



REVIEW ARTICLE

# Resistance in Postwar France: Five New and Noteworthy Histories

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Emile Chabal, *France* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020), xxi + 202 pp. (pb), £12.99, ISBN 978-1-5095-3002-1

Philip Nord, *After the Deportation: Memory Battles in Postwar France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), xiii + 472 pp. (hb). £29.99, ISBN 978-1-108-47890-8

Camille Robcis, *Disalienation: Politics, Philosophy, and Radical Psychiatry in Postwar France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), xiv + 224 pp. (pb), \$35.00, ISBN 978-0-226-77774-0

Venus Bivar, *Organic Resistance: The Struggle over Industrial Farming in Postwar France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), xiv + 224 pp. (pb), \$29.95, ISBN 978-1-4696-4118-8

Sarah Farmer, *Rural Inventions: Rural Inventions: The French Countryside after 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), xiv + 168 pp. (hb), £32.99, ISBN 978-0-19-007907-9

Historians of modern Europe have long seen the tragic events of the Second World War in France as a major caesura in the history of that nation. But eighty years later, do the legacies of the war still help us understand postwar France and its political divisions? The five superb books under review make a strong case that the fracturing experiences of defeat, Vichy and the Resistance shaped some of the most important subsequent developments in France in ways that previous historians have failed to recognise. The developments identified by these authors include the waxing and waning of Resistance myths as part of a contested deportation memory landscape, an anti-authoritarian *résistant* psychiatry born in 1940 that went on to revolutionise French theories of alienation in the face of both Stalinism and postwar capitalism, and rural resistance to the state-led transformation of the countryside as part of France's postwar economic modernisation. Collectively they point to a larger takeaway for historians of postwar Europe: oppositional movements in France may resemble similar movements elsewhere in a Western context marked by Cold War tensions and, more recently, globalisation; but these protests are also always following a script haunted in part by the trauma of France's war years – a past that has not passed, even eight decades later.

For the purposes of this essay, Emile Chabal's short volume *France* provides the ideal jumping off point.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, his main thesis is the same as this article: that the experience of defeat and collaboration, but also the spirit of the Resistance, have structured French political life in an astounding variety of ways ever since. Unlike the other more specialised monographs discussed below, *France* is a synthetic history of French politics and society from 1940 to the present that lucidly explores in six compact chapters the puzzling 'paradoxes' of modern France. For Chabal, the experiences of the Second

<sup>1</sup> This review of Chabal is adapted from a longer one that I published in *H-France Review* 21:138 (Aug. 2021) <https://h-france.net/vol21reviews/vol21no138conklin.pdf>.

World War are pivotal for explaining these paradoxes, and he lays them out in his first chapter. The humiliation of June 1940 led postwar elites to prosecute – and lose – wars in Indochina and Algeria, and then to pursue a largely illusory great power status by other means under the Fifth Republic. But the same 1940 defeat also produced the Resistance, and the concept of ‘resistance’ with a small ‘r’ has been a part of French politics ever since. We see this resistance in developments as different as the wave of anti-colonialism that accompanied the escalating horror of the Algerian conflict, the ‘events’ of 1968, and the constant street protests against American free-market capitalism and/or the ‘diktats’ of the French state in expected and unexpected places. As this description suggests, these postwar forms of resistance are neither consistent in their targets nor always related to each other. Chabal’s point, rather, is that since 1940 the French have taken a particular pride in being oppositional *because* of what happened during the war.

Subsequent chapters develop these insights in more detail. From his overview of the Second World War, Chabal pivots to the postwar struggles over France’s empire and its afterlives. Here he provides a succinct survey of almost two centuries of colonialism, leaving no doubt that the empire’s formal unravelling is an integral part of the nation’s history. Like France in 1940, the empire falls in ways so humiliating that the memory of another divisive defeat is buried only to return later. Anti-colonial resistance, however, is as much a part of this story as the ‘humiliation’ of defeat at the hands of the colonised. From the Haitian Revolution through the Left Bank’s opposition to torture during the Algerian War to today’s demand for the right to be recognised as Muslim and French, Chabal provides a multi-pronged genealogy of the ‘extraordinary transnational [Francophone] community’ that has repeatedly mobilised in different combinations to challenge colonial and postcolonial violence.<sup>2</sup>

When de Gaulle strode back onto the world stage in 1958, he was riding the coattails of the Fourth Republic’s successful reconstruction of the nation’s shattered economy and its revolutionary expansion of the safety net. Yet, paradoxically, the return of affluence brought new discontents. In tandem with workers, young people felt humiliated by the continuing paternalism, sexism, racism and structural inequalities at home and abroad which they linked variously to the growth of big business, consumer culture, Gaullist presidentialism and the rigidity of the Communist Party. The first to lash out was France’s exploding student population; they had no memory of the unified Resistance that de Gaulle was peddling, only questions about what had really happened during the Occupation, including the role of Vichy in the deportations. As the revolts spread, protesters adopted the slogans ‘*résistons*’ and ‘*résistez*’, but for them the term referenced 1789 and the Paris Commune more than the anti-fascism of the war years.<sup>3</sup>

Since the 1970s, mass unemployment, deindustrialisation, and the growth of the global economy have continued to exacerbate grievances in France. Especially noticeable has been the recent rise of a discourse of republicanism and its supposed antithesis, *communautarisme*, now ‘the dominant way in which the French talk about their country, their past and their society’.<sup>4</sup> To make sense of this shift, Chabal tracks struggles over neo-liberalism, French-led European integration and the meaning of republican citizenship in an increasingly diverse and unequal society. The collapse of Marxism and the atrophy of Gaullist ideas created an ideological void that republicanism rushed to fill; that parties and citizens on both sides of the aisle are fighting over republicanism’s meaning is a sign of the continuing relevance of its core values. The current upsurge in claims to a right to racial and gender difference is a case in point. That said, conflicts over republican citizenship are also part of a longer tradition of resistance to a notoriously powerful and globally ambitious state whose postwar welfarism has always advantaged some more than others. Typically, disgruntled citizens express their anger against Paris and Brussels through the time-honoured tradition of direct protest. The recent explosion of the *gilets jaunes* – ‘in their scope and longevity . . . the largest wave of protest since those of 1968’ – is part of a long postwar history of resistance movements that are neither left nor right but anti-state.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Emile Chabal, *France* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020), 35.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

Chabal's conceptual and chronological framework works well for the four additional books under review here, each of which covers several postwar decades; unlike Chabal's *France*, however, they end in the 1980s, albeit with nods to the present. Each addresses a theme – whether 'intellectual and cultural debates' or 'environmental history' and 'rural life' – touched on by Chabal but which he regretted not including more about in his short history.<sup>6</sup> Together they highlight how much Chabal got right in casting postwar French politics around the general theme of resistance in the wake of defeat; they also bring out even more clearly how important the 1960s were for transforming the content and performance of 'resistance' politics during France's long reconstruction.<sup>7</sup> In what follows, these books will be treated in pairs organised by theme, and I begin with Philip Nord's *After the Deportation: Memory Battles in Postwar France* and Camille Robcis's *Disalienation: Politics, Philosophy and Radical Psychiatry in Postwar France*. Both are sophisticated works of intellectual and cultural history that foreground politics, and both offer compelling insights into the centrality of wartime resistance and its memory for some of the postwar communities they study. *After the Deportation* charts the divisive politics and creative impulses of deportation narratives from the 1940s to the 1980s among communists, Gaullists, Catholics, Jews and the *soixante huitards*. Communist Resistance memory, which rigidly saw US-led capitalism as the heir to Nazi fascism, emerges as the earliest casualty of these battles. *Disalienation* recovers the postwar history of a radical psychiatric practice and theory pioneered by *résistant* intellectuals during the Occupation. Fascism had alerted these leftist intellectuals to the problem of alienation in European politics, and they believed that both postwar capitalism and Marxist revolution perpetuated the problem in ways that had to be addressed at the level of the psyche.

*After the Deportation* is a complex work of synthesis and original research that documents how the Deportation of 160,000 men and women to camps in Central and Eastern Europe was remembered, memorialised and fought over in France in the postwar decades. 76,000 of these deportees were Jews, of whom only 2500 returned; 41,000 of the deportees were resisters, of whom about half survived.<sup>8</sup> Right after the war, the resisters' narrative of their own suffering as anti-fascist heroes trumped that of the particular fate of the Jews; thirty years later, the memory of the Deportation had come to be identified with the Jewish tragedy alone. How this transformation took place in the realm of both politics and story-telling is the subject of Nord's book. This, then, is not a study of Holocaust memory alone but one that revisits a much vaster and more contentious memorial landscape in French-speaking France. From the outset, Nord follows recent revisionist work that has exploded the myth that silence initially prevailed in France with respect to the specific fate of the Jews. As early as 1943 Léon Poliakov founded the *Centre de documentation juive contemporaine*, making clear that the destruction of European Jewry was known even then in France; Issac Schneersohn carried on its work of amassing evidence of the Judeocide throughout the 1950s. Yet if France's Jewish citizens mobilised with memorials, the creation of archives, memoirs, films and artwork, the loudest voices memorialising the experience of the camps right after the war were those of quarrelling Communists and the Gaullists. Members of both groups had been sent to Nazi concentration camps like Buchenwald and Neuengamme rather than extermination camps reserved for Jews. Not surprisingly, these *résistants* imagined the concentration camp as a site of murderous political repression rather than ethnic genocide. For Communists in particular, such camps were also the ultimate expression of capitalist labour exploitation, never more starkly revealed. The lesson they soon drew was that the world had to be on guard against future iterations of what they referred to as the 'concentrationary universe', since the struggle against Nazi barbarism and its postwar militarist and racist avatars (West Germany and the United States) was ongoing; in this narrative, the figure of the Communist deportee was sacralised as a present reminder of dangers still lurking, while the specific fate of the Jew held a very marginal place.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>7</sup> I borrow this term from Herrick Chapman, *France's Long Reconstruction: In Search of the Modern Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> Philip Nord, *After the Deportation: Memory Battles in Postwar France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1.

The Gaullists competed most directly with the Communists over control of the memory of the war, and by the 1960s their version had won out thanks to the return of the General to power in 1958. Commemorations of the Resistance under the new Fifth Republic told a straightforward redemptive story of patriotic service stretching from the First World War to the Liberation, in which France and its empire had taken up ‘arms as one under the undisputed leadership of General de Gaulle’.<sup>9</sup> Orchestrated from on high with the full backing of state-controlled public media at a time when deportee memories were themselves fracturing over the brutal methods used by French troops in Algeria, this stirring message became ‘like a wall’; competing memories of the war were either obscured and drowned out or ‘incorporated brick by brick into the structure of the wall itself’.<sup>10</sup> For example, where at first de Gaulle had favoured the image of the *résistant* who died arms in hand, by the time Jean Moulin was Pantheonised in 1964, Gaullist martyrology had expanded to include ‘the starved and battered deportee with shaven head’.<sup>11</sup> Yet even here the Gaullists – much like the Communists before them – failed to make much room for acknowledging the particular fate reserved to France’s Jews.

How then did Holocaust consciousness become hegemonic in France? Today, commemorative ceremonies and monuments honouring deportees evoke Jewish victims alone; a new memorial landscape has emerged compared to that created in the 1950s and 1960s, with the Vél d’hiv and Drancy as key coordinates.<sup>12</sup> Nord does not challenge the consensus view that the 1961 Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the coming of age of a new generation of French Jewish militants and the ludic student revolts of 1968 all contributed to making the plight of the Jews a dominant theme in the memory of the war. But in keeping with his thesis that Jewish deportation memory had always existed in France, he is most interested in arguing for a more piecemeal process of transformation. Central was a Jewish-Catholic dialogue that emerged in the 1950s, particularly between conscience-stricken lay Catholic intellectuals Jacques Maritain, François Mauriac and Paul Claudel and the founder of the *Amitié judéo-chrétienne de France* in 1948, Jules Isaac. In imagery and texts, postwar Catholics at first Christianised Jewish suffering without confronting the Church’s historical antisemitism; Poliakov and Isaac called their Christian interlocutors out unsparingly on both fronts. The eventual resolution in the 1950s of a series of explosive controversies between Jews and the Catholic Church helped to pave the way for the radical shift toward Jews that was embodied in the 1965 Vatican II statement, *Nostra Aetate*. For Nord, these two decades of interreligious dialogue were nothing less than the rumbles of a Jewish story very much at odds with the overpowering Gaullist narrative, ones that only needed a catalyst to explode. ‘A generational shift is what set off the explosion.’<sup>13</sup>

The final chapters of *After the Deportation* chronicle the hammer blows inflicted by the ‘insolent’ 68ers broadly defined – whether Jewish student militants or those slightly older than them like the Klarsfelds – on de Gaulle’s massive memory wall. This cohort unmasked former Nazis and French collaborators complicit in the Final Solution while insisting (wrongly) that up until then actual Jewish experiences had been both repressed and ignored. Nord closes with an eloquent discussion of Claude Lanzmann’s documentary *Shoah* (1985), a term Lanzmann preferred for the fate of the Jews because it broke with the Christianising logic of the Holocaust paradigm. The chapter is a fitting bookend to an analysis as concerned with the shifting art and literature of the Deportation as with the ebb and flow of memory regimes – this review does not begin to do justice to the detailed discussions of monuments, novels and films that lead up to this final chapter, including Nord’s beautifully rendered readings of works, among others, by Charlotte Delbo, Patrick Modiano, Alain Resnais, Jean Cayrol and Marcel Ophuls. The question of how to represent pure evil haunted those who wanted

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>12</sup> Right after the war, the tomb of the unknown soldier at the Arc de Triomphe, the monument to the fallen resisters at the Fort Mont-Valérien, and – at least for communist memory – the Père-Lachaise cemetery had figured centrally in the Resistance memory regime then being created.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 391.

to bear witness, since no existing genre seemed adequate to the task. Lanzmann's path-breaking contribution was a nine-hour film devoted exclusively to the extermination centres of Treblinka, Chelmno, Majdanek, Bobibor and Belzec. With negationism on the rise, Lanzmann had only one message to pound home in *Shoah*: the world had abandoned the Jews to their monstrous fate, and no redemptive reading of this fate was possible.<sup>14</sup> *Shoah*'s success with the French public coupled with President Jacques Chirac's 1995 declaration that Vichy had been complicit in the Judeocide make clear that by the end of the twentieth century a new threshold of Holocaust consciousness, one shorn of older Deportation narratives, had been reached. The French now routinely prefer the term 'Shoah' to that of 'Holocaust'.

Nord took as his remit the politics and cultural expressions of an impressive array of deportee memory workers over four decades, some of them more radical than others. One of his most compelling conclusions is how enormous the contribution of French creative genius has been to memorialising the tragedy of the Deportation in a country where three-quarters of the pre-war Jewish population survived.<sup>15</sup> Camille Robcis's more slender volume homes in on a constellation of radical intellectuals in conversation with each other, who sought to disalienate their world during and after the Nazi nightmare through a new practice of treating and theorising madness. *Disalienation* is a study of pioneering doctors associated with the psychiatric hospital of Saint-Alban (located in the department of Lozère, in the Massif Central) during the Occupation, and some of the younger thinkers and artists they influenced between 1945 and 1975. Both generations played a role in the rise and fall of the movement known as institutional psychotherapy, premised on 'a vision of psychiatry as a deeply political practice'.<sup>16</sup> Mass acquiescence to fascism and its genocidal practices had made clear to these intellectuals that authoritarianism – or what they called 'concentrationism' – was not just a political choice but a state of mind. Resistance to fascism thus required fighting on the political and psychic fronts simultaneously, not only during the war but after the war when new forms of authoritarianism threatened social existence, whether in the guise of Stalinism, colonialism or capitalism. A radically reformed psychiatry, they hoped, could help identify tools for fighting the traces of this 'concentrationism' on the individual unconscious daily within the asylum, and perhaps on the collective unconscious without.

*Disalienation* is an important contribution to both the history of psychiatry in France – and of the social sciences more generally – and that of what is commonly referred to as 'French theory'. The book consists of four case studies of radicals, all male and mostly white, who either practised, theorised or engaged extensively with institutional psychotherapy. The first chapter focuses on the work of François Tosquelles (b. 1912) at the asylum of Saint-Alban in the darkest years of the Occupation, when Vichy's embrace of a policy of 'soft' eugenics allowed some 40,000 inmates in French psychiatric hospitals to starve to death. Tosquelles was a psychiatrist and anarchist refugee from fascist Spain who had been interned in 1939 in one of France's most brutal concentration camps, Camp de Judez near Montauban. His experience of psychic harm there convinced him that politics and psychiatry, Marx and Freud and especially Lacan, could be brought together to help reform the asylum, still stuck in outmoded practices inherited from the nineteenth century. Released in 1940 and sent to work as a psychiatrist at Saint-Alban, Tosquelles resolved to save its patients by not only feeding them but by reconceiving the 'concentrationist institution' as a space of exchange and solidarity.

To simplify, he believed that taking down walls between cells could liberate internal divisions within the psyche. For Tosquelles and the circle of *résistant* doctors, artists, philosophers and writers who were drawn to Saint-Alban in the 1940s, the war context was crucial. In fighting Vichy's

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 395.

<sup>15</sup> Nord is careful not to overemphasise this point, since it risks minimising the horrific figure of 76,000 Jews who were deported, most of whom never returned. Many more Jewish lives could have been saved if the French state had not chosen the path of collaboration. On this point see Lauren Joly, *L'État contre les juifs: Vichy, les nazis et la persécution antisémite* (Paris: Grasset, 2018).

<sup>16</sup> Camille Robcis, *Disalienation: Politics, Philosophy, and Radical Psychiatry in Postwar France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 3.

'biopolitical assault' against the mentally ill and serving in the *maquis*, the team forged a bond of fraternity that allowed them to see the social dimension of psychosis: madness was individual and social at the same time.<sup>17</sup> This insight incubated new practices, including the creation of a *collectif soignant* on guard against oppressive social relations. Walls literally came down, uniforms came off; collective meetings supplemented individual sessions; doctors, nurses, staff and patients attended, and everyone was encouraged to speak. The goal was an 'asylum village' that 'could operate as a site for transference for the psychotic patient who suffered from internal division'.<sup>18</sup> That said, institutional psychotherapy, as these practices came to be called in 1952, had no fixed template. Tosquelles offered instead 'an ethics, a way of thinking and living that was meant as a permanent revolution of politics, society and psychic life in the face of ongoing and future concentrationisms' – whether capitalist or Marxist.<sup>19</sup>

Frantz Fanon (b. 1925) spent a year as a resident at Saint-Alban in the early 1950s before joining the staff of the asylum of Blida-Joinville in Algeria; as a student of psychiatric medicine in Lyon at the end of the war, he had already recognised the importance of 'the social, the permeation of structural racism and the foundational role of alterity in the construction of the self'.<sup>20</sup> In Algeria, he realised that the political, psychic and social violence of colonialism were of a piece, driving Algerians to the brink of 'madness' within their own country. How then to disalienate them? Robcis argues that Fanon's famous call for decolonial violence in chapter one of *Wretched of the Earth* was shaped by his psychiatric work in North Africa. There Fanon adapted the emancipatory methods he had observed at Saint-Alban, although for someone so aware of racism his first attempts were surprisingly insensitive to the local context. These institutional reforms then haunted his political project: the final chapters of *Wretched of the Earth* imagine a postcolonial Algerian nation organised as a 'healing community' in the spirit of the *collectif soignant* instituted by Tosquelles. In this way Fanon 'deterritorialised' and transformed the *résistant* practices and the theories themselves.<sup>21</sup>

Robcis next shifts her attention to the psychoanalyst Félix Guattari (b. 1935) and the philosopher Michel Foucault (b. 1926). After working as a resident at Saint-Alban, Guattari in 1955 moved to La Borde in the Loire, an experimental clinic housed in a former chateau that a close Tosquelles associate, Jean Oury (b. 1924), had founded. Thanks to its proximity to the capital, La Borde became a site of mythical pilgrimage for a roster of Parisian intellectuals and artists seeking to come to terms with two related phenomena in the 1950s: the paralysis of the left and what appeared to be a new kind of 'fascism' that perpetuated alienation – the love of power in a capitalist society that stoked 'desire for the very thing that dominates and exploits us'.<sup>22</sup> La Borde's treatment of psychosis offered theorists disillusioned with classical Marxism an opportunity to rethink the role of the unconscious for – as always – the purposes of political analysis. Within this context, the willingness of striking workers in May 1968 to settle for better salaries and working conditions marked a critical turning point and also a parting of the ways of Guattari and Oury. In the wake of the 'aborted revolution', Guattari went on to co-author *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) with Gilles Deleuze, one of many post-1968 interventions wrestling with the question of why people participated in their own subjection. As Foucault put it in his introduction to *Anti-Oedipus*, society repressed the revolutionary potential of unconscious desire, freeing desire had the political potential to 'disorganize social hierarchies, norms, identities and authoritarianisms of all sorts'.<sup>23</sup> Guattari applied these insights to his psychiatric practice at Laborde and to a series of collective research projects in other fields; these ranged from philosophy and politics to urban planning and architecture, each serving as a terrain for envisioning radically anti-authoritarian spaces not only in theory but practice. In doing so, he also 'deterritorialized' institutional psychotherapy, albeit in a different way than Fanon.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 34, 38.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 89, 96.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 8, 106.

Michel Foucault, although neither a psychiatrist nor a psychoanalyst, nevertheless engaged with all the reform movements and theories discussed so far by Robcis, both before and after 1968; he was also influenced by the anti-psychiatry movement of the 1960s, which rejected Tosquelles' original insight that the asylum could be reformed. Robcis shows how these engagements 'largely contributed to his critique of norms in the 1960s and his new theory of power in the 1970s'.<sup>25</sup> 1968, for Foucault too, was a turning point – in particular the grassroots struggles against social and psychic alienation that it revealed. Institutional psychotherapy had identified the repressive power of institutions. In his 1975 *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argued instead that power in the prison and the asylum was disciplinary, i.e. productive and diffuse, a microphysics rather than an apparatus; the uneven balance of this kind of power nevertheless left spaces for inmates to resist.<sup>26</sup>

For Nord and Robcis the specific experience of resisting during the Second World War continues to frame the politics each charts in their respective works. The pair of books I turn to next, in contrast, examine a form of 'resistance' that became unmoored from its wartime connotations, among a set of actors who could not be more different than those of Nord and Robcis: France's rural inhabitants. The trauma of defeat, Chabal reminds us, helped fuel one of the Fourth Republic's most famous initiatives: the state-led economic acceleration known as *les trente glorieuses* whose goal was to return France to great power status by fostering American-style capitalism on its soil while also pursuing European integration. Yet most of what we know about postwar modernisation relates to its impact on the industrial and energy sectors of the economy and the formation of the EEC. Venus Bivar in *Organic Resistance: The Struggle over Industrial Farming in Postwar France* and Sarah Farmer in *Rural Inventions: The French Countryside after 1945* both had the good idea of asking what happened to rural life when the French state decided also to prioritise agricultural production as part of postwar rebuilding.<sup>27</sup> The two historians approach this question from different angles, but their answers are complementary: yes there was a great deal of painful displacement as small producers were pushed off the land, but a minority of rural dwellers resisted state-led initiatives while others adapted creatively to changing times, and these responses also shaped national politics and culture in the postwar decades.

In Venus Bivar's account, the modernising state looms large, as do the farmers who resisted it. Her story begins with France's technocrats demanding that farming industrialise after the war, in order to produce sufficient wheat and sugar exports to buttress France's balance of payments. The author pulls no punches here: within a single generation, the country moved with brutal speed from being one of Europe's farming laggards to becoming the world's second largest food exporter (the United States was first).<sup>28</sup> The state achieved this goal principally by reducing the number of farmers – who represented 36 per cent of France's population in 1945 – increasing the size of farms, and ramping up their productivity through mechanisation, chemical inputs and the planting of high-yield seed varieties. All of these trends accelerated after 1957 with the signing of the Treaty of Rome, since an integrated European market was also seen as essential to making farms efficient enough to produce surpluses for export and to raise farmers' income. A critical step in modernisation was a fraught process of *remembrement* or state-mandated land distribution executed through a new agency, the SAFER (*Sociétés d'aménagement foncier et d'établissement rural*), created in 1961. In 1945, 56 per cent of French farms were less than 10 hectares in size – barely enough to sustain a family.<sup>29</sup> Between 1945 and 1980, 10.9 million out of a total 18 million arable hectares were reallocated to a combination of

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 136, 139.

<sup>27</sup> This important question has been surprisingly neglected by historians since at least the 1980s. Here the success of Eugen Weber's monumental *Peasants into Frenchmen* unintentionally played a role in burying the topic by suggesting that by the First World War French rural folkways were already a thing of the past. Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976).

<sup>28</sup> Venus Bivar, *Organic Resistance: The Struggle over Industrial Farming in Postwar France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 1.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 42.

large-scale producers specialising in sugar beets and cereals and smaller-scale producers who absorbed neighbouring parcels.<sup>30</sup> At the end of this process, only 6 per cent of the population remained in farming, and France was exporting surplus foodstuffs. ‘The methods . . . were ruthless’ and ‘farms that failed to meet the industrial ideal were swallowed up by those that did’.<sup>31</sup> With fewer but bigger farms, French *agriculteurs* did begin outproducing their traditionally more efficient Dutch, Belgian and German neighbours; yet at the same time the incomes of farmers continued to lag behind those of the rest of French consumers.

Such rapid conversion to competitive market standards and continuing inequality met with citizen-farmer resistance that varied in style, temperament and content depending on the producers in question. The winners of *remembrement* formed lobbies that could take advantage of the opportunities that the new Common Market created, negotiating, for example, for the Common Agricultural Policy that benefited cereal producers most. These were hard-nosed business types who chose to adapt to international imperatives. Younger smallholders, in contrast, organised and regularly took to the streets to protest the persistent gap in rural and urban standards of living that was still there at the end of the 1960s. But Bivar is most interested in another form of political resistance, the organic one of her title. From its inception in the West, agricultural industrialisation had raised the suspicions of some farmers, precisely because of its use of chemical inputs. Organic and biodynamic farming first developed in England and Germany; this opposition spread to France in the 1920s, when a few small producers there conflated processed wheat with degeneration and the proverbial end of civilisation. As this description suggests and as some will be surprised to learn, organic farming in France from its inception had a particular political valence, a right-wing one, and this valence would define it until the late 1960s.

By the 1940s organic farming was developing sturdier legs, thanks to the growing number of farmers, agronomists, doctors and consumers who started committing to the small-scale production of foods because they deemed them healthier for the consumer. Twenty years later this community had become a nationally and internationally networked movement, with a coherent set of anti-statist principles, an association, a journal and a label for marketing their organic products. It had also become a big enough movement for liberal and conservative factions to emerge in the face of new challenges, and in 1964 members would split acrimoniously into two different organisations. At issue were how and where to commercialise their products – national markets or local distribution networks – and whether to privilege sustainability over profit. Despite this split, alternative farming’s politics still remained more right leaning than left. Bivar ends this part of her account by noting that only in the aftermath of the student revolts of 1968 would the old fascist chauvinism and Catholicism of the movement disappear, replaced by a leftist countercultural ethos and a green sensibility.

The 1970s would mark a new phase in the always uneven struggle between France’s smaller farmers and the state, one with a rather ironic outcome. In that decade the same planners who had relentlessly pushed an ethos of quantity over quality for French agriculture began to co-opt some of organic farming’s ideals, due to new pressures on the horizon that no one controlled: growing environmental awareness, a new preference among urban consumers for ‘quality’ food and green spaces, and the continued costs of EU agricultural subsidies. In this changed national and international context, the post-1968 back-to-the-land movement and the rising cost of fertilisers after the 1973 oil crisis were also giving organic agriculture greater visibility. By 1980, these tendencies converged in a new top-down marketing initiative: the development of the ‘Red Label (Label Rouge)’ to certify the absence of chemical inputs on products ranging from chickens to cheeses. This label, needless to say, represented a drastic dilution of the organic movement’s original concepts. An expanded AOC (*Appellation d’origine contrôlée*) system was soon certifying that particular items had been authentically produced, were deeply connected to the *terroir* of a particular region and sustainably produced. The promotion of tourism around regional gastronomy then convinced the world that French

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 15, 45.



agricultural policies and practices valued quality over quantity. Yet behind the successful marketing of high-end regionally-specific items and bucolic images lies to this day a different reality – that of France’s globally competitive agro-food industry, a legacy indirectly of the humiliation of 1940.

*Organic Resistance* is a rich and deep study of the transformation of French farming that encompasses the various state agencies empowered to push through new policies in the name of productivity, the European market in food stuffs and the political pushback from farmers who were promised deliverables if they modernised that never arrived, or who were simply shoved off ancestral holdings, or who chose to resist by turning to organic methods. Sarah Farmer in *Rural Inventions* also documents France’s changing countryside in the four decades after the Second World War, but from a different angle. Where Bivar emphasised the human and environmental costs of France’s pursuit of the industrial ideal in agriculture, Farmer is interested in the urbanisation of the countryside that was a by-product of this same ideal. As increasing numbers of farmers left for the city, ‘peri-urban’ or ‘rurban’ zones developed that eroded the distinction between urban space and its particular forms of consumerism on the one hand, and rural space and peasant culture on the other. Given France’s long-standing attachment to its rural traditions, one would expect to see a strong wave of nostalgia for a ‘lost’ peasant civilisation to develop – and indeed one did materialise. But France is a country that constantly surprises. Without minimising the pain of relentless *remembrement* and ‘rurbanisation’, Farmer persuasively argues that the transformation of the country also generated opportunities for different groups in French society to valorise rural living in new ways.

In Farmer’s story as in Bivar’s, the postwar ‘planning’ state plays an important role in launching the destruction of the traditional peasant economy; but where Bivar focused on the SAFER in charge of land consolidation, Farmer emphasises the actions of an agency known as the DATAR (*Délégation interministérielle à l’aménagement du territoire et à l’attractivité régionale*). The DATAR was formed in the 1960s alongside the SAFER, with the mandate to convert France’s more marginal agricultural land to other purposes that might bring new jobs and life to recently deserted areas – for example tourism, or commercial development on the outskirts of towns and cities. In this spirit, the DATAR helped to build a national network of superhighways, to drain marshes, and to set up the first regional parks, all with an eye to creating new multiuse spaces where the smallest farms had once stood. Additional signature projects included transforming the lower Rhone riverscape and developing the alpine ski resort of La Plagne. Yet in this re-envisioning of France’s landscapes, the state was not the only postwar actor. Even as the number of farmers shrank, a combination of urbanites but also ‘authentic’ peasants began adapting to the changing environment by inventing alternative ways of inhabiting and representing the countryside. One early trend was the acquisition and refurbishing of a *résidence secondaire*, a surprisingly cross-class phenomenon, although one dominated by Parisians disoriented by the frenzied pace and anomie of modern cities and their suburbs and thirsting for fresh air.<sup>32</sup> A surplus of abandoned farms and accessibility to remote areas thanks to car ownership, new highways, canny real estate agents and savvy marketing of rustic idylls by the media played a part in fostering this phenomenon. The renovations of city-dwellers in turn enticed remaining rural dwellers – and particularly peasant women – to buy the latest labour-saving appliances for their own kitchens. Weekends and vacations in the countryside also fostered growing environmental awareness among these *néo-ruraux*, as they were later to be called. One of the most famous and successful examples of this interpenetration of urban and rural cultures was the coalition formed in 1971 with local sheep farmers on the Larzac plateau (in the southern Massif Central), in order to save a unique heritage and landscape from destruction by the state. Inventive farmers cast their struggle as an alternative to the market productivism of big agriculture, one ‘important to society at large as well as to the planet’.<sup>33</sup> Some devotees of *résidences secondaires* soon joined the fight to save Larzac, transforming their desire to reconnect with France’s rural past into a broader mission to protect the

<sup>32</sup> Farmer, *Rural Inventions*, 40.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

future of such places. This victory in turn helped to fuel mass support for French environmentalism and opposition to nuclear power and colonialism.

The events of May 1968 marked a turning point in these trends, by helping to launch a new and different wave – really two waves – of *néo-ruraux* into the French countryside, a phenomenon that came to be known as *le retour à la terre*. For the post '68 countercultural utopians – later dubbed *les marginaux* – reconnecting with an agrarian past was supposed to be the pathway to a more radical and egalitarian future. The first wave began arriving in 1969 and founded between 300 and 500 communes clustered in some of the most deserted areas of the Massif Central, Upper Provence and the Pyrenees foothills; most were gone by 1978 as a result of internal fighting, tensions with locals, streams of outside visitors, run-ins with the authorities and the proverbial difficulty of recasting human society. A second group of *néo-ruraux* started turning up in these same abandoned rural spaces around 1975, equally critical of postwar industrial capitalism and consumer society but with the more limited ambition of living self-sufficiently according to green principles. Fortunately, the same state which fifteen years earlier had encouraged young farmers to leave marginal areas was now willing to help first-time farmers, in order to stem the excessive 'desertification' of France's most isolated regions. The most successful of these *néo-ruraux* became niche-oriented small producers of goat cheese and honey (also discussed by Bivar). Farmer nevertheless insists on their marginal position within French society, a marginality that they shared with the remaining *agriculteurs* in the region, although the two groups never melded. Interestingly and despite their tiny numbers, throughout the 1970s the back-to-the-landers commanded considerable media attention from mainstream publications like *Liberation* and *Le Point* – proof, Farmer argues, that rurality was woven into the very fabric of postwar urban life. Whether embracing consumerism or fleeing it, many French 'paid tribute to the nation's rural life, past and present' by acquiring a physical piece of it.<sup>34</sup>

As new groups physically invested in some part of France's countryside in the postwar decades, new representations of changing rural lifeways also emerged, particularly in the 1970s. Farmer closes her book with two examples: a group of peasant memoirs that captured the collective French imagination and the haunting photographs that the DATAR agent Raymond Depardon took of one particularly blighted rural landscape. Both testify to an intense awareness of the up-ending of rural life by those who lived through it. Ephraïm Grenadou, Pierre Jakez Hélias, Émilie Carles and Antoine Sylvère each authored a best-selling autobiography recounting the changes they had witnessed in their lifetime.<sup>35</sup> Farmer carefully contextualises these works in order to argue that while nostalgia is present in these memoirs, each author also actively engaged with the many opportunities that modernisation afforded them. The enormous popularity of this literary genre helped quell French anxieties about postwar changes more generally, as 'peasants became guiding figures to show how the now urbanized French became modern'.<sup>36</sup> Her eloquent chapter on Depardon ends on a bleaker note. Assigned the task of rendering legible to a broader public the 'silent revolution' that had so altered the countryside, the corpus of photos that Reardon produced in the 1980s was also autobiographical. Yet for him there was no possible return to a landscape disfigured by roundabouts and strip malls on the edge of his father's farm near Villefranche-sur-Saône in eastern France.

In the mid-1990s there were only about 5000 roundabouts in France; today there are over 40,000, proof that the creation of 'rurban' spaces intermediate between city and country – begun in the 1960s by the SAFER and DATAR and photographed by Depardon – has only accelerated with the neoliberal turn of the last thirty years.<sup>37</sup> To everyone's surprise and confusion, groups of politically unaffiliated

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>35</sup> The books in question are Ephraïm Grenadou, *Grenadou paysan français* (1966); Pierre Jakez Hélias, *Le cheval d'orgueil* (1975); Émilie Carles, *Une soupe aux herbes sauvages* (1977) and Antoine Sylvère, *Toinou: Le cri d'un enfant auvergnat* (1980). Hélias and Carles have both been translated into English and are assigned often in history courses on modern France in the United States.

<sup>36</sup> Sarah Farmer, *Rural Inventions: The French Countryside after 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 95.

<sup>37</sup> Luc Gwiazdzinski 'Le rond-point. Totem, média et place publique', *Multitudes*, 1, 74 (2019), 7–15. DOI: 10.3917/mult.074.0007. URL: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-multitudes-2019-1-page-7.htm>.

protesters occupied these *ronds-points* for months in 2019. At one point, moreover, these protesters called themselves the *Conseil national de la Résistance des Gilets Jaunes*. As Chabal points out, this seemingly anachronistic reference to France's wartime Resistance 'made perfect sense to the people who made it'.<sup>38</sup> The books under review here help us to see why: on the one hand these actions were part of a longer postwar tradition of *résistance territorialisée* in the French countryside to modernisation and European integration that had little to do with the war itself. On the other hand, the Gaullist myth of the Resistance so assiduously burnished under the Fifth Republic meant that iconic symbols of the Free French resonate down to the present. Yet these books also make clear that there is often no straight line from resisting fascism during the war to periodically protesting the actions of the French state or new forms of 'concentrationism'. Constantly invoked, resistance since 1940 is a concept whose meaning keeps changing as different groups across the political spectrum – including those who claim to be apolitical – jockey for the legitimacy that the word nevertheless still conveys. In the end, all five of these highly innovative and thoughtful books leave no doubt that the further the Second World War recedes from our horizon, the more we have to learn about its continuing relevance for explaining the particular paradoxes of contemporary France.

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<sup>38</sup> Chabal, *France*, 33.