, Radio Télévision Suisse, Télévision Rencontre Lausanne, 251 min; Robert O. Paxton, *La France de Vichy, 1940-1944* (Paris 1973). First edition in *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944* (New York 1972).

¹² Robert Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows: A New History of the French Resistance* (Cambridge 2015), p. 21.

members of the Manouchian resistance group: *L’Affiche rouge* (1976) and *Des terroristes à la Retraite* (1985).¹³

Among those foreigners, thousands of Spaniards, most of them refugees of the Spanish Civil War, fought the German occupiers and their partners between 1939 and 1945.¹⁴ In spite of their quantitative and qualitative importance, their contribution failed to attract the attention of historians, whether French or Spanish, until the late 1980s and early 1990s.¹⁵ Amongst the factors which were responsible for this forgetting, three stand out: the way in which France wrote its own history following the conflict; the form in which forty years of dictatorship in Spain —its evolution, consolidation and international projection— conditioned the development of initiatives destined to regain the memory and analyse the history of Spanish resistance fighters; and the way in which mechanisms of concealment and positive constructions have combined to condition the study of this

¹³ Frank Cassenti, *L’Affiche rouge*, 1976, Z Productions, Institut National de l’Audiovisuel (INA), Avia Films (A.V.I.A.), 90 min. M. Bocault, *Des terroristes à la Retraite*, 1985, Top n° 1, Zec Production, La Cécilia, Antenne 2, ARTE France, 84 min.

¹⁴ Diego Gaspar Celaya, “Premature Resisters”. Spanish Contribution to the French National Defence Campaign in 1939/1940, *Journal of Modern European History, JMEH*, 16 (2018), pp. 203-224; Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand, “Spanish Republicans Exiled in France during the Second World War: War and Resistance”, in Sara J. Brenneis and Gina Herrmann (eds.), *Spain, the Second World War, and the Holocaust* (Toronto, 2020), pp. 185-198; Diego Gaspar Celaya, “Spanish exiles, transnational soldiers. From the French internment camps to the Free French Forces”, *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, 27:1 (2021), pp. 27-40.

¹⁵ A detailed analysis of the bibliography which addresses Spanish participation in the resistance in: Diego Gaspar Celaya, “D’un mythe à l’autre. Mémoire et histoire des espagnols dans la Résistance”, *Conserveries mémorielles*, 20 (2017), online, <http://cm.revues.org/2441>. ISSN 1718-5556. For a gender perspective, see also Diego Gaspar Celaya, “Combatir “sin” armas. Género e instrumentalización: mujeres españolas al servicio de la Francia Combatiente (1940-1945)”, *Historia Social*, 97 (2020), pp. 135-156.

Spanish participation in the Resistance in France.¹⁶ Together, these elements highlight both: the absence in Spain of an official transmission of the European antifascist resistance memory, and a complex historiography evolution highly contaminated by testimony and positive constructions.

As Richard Golsan points out, in France, the "longue durée" of the Gaullist Myth of Resistance resistant also had a psychological function: to stigmatize a good part of the attempts made to challenge it, reevaluate it and / or analyse the complex past of French occupation and collaboration.¹⁷ But, far from being an exception, the French case is a paradigmatic example of the complex Post-War European reality, in which most European countries (including the USSR) dealt with different processes of (re) constructing their own national identities and memories.¹⁸ In Italy, for example, this

¹⁶ Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand, Denis Peschanski, Jean-Pierre Amalric, Michel Goubet, Jean-Marie Guillon and François Marcot, "Les Espagnols dans la Résistance", in Pierre Milza and Denis Peschanski (eds.), *Exils Et Migrations. Italiens et espagnols en France 1938-1946* (Paris 1994), pp. 593-594.

¹⁷ Richard J. Golsan, "The Legacy of World War II in France: Mapping the Discourses of Memory", Richard Ned lebow, Wulf Kansteiner and Claudio Fogu (Ed.), *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (Durham and London, 2006), pp. 73-101.

¹⁸ For example, Jan-Werner Müller (ed.), *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past* (Cambridge 2002); Małgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth (eds.), *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance* (New York, 2010); Thomas C. Wolfe, "Past as Present, Myth, or History? Discourses of Time and the Great Fatherland War", in Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner, and Claudio Fogu (eds.), *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (Durham 2006), pp. 249-283; James V. Wertsch, "Blank Spots in Collective Memory: A Case Study of Russia." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 617 (2008), pp. 58-71. Out from European scenario see also: Mark A. Stoler, "The Second World War in U.S. History and Memory." *Diplomatic History*, vol. 25, 3 (2001), pp. 383-392; Mark A. Stoler and Melanie S. Gustafson (eds.), *Major problems in the history of World War II : documents and essays* (Boston 2003); Rana Mitter, *China's Good War. How World War II Is Shaping a New Nationalism* (Cambridge – London 2020).

process was developed according to another founding myth: that which presented the country as a "nation of anti-fascists".¹⁹

Regardless of the French and Italian particularities, many European nation-states implemented different strategies in order to avoid dealing with these "complex episodes" of their own Past, omitting them from their respective "collective memories".²⁰ With this in mind, they adopted two main common strategies. First, there was the aforementioned creation of positive constructions and myths around their national resistance movements. This was a phenomenon that, as we have seen, was especially significant in France and Italy, but also in Yugoslavia, Norway and Poland.²¹ And second, there was the

¹⁹ Even if, according to Renzo De Felice, its result served to "obscure" the real history of Italian fascism and the war, while the "anti-fascist republic of Italy" provides an institutional alibi to fascist and communist anti-democratic political elements. Renzo De Felice, *Rosso e Nero, a cura di Pasquale Chessa* (Milano, 1995). See also: Robert A. Ventresca, 'Mussolini's Ghost: Italy's Duce in History and Memory', *History & Memory*, 18, 1 (2006), pp. 86-119; Andrea Mammone, 'A Daily Revision of the Past: Fascism, Anti-Fascism, and Memory in Contemporary Italy', *Modern Italy*, 11, 2 (2006), pp. 211-26; Rosario Forlenza, "Sacrificial Memory and Political Legitimacy in Postwar Italy: Reliving and Remembering World War II", *History and Memory*, Vol. 24, 2 (2012), pp. 73-116.

²⁰ In this paper, I employ a broad definition of 'collective memory', following Alon Confino's work: 'a set of representations of the past that are constructed by a given social group (be it a nation, a family, a religious community, or other) through a process of invention, appropriation, and selection, and that have bearings on relationships of power within society'. Alon Confino, 'Remembering the Second World War, 1945-1965: Narratives of Victimhood and Genocide', *Cultural Analysis*, 4 (2005), p. 48. On "collective memory" studies, see also: Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Paris 1968), especially chapter 2; Alon Confino, 'Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method', *American Historical Review*, 102, 5 (1997), pp. 1386-1403; and Paul Ricoeur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Paris 2000), especially chapter 11.

²¹ For the Yugoslavian case, see Jelena Dureinovic, *The Politics of Memory of the Second World War in Contemporary Serbia* (Abingdon – New York 2020). For the Norwegian case see Claudia Lenz, "The second world war in the popular culture of memory in Norway", in Sylvia Paletschek (ed.), *Popular Historiographies in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, New York – Oxford, 2010) pp. 140-154; and Helle Bjerg, Claudia Lenz and Erik Thorstensen (eds.) *Historicizing the Uses of the Past Scandinavian Perspectives on History Culture. Historical Consciousness and Didactics of History Related to World War II* (Bielefeld, 2011). For the Polish case see Jan Karski, *Story of a secret state: My Report to the World* (Washington

"quarantine": the identification of the war, the occupation, the collaboration and in general any episode that was problematic to remember, as "exceptional moments" far from the "normal trajectory" of the nation. This strategy was adopted initially by the German Conservatives, and then followed by both Italians and Austrians, resulting in a simplified reading of the Nazi legacy defined as "Nocturno" by Richard N. Lebow.²²

In France, this strategy was fully-developed under the Gaullist hegemony. As a result, some "unwanted memories" were systematically concealed, as indicated above: the collaboration, the confinement of foreigners in internment camps and their contribution to Resistance.²³ For its part, this strategy in Eastern Europe was restricted, at least until 1989, to the particular reading that the USSR made of its past, focusing chiefly on the "Great Patriotic War". This process began during the Second World War, when communist officials urged the Russian people to repel the German invasion in the name of "Holy Mother Russia". In this way, the Soviet authorities reinforced the concept of the "Great Patriotic War" by combining the ideological component of communism with the emotional appeal of nationalism, as the basis of identity and sacrifice. As Thomas Wolfe

2013); Barbara Szacka and Marjorie Castle, "Polish Remembrance of World War II", *International Journal of Sociology*, vol. 36, 4 (2006) pp. 8–26; and Annamaria Orla-Bukowska, "New Threads on an Old Loom. National Memory and Social Identity in Postwar and Post-Communist Poland", in Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner and Claudio Fogu (Ed.), *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (Durham and London, 2006) pp. 177-209.

²² Richard Ned Lebow, "The Memory of Politics in Postwar Europe", in Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner, and Claudio Fogu, eds., *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, pp. 19-21.

²³ Rosemarie Scullion, "Unforgettable: History, Memory, and the Vichy Syndrome," *Studies in 20th Century Literature*, vol. 23, 1 (1999), p. 12. See also Rousso's "organization of forgetting" in Henry Rousso, *Le syndrome de Vichy, de 1944 à nos jours* (Paris 1990), p. 12.

points out, we can detect this strategy -however much it was adapted- throughout the entire Soviet era, even if, in the 1980s, the usefulness of the "Great Patriotic War" was drastically diminished as the generation forged in the heat of the Second World War disappeared.²⁴

Lost in “transition”

In the 1960s, something started to change in Western Europe which challenged the mythical post-war narratives. Beginning in Germany, the change continued in France during the 1970s and was confirmed in Italy following the collapse of communism and the birth of the 'Second Republic'. As a result, an uncomfortable space for multiple competitive versions of the past opened up within the new European post-Cold War scenario.²⁵ But what about Spain? Did Franco's regime manage to resist to this?

One of the Francoist myths which was sustained by official regime historiography for decades presented its Generalissimo as a statesman who managed to prevent the entry of Spain into the Second World War. However, Franco's "clever prudence" involved a strategy in which he sought adapt to a shifting environment marked by the unequal importance that any potential entry of Spain into the conflict would have had for Germany

²⁴ Thomas C. Wolfe, "Past as Present, Myth, or History? Discourses of Time and the Great Fatherland War", Richard Ned Lebow, "The Memory of Politics in Postwar Europe", Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner, and Claudio Fogu, eds., *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, pp. 249 – 283.

²⁵ Dan Stone, *The Holocaust, Fascism and Memory: Essays in the History of Ideas* (Basingstoke – New York 2013), p. 176.

and Great Britain.²⁶ In fact, despite the ambiguity demonstrated in the first years of war, with the Allied victory on the horizon, Franco's regime rushed to shed its former ideological skin in order to surviving the fall of international fascism. This was the same strategy that led to Franco's victory in the Spanish Civil War. The propaganda did its job, and supported by the Catholic Church, Franco's regime survived the war, presenting itself as as the guarantor of Catholicism and an anti-communist bastion in southwestern Europe within the new Cold War context. Indeed, as Franco told the United Press agency in November 1944, Spanish organic and Catholic democracy had nothing to do with fascism.²⁷

However, the defeat of the Axis imposed, in addition to a change in the exterior image of Franco's Spain, a new internal account of the Second World War in which the memory of the almost 48,000 Spaniards who fought on the Eastern front did not fit very comfortably. As Xosé M. Núñez Seixas points out, starting in 1944, the Falangist press presented the members of the Blue Division as anti-communist fighters who had nothing against the Russian people or were not especially in favour of the Germans.²⁸ The image of the regime had been altered, and in this adaptation to the new international context, the former Blue Division soldiers were silenced. That said, the "other" Spaniards, those who

²⁶ Ángel Viñas, *Sobornos. De cómo Churchill y March compraron a los generales de Franco* (Barcelona 2016)

²⁷ Agustín Río Cisneros (ed.), *Pensamiento político de Franco* (Madrid 1964), pp. 415-416.

²⁸ Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, *Camarada de invierno. Experiencia y memoria de la División Azul (1941-1945)*, (Barcelona 2016).

were on the losing side in the Civil War and had contributed to the Allied Victory in Europe, were also still ignored in this modified narrative.

Thus, the anti-fascist Spanish collective memory (and History) had no place in the Iberian Peninsula until 1975. It survived instead in exile: mostly in France, Mexico and the US, as a result of testimonies, individual memories and civilian initiatives fuelled by political and personal solidarity. Consequently, historiography of Spanish contribution to resistance was highly contaminated by both, testimonies and a series of positive constructions built around “the greatest hits” of Spanish exile, where the "Spanish" Liberation of Paris played a key role, from the very beginning.

One might think, however, that the arrival and consolidation of democracy in Spain would bring with it a change in tendency. That was not the case. In fact, in the last forty years few historians have accepted the challenge of explaining the delay in the historiography which deals with the Spanish participation in the Resistance in France and the positive constructions that this displays. Nevertheless, 1975 is also a very good starting point for analysing the ways in which Spanish political groups have made use of the memory of International Brigades (IB), since those volunteers played the role of agents of democracy between 1975 and 1977. In fact, as Jorge Marco and Peter Anderson outline, between 1977 and 1988, Spanish left-wing groups constructed a collective memory of those transnational volunteers as proxies, and this memory granted the groups the space that they needed to vindicate their own anti-fascist struggle. But, as was the case in Italy, the

collapse of the Soviet Union affected the Spanish political scenario, with a decline in left-wing ideology and the emergence of a new struggle: the recognition for the Spanish victims of General Franco. In this new context, former IB members were increasingly remembered as part of a struggle to acknowledge the sufferings of Spaniards. Meanwhile, Spanish exile studies focused on French internment camps, the Resistance in France and Nazi concentration camp experiences during the Second World War.²⁹

In the last fifteen years the history of the Spaniards who defeated Hitler has aroused notable interest amongst the media, publishing houses, cultural associations and official circles constructing a powerful culture industry around “la Nueve”. This interest has evolved simultaneously with a popular consumption of history channelled through simplified, comfortable and aesthetic visions of the Spanish contribution to Resistance. In this period, many different works -totally or partially dedicated to “la Nueve”- have contributed to settle-up this culture industry within it is worth highlighting those from the journalists Evelyn Mesquida, Rafael Torres, Basilio Trilles and Alfonso Domingo; the novelists Jordi Siracusa and Raúl Monteagudo, the latter also a historian; the illustrator Paco Roca; or the directors Albert Marquadt and Pedro Callejas.³⁰

²⁹ Jorge Marco and Peter Anderson, “Legitimacy by Proxy”, *Journal of Modern European History*, vol. 14, 3 (2016), pp. 391-410; Diego Gaspar Celaya, *La Guerra continua. Voluntarios españoles al servicio de la Francia libre (1940-1945)* (Madrid 2015).

³⁰ Evelyn Mesquida, *La Nueve. Los republicanos que liberaron París* (Barcelona, 2008); Rafael Torres, *El hombre que liberó París* (Madrid 2007); Basilio Trilles, *El español de la foto de París*, (Barcelona 2009); Alfonso Domingo, *Historia de los españoles en la II Guerra Mundial* (Córdoba 2009); Alberto Marquadt, *La Nueve ou les oubliés de la victoire* (2010) Point du Jour, France Télévisions & l'ECPAD, 56 min. Paco

Denouncing the neglect to which the Spaniards who were part of that company were historically subjected -an argument started by Mesquida, and that although it was valid in 2008, it seems to be outdated today- these works provide a simplified and original version of the story of "la Nueve" and its (Spanish) men, renouncing to the transnational nature of the company. And yes, this story has a great value as a tool for the transmission and dissemination of the company's memory focused on its Spanish component. But these narratives, paradoxically, concealed or relegated to the background the contribution of "la Nueve" volunteers who were born "au-delà des Pyrénées". In fact, most of them imposed the "liberation of Paris" as the main battle of a war that seems to want to end at the feet of its city council that August 24, 1944. Not surprisingly, the name of the French capital is present in the title of six of the nine previously highlighted works.

A Spanish company?

Many [Spaniards] died. The graves of these dead line the sad glorious route they followed from Normandy to Berchtesgaden. [...] Little by little, young French volunteers arrived [in the ranks of the company] in order to fill the gaps left by the dead. Gaps that were particularly important in the Vosges and Alsace.³¹

Roca, *Los surcos del azar* (Bilbao 2013); Jordi Siracusa, *Pingüinos en París* (Zaragoza 2017); Raúl Monteagudo, *Cuando los republicanos liberaron París* (2016); Pedro Callejas, *Rafael Gómez: el andaluz que liberó París* (2019) Canal Sur, 55 min.

³¹ Raymond Dronne, *Carnets de route d'un croisé de la France Libre* (Paris, 1984, p. 263. Author's translation.

In contrast to the positive constructions which present la Nueve as a Spanish unit, since its creation in 1943 and until its disbandment in 1945, at least 368 men encompassing fourteen different nationalities served amongst its ranks, those of a unit in the French army. Of those, 183 were Spanish, for the most part republican refugees that had escaped the final phase of the Spanish conflict; but also economic immigrants that had arrived in French territory prior to outbreak of the Second World War. Their comrades in arms: Frenchmen that had fled France to Spain, Gaullists, communists and those opposed to the German Compulsory Work Service, young men from North Africa, anti-Nazi Germans and anti-Fascist Italians, Belgians, Hungarians, Portuguese, Rumanians, Russians, Swiss, Armenians, Chileans and Brazilians. A Spanish company? No, a transnational company, a group of men made up -initially- of a Spanish majority, which the conflict itself came to modify in favour of a French collective which grew significantly from August 1944 onwards, thanks to the contribution of young replacements that arrived to make up for the losses of the most veteran soldiers as the Captain Dronne recalled.

In fact, prior to the liberation of Paris, out of the one hundred and sixty men who made up the company, 80% were Spanish. Although this proportion was not maintained during the whole conflict, given that the losses suffered by the company after landing in Normandy were replaced by young French volunteers, resistance fighters from the interior and recruits. Nevertheless, a detailed analysis reveals that, even though the Spanish collective was in the majority (183 out of the 368 soldiers), its specific weight

within the structure of the company decreased; it reached its zenith during its formative period, falling slightly before operations in Europe began, and continued to do so during the Vosges and Lorraine campaign. A good example of this was the loss of the Spaniards Juan Antonio López Serrano, alias *Manuel Sánchez* and Luis del Águila: both fell at Ecouché on 13th and 16th August 1944; that of the Armenian Ernest Hernoizian, who died in combat on the 24th in Anthony, and the evacuation of the Spaniard Juan Vega, injured in battle in Longjumeau the previous day. All of them, experienced soldiers, were replaced by the French volunteer Yannick Le Tourneur du Val in Ecouché, the ex-interior resistance fighter Xavier Marie d'Aboville and the former intelligence agent Marcel Bontemps in Paris.³²

For its part, the (non-Spanish) foreign contribution to la Nueve was divided into two groups: the first was made up of three German volunteers, three Italians, two Portuguese, two Brazilians, one Armenian, one Hungarian and one Moroccan. They were all former combatants in the CFA who formed part of the initial nucleus of the company, which they were forced to abandon after having taken leave, having been wounded seriously (Jacques Trodjmman) or having been found dead on the battlefield (Wilhelm Poreski).³³ The second

³² Personal records of: Juan Antonio Lopez Serrano, Service Historique de la Defense, Fonds de l'armée de Terre, Deuxième Guerre mondiale (SHD/GR), 16P 534127; Luis del Águila, SHD/GR, 16P 167226 and SHD/Centre des archives du personnel militaire (CAPM), 216403; Xavier Marie d'Aboville, SHD/GR, 16P 153893; Marcel Bontemps, SHD/GR, 16P 72925. Data on Ernest Hernoizian, Juan Vega and Yannick Le tourneur de Val in SHD/GR, 11P 219-2, 2e DB, "Ordres de bataille", "Situations d'effectifs et pertes".

³³ Wilhelm Poreski, SHD/GR, 16P 486326.

group of foreigners was made up of the Portuguese Manuel Francisco Riguera, the Belgian Emile Mazy, the Armenian Ernest Hernoizian, the Rumanian André Davidovitch, the Swiss Francis Kron and the Russian Yvan Pavloff; all of them having joined the ranks of la Nueve in French metropolitan territory in the latter half of 1944; after having transited through the French Foreign Legion (Hernoizian), the RMVE (Davidovitch), the CFA (Kron) and the FFC (Pavloff). These incorporations highlight the importance of international antifascism and the experience of multiform combat which these international volunteers contributed; characteristics which were especially valued in la Nueve, as demonstrated by the level of responsibility held by officers Kron and Davidovitch, and sergeants Reiter, Poreski, Fernandes, Félix Mendelson and Manuel Morillas.³⁴

As regards the French collective, the second most important one after that of the Spaniards, one must emphasise that the arrival of its troops in la Nueve was structured in two phases which were differentiated clearly according to the personnel, time and different contexts which conditioned these incorporations. The first took place in Algeria in August 1943, coinciding with the formation of the company; and it was led by more than twenty Free French veteran volunteers from both North Africa (12) and metropolitan

³⁴ Personal records of Francis Kron, SHD/GR, 16P 323839 and SHD/ Pôle des archives des victimes des conflits contemporains (AC), 21P 62599; André Davidovitch, SHD/GR, 16P 160790; Johann Reiter, SHD/GR, 16P 504096; Wilhelm Poreski, SHD/GR, 16P 486326; Manuel Fernandes, SHD/GR, 16P 220937; Félix Mendelson, SHD/GR, 16P 410260; Manuel Morillas Montuno, SHD/GR 16P 431271 and SHD/AC, 21P 97979.

France (11), who took up a large part of the positions of responsibility in the company on its formation.³⁵ This heterogeneous yet compact group, was completed by a dozen privates, which barely suffered any modification until the company landed in Normandy.

The second phase of French enlistment in the company began, precisely, with the landing of la Nueve in French metropolitan territory. A period which would extend until May 1945, and which was characterised by its participation in the continental theatre of operations, the losses it suffered, and the staggered arrival in its ranks of more than a hundred volunteers: young replacements, ex-combatants from the interior Resistance and agents from the Allied networks, most of them from the mother country.

In the right place, at the right time

[After deserting the Legion], on arriving in Algeria, they put me in a barracks in which there were a lot of blacks. They were soldiers who had come from Chad with General Leclerc [...] From there we went to Sabratha [Libya], where Leclerc had to withdraw the black soldiers on the orders of the Americans [...]”.³⁶

³⁵ This group was made up of: the captain in charge of the company, Raymond Dronne; his deputy lieutenant, Michel Elias; the officer cadet Gaston Cascaïl, the chief warrant officer François Neyret and sergeants Marcel Dubon, René Guillon, Jean Rigas, Paul Rouchon and Pierre Valero.

³⁶ Testimony of Luis Royo, third combat section member of la Nueve, in Evelin Mesquida, *La Nueve*, pp. 215-233.

In addition personal motivations of "la Nueve" transnational soldiers, the politico-military context determined the power struggles between Giraud and De Gaulle in French North Africa, and the disbandment of the CFA determined the enlistment of those men. However, in analysing the formation of the 2e DB in general, and "la Nueve" in particular, a study of the whitening process of French troops stationed in North Africa in August 1943 is essential.³⁷ In fact, black soldiers outflow and relocation created a space in these units that was filled out by hundreds of young North Africans, French dissidents and European anti-fascists.

Created in July 1943, the RMT -a unit which inherited the mantle of the Ad Hoc Brigade of Chad and its predecessor, the Senegalese infantry regiment of Chad (RTST)- was the only regiment which swung completely in favour of the FFL in the spring of 1943. However, at the end of the Tunisia campaign, amidst the process of forming the Second Free French Division (2^e DFL), the unit was "whitened" and the mostly black Senegalese infantrymen of the RTST were placed at the disposition of the First Free French Division (1^e DFL) and different garrisons in French Equatorial Africa. Their loss was compensated

³⁷ A second whitening process of French troops took place in Italy in the autumn of 1944, fully affecting the 1^e DFL, which, at that time, was under the command of General Jean de Lattre Tassigny. For more on this topic, see: Gilles Aubagnac, "Le retrait des troupes noires de la première Armée à l'automne de 1944", *Revue historique des armées*, 2 (1993), pp. 34-46; Jacques Frémeaux, "Les contingents impériaux au coeur de la guerre", *Histoire, économie & société*, 23, 2 (2004), pp. 215-233; Claire Miot, "Le retrait des tirailleurs sénégalais de la Première Armée française en 1944. Hérésie stratégique, bricolage politique ou conservatisme colonial ?", *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 125, 1 (2015), pp. 77-89.

by the incorporation of three battalions of the CFA, including the third, made up mostly of Spaniards, the main source of troops in la Nueve.

Armed and equipped by the American administration, the division was transformed into an armoured division (the 2^e DB) after confirmation of French acceptance of the “whitening” demanded by Washington. Amongst the supporting reasons for this measure one must highlight: the mechanisation of the division with the use of tanks that - presumably- African soldiers were not able to operate. The fear that, as the war entered Europe, the colonial hierarchy could be threatened by black troops. And lastly, the Allied desire that the division which was going to lead the liberation of France was as “European” as possible.³⁸

Forced to replace the black soldiers, who were considered unsuitable for war in Europe; on 2nd August 1943 in Algeria, Leclerc asked De Gaulle for reinforcement troops in order to “whiten” his division.³⁹ This measure immediately opened the doors of the 2^e DB to some non-black 2,000 young North Africans, more than 2,500 Frenchmen that had fled France to Spain, and more than 700 ex-combatants of the CFA, most of them Spanish.⁴⁰ Far from diminishing, in the following months, the Allied insistence intensified the whitening process of Leclerc’s troops in early 1944, before the 2^e DB was transferred to

³⁸ Eric Jennings, *La France libre fut africaine* (Paris, 2014), p. 169.

³⁹ SHD/GR, 11P 21, “Le général Leclerc au général de Gaulle”, 2nd August, 1943.

⁴⁰ “Division Blindée (2^e DB)”, Jean-François Muracciole and Guillaume Piketti (eds), *Encyclopédie de la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Paris 2015), p. 215.

England, with a view to being deployed in Normandy. Nevertheless, already some months previously De Gaulle had transmitted his aspirations to the Allied High Command: the participation of a large French unit in the Normandy campaign and in the liberation of Paris. In fact, on 18th September 1943, De Gaulle, in the name of the French Committee of National Liberation (CFLN), sent a memorandum to Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin addressing both questions, and pointing out that, in order to do so, it would be necessary to transfer that division to England.⁴¹

As we know, in the end the 2^e DB was the unit chosen to take part in the landing. However, the AHC's approval was accompanied by a condition: the absence of black soldiers amongst Leclerc's troops. Such was the impact of the measure that, six months before the landings, in a meeting between De Gaulle and General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force, on 30th December 1943 with the objective of discussing the plans to invade France and Allied opposition to the presence of indigenous troops amongst the French troops; the Frenchman argued that his armoured divisions were formed mainly by French elements.⁴² However, on 28th January 1944, Walter Bedell Smith, Eisenhower's chief of staff, wrote a confidential memorandum in which he insisted again on the racial question in the following terms:

⁴¹ General Alain De Boissieu, "La libération de Paris", *Revue de la France libre*, 287 (1994), pp. 38-40; Charles De Gaulle, *Memorias de guerra. I. El llamamiento (1940-1942)* (Barcelona, 1995), pp. 228-268.

⁴² Matthew Cobb, *Eleven Days in August* (London, 2013), p. 30.

It is more desirable that the [French] division mentioned above consist of white personnel. [...] This would indicate the Second Armoured Division, which with only one fourth native personnel, is the only French division operationally available that could be made one hundred percent white.⁴³

Weeks before, Frederick Morgan, Smith's predecessor, made a record in his notes of a meeting with Churchill's chief staff officer, General Hastings Ismay. Therein, both agreed with the decision that European French forces should be in charge of taking Paris. Indeed, that is what had been transmitted to Colonel Chevigné, the Free French chief of staff, alluding to the fact that, "we would with reluctance accept anything here other than French metropolitan troops". What is more, Morgan continued, "I have told Colonel de Chevene [sic] that his chances of getting what he wants will be vastly improved if he can produce a white infantry division". Given that the British army did not segregate its armed forces, one would have expected some objection on the part of the British high commander to these racist measures. However, as Morgan's words encapsulate, they supported seamlessly the American decision: "It is unfortunate that the only French formation that is one hundred percent white is an armoured division in Morocco. [...] every other French division is only about forty percent white."⁴⁴

⁴³ Confidential note written in January 1944 by the American General Walter Bedell Smith, in Christine Levisse-Touze (eds.), *Paris 1944: Les Enjeux de la Libération* (Paris 1994), p. 96.

⁴⁴ Quotes in Olivier Wieviorka, *Histoire du débarquement en Normandie* (Paris, 2007), pp. 364-365.

In spite of the fact that the writings of Smith and Morgan leave no doubt as to the Allied position with respect to whitening of the French troops, the relationship between the testimonies of the men in la Nueve and Leclerc's notes nourish the French general's behaviour in regard to this question with ambiguity. They serve as an example of the words of Daniel Hernández in recalling that when the 2^e DB was founded, the newly arrived volunteers in the division replaced black soldiers: "The indigenous soldiers were sidelined -on higher orders- after having fought for three years with General Leclerc. They say that the general was not at all happy, but he could not do anything".⁴⁵ However, at the beginning of August, Leclerc allowed no room for doubt in asking De Gaulle for "white reinforcements destined to replace the blacks unsuitable for war in Europe", specifying that he needed "1,500 Frenchmen, of those 190 officers, and 2,370 North African *indigènes* soldiers".⁴⁶

Following this process, the 2^e DB modified notably its human capital, becoming a unit of a more European and North African rather than Sub-Saharan background. For their part, the relief colonial forces were still important in other units, especially in the First Free French Division. As we have seen, the biological-climatological pretext was used both in order to justify the change requested by Leclerc in 1943 and the Allied demands months later. In the words of Raymond Dronne, captain of la Nueve: "[Before transferring to

⁴⁵ Testimony of Daniel Hernández in Mesquida, *La Nueve*, p. 192.

⁴⁶ SHD/GR, 11P 21, "Le général Leclerc au général de Gaulle", 2nd August, 1943.

Morocco] we let the black African soldiers go [...] we were going to fight during the winter in Europe, and they would have been incapable of withstanding great cold spells”.⁴⁷ Favoured by these whitening processes, hundreds former CFA’s members joined the Free French Forces (FFL) in the summer of 1943 in Algeria and Morocco. Present in most of the units that made up the 2^e DB, Spaniards were concentrated mainly in the RMT.⁴⁸ Not without reason, more than 87% of the Spanish volunteers under Leclerc’s orders formed part of this regiment, particularly its third battalion, a unit in which 77% of the Spaniards who made up the division served.⁴⁹

“Landing” in Europe

On its founding, in August 1943, the third battalion of the RMT, led by the First World War veteran and former International Brigade member in Spain, Joseph Putz, was made up of three combat companies (la Nueve, the tenth and the eleventh), one of support (CA3) and a special one (Compagnie Hors de rang, CHR). They all had Spanish troops, yet, as we know, most were concentrated in la Nueve. To lead it, Leclerc chose Raymond Dronne a “first hour” resister who took over the running of la Nueve in Sabratha (Libya). Transferred to Algeria and then to Morocco, the men of la Nueve were concentrated,

⁴⁷ Dronne, *Carnets de route*, p. 242.

⁴⁸ For more information on the structure and make-up of the 2^e DB see: Erwan Bergot, *La 2^e DB* (Paris, 1980); Erwan Bergot, *La coloniale du Rif au Tchad 1925-1980* (Paris, 1982); Paul Oddo and Paul Willing, *Calots rouges et Croix de Lorraine. Les spahis de Leclerc de l'Erythrée au Tonkin 1940-1946* (Paris, 1988); Alain Eymard, *Album memorial de la 2^e DB* (Paris, 1990); Lt. Jean-Paul Michel, *Le Régiment de Marche du Tchad* (Paris, 1996); Thierry Moné, *Les Spahis du 1^{er} Marocains* (Paris, 1998).

⁴⁹ Gaspar Celaya, *La guerra continúa*, pp. 412-416.

armed and trained in North Africa for more than ten months before setting off for Europe. Armed with American equipment, in Morocco la Nueve became an armoured motorised infantry unit divided into three combat sections. Having arrived in England in May 1944, la Nueve remained stationed for several months in Pocklington until it landed on Normandy on 4th August.

Landed in Normandy the 2^e DB began its advance southwards divided into three Tactical Groups (GT) under the orders of Colonels Langlade (GTL), Dio (GTD) and Warabiot (GTV).⁵⁰

Part of the latter, la Nueve remained in reserve until the division advanced towards Écouché, now with the GTV at the head. Écouché is presented in the history of the company as a watershed moment, the place where la Nueve registered its first casualties and the fallen veterans replaced by recently recruited young Frenchmen, many of them FFI combatants, as the incorporations of Alexis Chariau, Yannik Letourneur du Val and Gilles Plessis d'Argentre demonstrate.⁵¹ These arrivals confirm, also in Europe, the continuation of a transference of battle experiences and knowledge between irregular and

⁵⁰ He would be replaced some time later by Guillebon at the head of the GTV. SHD/GR, 11P 233-2, GTV, Dossier 2, "Ordres et compres rendus d'operations".

⁵¹ SHD/GR, 12P 259, JMO III/RMT; Internationaal Instituutvoor Sociale Geschiedenis (IISG), José Ester Borrás Papers, ARCH2428, 156.

regular warfare; as well as the aid received from members of la Nueve through interior resistance fighters throughout the Spanish Civil War and the battle for France.

Following Écouché, Paris was new objective. Taking the French capital was not a priority for the AHC, whose plans were for the Allied forces to surround Paris, thus forcing the flight of the Germans from the capital. However, the pressure exercised both by De Gaulle and the popular insurrection broke out in the capital on 18th August forced a change in the operations, and the American General Omar N. Bradley authorised French troops to advance on Paris on the 22nd, August. Dronne did so on the 24th, following the instructions of General Leclerc: "to advance on Paris as fast as possible, taking whatever he might have to hand in order to do so".⁵² In order to form the detachment which reached the capital by the evening, he took with him La Nueve's second and third combat sections, and the command and repair half-tracks. To those were added: the first section of the second company of the 501st Tank Regiment (RCC) commanded by Lieutenant Louis Michard, which included three Sherman tanks with their crews (15 men); and an engineers' section, also transported on half-trucks, commanded by the French non-commissioned officer Gérard Cancel (41 men).

A Spanish Liberation? Memory vs history

⁵² Dronne, *Carnets de route*, pp. 321-330.

Most studies estimate Dronnes's detachment members at 160 men. However, when it comes to specifying the composition of the column led by the French captain, there are three variables to keep in mind in order to recast men tables data and increase total men under Dronne's command over than 170. First of all, the losses suffered by la Nueve since it landed in Normandy. Second, the reinforcements and replacements arrived to the company, amongst which we must include the incorporation of several FFI French volunteers.⁵³ And finally, the losses suffered by the company in its advance towards Paris as it was the death of the Armenian veteran legionary Ernest Hernozian, and the evacuation of private Juan Vega, injured at Ballainvilliers.

In total, more than one hundred and seventy men (41 belonging to Cancel's section, 15 to the crew of Michard's three Sherman tanks, and at least 116 in la Nueve, of whom 68 were Spanish, 35 were French and 11 were international volunteers) reached Paris on the night of 24th August 1944.⁵⁴ Thus, Spanish volunteers made up 40 percent of the total troops in Dronne's column. Most of them were former CFA and/or Foreign Legion volunteers recruited in North African internment camps, and economic immigrants in Algeria and Morocco before the outbreak of the Second World War.

⁵³ Yannick Letourneur du Val, Louis Du Chastel de la Howarderie, Gilles Du Plessis d'Argentré, André Robinet, Jean Sauvage, Bernard Marie d'Avigneau and Maercl Bontemps.

⁵⁴ SHD/GR, 12P 259, JMO III/RMT; SHD/GR, 11P 219-2, 2^e DB, "Situations d'effectifs et pertes"; SHD/GR, 11P 233-2, GTV, Dossier 2, "Ordres et compres rendus d'operations". See also Dronne, *Carnets de route*, p. 330. I am profoundly indebted here to Lieutenant Colonel (H) Pierre Van Langenhove for having shared with me his ongoing research into the Dronne column, which has been useful in guiding my own examination of the composition of this detachment.

Twenty-five years later than Allied victory in Europe, a civil initiative managed by the Spanish Federation of Political Deportees and Internees (FEDIP), officially honoured, for the very first time, the memory of Spaniards who had died in the cause of freedom during the Second World War. It was in Paris, at Père-Lachaise Cemetery on 13th April 1969, and under the motto “Fraternity cemented in the pain and in the solidarity of memory must be qualities of our coexistence”, where, following the speeches of P. Freixa, (president of FEDIP) and D. Mayer (former member of the National Council of the Resistance, CNR), a monument was inaugurated in the graveyard which “inspired the memory of those who disappeared” between 1939 and 1945.⁵⁵

In their discourses, both Freixa and Mayer made mention of the Spanish contribution to inner Resistance in France, as well as the participation of Spanish soldiers in crucial battles in the Second World War alongside French troops such as those of Narvik, Dunkirk, Bir-Hakeim, Paris and Strasbourg. Yet in his words, Mayer went further; in fact, the main part of his address revolved around the arrival in Paris of Spanish men of la Nueve on 24th August 1944, underscoring - in April 1969- the power of the history of the company and its men:

⁵⁵ This project had a sponsorship committee made up of P. Casals, Mayer himself, and the teacher and former deportee Ch. Richet, in charge of collecting private donations sent to the FEDIP in order to contribute towards financing the monument. The original booklet accompanying the act is preserved in IISG, José Ester Borrás Papers, ARCH02428, 38.

They were the first to enter Paris, with Leclerc's division. The tanks with which made contact against the non-uniformed combatants were named "Teruel" and "Guadalajara". And the Spaniard Granell replaced the Frenchman Dronne when the latter first entered the Hôtel de Ville in Paris [...].⁵⁶

With the exception of the FEDIP initiative, and others of a more local kind that emerged in cities like Annecy and Strasbourg, more than fifty years went by before, in 1994, the French president, François Mitterrand, and Spanish prime minister, Felipe González paid joint homage to the Spanish resistance fighters who contributed to the liberation of France on 21st October in Prayols (Ariège) during the ceremony held there to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Liberation.⁵⁷ For the first time in history, the memory of the Spanish "combatant" exile had deeply touched the French collective memory.

Yet in spite of the fact that la Nueve was not a protagonist in Ariège, it is true that the interest raised by this tribute continued some weeks later in a column by the Parisian teacher, artist and ex-Resistance member France Hamelin, published in *Le patriote résistant*.⁵⁸ A text dedicated entirely to la Nueve, in which Hamelin raised the question:

⁵⁶ Original extract (author's translation) of D. Mayer's speech at the inauguration of the monument in Père-Lachaise Cemetery in honour of Spaniards who gave their life for freedom fighting in the Second World War. IISG, José Ester Borrás Papers, ARCH02428, 38.

⁵⁷ Twelve years previously, on 5th June 1982, and also at the behest of a civil initiative, a national monument to the guerrillas was unveiled in that same place in which both leaders were photographed together. "Une amitié nouvelle et durable", *La Dépêche de Midi*, 22nd October 1994; "Le village honoré", *La Dépêche de Midi*, 2nd November, 1994.

⁵⁸ Organ of the Fédération Nationale des Déportés et Internés Résistants et Patriotes.

“can we ignore this history and everything it implies?”⁵⁹ Clearly, the answer is no. And this was confirmed, this time in Spain, by the first official tribute that the Spanish resistance fighters received south of the Pyrenees. On 20th May 1995, repeating the Père-Lachaise model, the Spanish Minister of Defence -the socialist Julián García Vargas- inaugurated in the cemetery of Fuencarral (Madrid) a monument in honour of those Spaniards who beat Hitler: fifty years after the end of the conflict, twenty after the death of Franco and following thirteen years in power by the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE).⁶⁰

Ten years later, during the acts to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the French capital, and thanks to the important work undertaken by the journalist Evelyn Mesquida in the preceding years to disseminate and appreciate the history of la Nueve, the mayor of Paris - Bertrand Delanoë- accompanied by his deputy mayor Anne Hidalgo -the granddaughter of Spanish exiles and the current mayor of the capital- and a Spanish diplomatic representation headed by the President of the Senate -Francisco Javier Rojo-, paid homage to the Spaniards who reached the Hôtel de Ville square in Paris in the evening of 24th August 1944 as members of the Dronne column.

As had been the case in Père-Lachaise and Prayols, France once more took up the initiative to acknowledge the combat led, this time, by the men of la Nueve; whilst Spain’s

⁵⁹ France Hemelin, “Et les espagnols”, *Le patriote résistant*, 658 (1994).

⁶⁰ Serrano, *La última gesta*, p. 590.

response would come two months later full of controversy. On 12th October 2004, on the initiative of the defence minister, the socialist José Bono; Luis Royo -a former member of la Nueve- and Ángel Salamanca -and old member of the Blue Division (250th Wehrmacht infantry division)- they marched alongside the rest of the troops that participated in the military parade on Spain's National Day.⁶¹ Yet Bono failed spectacularly in his attempt to combine under the same flag the victors and the vanquished, thereby symbolising an embrace of "harmony and reconciliation". Not without reason, equating the sacrifice of those who fought the Axis powers during the Second World War with the contribution of those who operated under Hitler's orders was not just grotesque but unacceptable for numerous associations of the victims of Francoism, victim's relatives, and unions and political parties which criticised formally this initiative. No wonder that different international media dedicated headlines to Bono such as: "Hitler could have marched, were he alive", "Spain reopens old wounds" and "Republican memory insulted".⁶²

In 2010 the last three Spanish survivors of la Nueve were honoured in Paris. On 24th February 2010, coinciding with the premiere of a documentary which the Argentinian filmmaker Alberto Marquardt dedicated to the company, the Hôtel de Ville in Paris

⁶¹ For more on this topic, see Xose Manuel Nuñez Seixas, *Camarada invierno*.

⁶² <http://www.latinreporters.com/espagnepol12102004.html>; <http://www.humanite.fr/node/337211>; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3738684.stm>; http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/13/news/13iht-spain_ed3_0.html; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/oct/12/spain>.

awarded the Medal of the City of Paris to Manuel Fernández, Luis Royo-Ibáñez and Rafael Gómez for having reached occupied Paris on the night of 24th August 1944. The legend of la Nueve continued and made the leap to the big screen. However, moved by the enthusiasm and the aesthetics, no one in the Paris Hôtel de Ville noticed that none of the three Spaniards honoured formed part of detachment which, under Dronne's orders, took the French capital that 24th August 1944, the act for which they were being rewarded. In fact, Manuel Fernández was never part of la Nueve but belonged instead to accompanying company number three in the third battalion of the RMT, and entered Paris on a stretcher as a consequence of injuries caused by shrapnel in Écouché. Whilst Luis Royo and Rafael Gómez reached Paris during the morning of the 25th alongside the bulk of the second armoured division commanded by Leclerc.

The night of 24th August, Spanish republicans in la Nueve, were the first to enter Paris, heralding an imminent Allied victory. They were joined, some hours later, by General Leclerc's 2nd Armoured Division, welcomed at the Porte d'Orléans by a multitude which cheered it on. The occupier capitulated. In the afternoon of 25th August 1944, Paris was liberated. After four years of oppression, Parisians had regained control of their own destiny. 70 years later, we commemorate with our

emotion intact the days of August 1944 which changed the history of Paris and brought a breath of hope and renewal to the whole world [...].⁶³

In 2014, once more in Paris, during the acts of the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the capital, and with Hidalgo now as mayor, la Nueve was the outstanding protagonist. Not for nothing, for besides occupying much of the editorial which Hidalgo sent to the press, publicising the abovementioned act and especially the Spaniards who were part of it, they were honoured in the evening of 24th August in the Hôtel de Ville square in a ceremony which put an end to the commemorative march that had set off some hours earlier from the Porte d'Italie, traversing the route followed by the Dronne column sixty years before.

There is no doubt that la Nueve and its men occupied an already preeminent place both in the history and the memory of the liberation of Paris and on the agenda of its Hôtel de Ville. A privileged position that it held in the work of Mesquida and Hidalgo, two high-level agents of diffusion, whose initiative and commitment resulted in two new tributes. The first, also in Paris, on 3rd June 2015, a date of historical redress on which the Spanish monarchs, Felipe VI and Leticia, payed homage in the Hôtel de Ville to the historically forgotten exiled Spanish republicans in France. An act in which the monarchs, accompanied by Hidalgo, Mesquida and the ex-combatants Rafael Gómez and Luis Royo

⁶³ A. Perol, "Dossier de presse: Commémoration de la Libération de Paris 25 août 2014", Mairie de Paris, <https://cdn.paris.fr/presse/2020/03/23/e6c6da8cb393f94a48df48baab7d7092.pdf>. Author's translation.

baptised one of the small side parks adjacent to the city council with the name “garden of the la Nueve combatants”. An act that, as might be expected, was repeated two years later (2016) in Spanish territory with the inauguration by Manuela Carmena, the mayor of Madrid, of a park in the Ciudad Lineal district which the Madrid city council dedicated to la Nueve. A ceremony in which Hidalgo and Mesquida took part, and which was also attended by Rafael Gómez, the last remaining Spanish survivor of the company, who died on 31st March 2020.⁶⁴ As the journalist Diego Fonseca wrote hours later: “La Nueve arrived in Madrid over 70 years late”.⁶⁵

Conclusion

In spite of the fact that it is not easy to establish a line of separation between the trivial and professional uses of history, between the popular consumption of history and historical knowledge, in the case of la Nueve, such consumption expresses the need on part of Spanish and French society to communicate the past experiences of their forebears, to condemn the systematic forgetting to which they were subjected and place them in a relationship with the past and present of France and Spain. However, it is erroneous to present them as identity elements of a seamless history over which many questions still

⁶⁴ Gabriela Cañas, “París reconoce a los combatientes españoles que la liberaron”, *El País*, 4th June, 2015; Luca Constantini, “Carmena, en el nuevo parque de ‘La Nueve’: “La memoria es necesaria para conservar la libertad”, *El País*, 20th April 2017; Diego Gaspar Celaya, “Muere de coronavirus Rafael Gómez, el último español de La Nueve”, *El País*, 31st March 2020.

⁶⁵ Diego Fonseca, “La Nueve llega a la capital con más de 70 años de retraso”, *El País*, 20th April 2017.

hang. The main aim of this paper has been to attempting to clear these up based on my work in the historical discipline, denouncing and deconstructing the myths and legends apparent in the history of la Nueve and its men. A new analysis called on to question the positive constructions which, in the last fifteen years, have presented la Nueve as a paradigm of Spanish contribution to antifascist battle in Europe: the liberators of Paris and the conquerors of Hitler's "Eagle's Nest" (*Kehlsteinhaus*).

However, la Nueve was not a Spanish company. The liberation of Paris was thanks, amongst many other factors, to Allied pressure, striking, rising up and taking different control posts in the capital led by the interior Resistance and the full intervention of the 2eDB. And, even if Leclerc's troops did complete the conquest of the "Eagle's Nest" on 5th May, many of the men in la Nueve mistook this building for Hitler's Berghof, where some of Leclerc's troops arrived on 4th May 1945. In fact, it was not until the 7th, following the German capitulation in Eisenhower's general headquarters in Reims, that "la Nueve" was authorised to go up to Obersalzberg to visit the ruins of Hitler's Berghof and Eagle's Nest.⁶⁶

The "Spanish Liberation of Paris" and the positive constructions around la Nueve show how easy-to-read and aesthetically deformed visions of the past have contributed to

⁶⁶ SHD/GR, 12P 259, Journaux des marches et opérations (JMO) III/RMT, "Ordres de bataille et situations d'effectifs"; SHD/GR, 11P 219-2, 2e DB, "Ordres de bataille", "Situations d'effectifs et pertes"; SHD/GR, 11P 233-2, GTV, Dossier 2, "Ordres et comptes rendus d'opérations".

building the myth of the company, structuring a popular tale about its history as a company and the history of its individual men. This is a "belated" national account, constructed on both sides of the borders and empowered by the third generation of Spanish exile, which contests official French and Spanish Cold War policies in the past. It is one particular recovery of a complex past, which has also been embraced by the Spanish authorities. For example, on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Liberation of Paris in 2019, Spain's Ministry of Justice tweeted about "the crucial role that Spain had in the liberation of Paris". These are all distorted visions of the past which help to structure a popular story about certain events that has little or nothing in common with that produced by an analysis of the sources and their historical context. They are, in short, "invented traditions" which have been crucial in preserving the memory of the Spanish contribution to Resistance, but also in forging a myth based on an "à la carte" reconstruction of the Spanish antifascist commitment during the Second World War.

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