‘An Army of mutes in disguise’

Languages and Transnational Resistance in France during the Second World War

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Parce qu’à prononcer vos noms sont difficiles
Y cherchait un effet de peur sur les passants

(Aragon, 1956, p. 227)

The myth created around the French Resistance after the end of WWII portrayed it as military, masculine and national. Consequently, the unarmed forms of resistance, women, foreigners and the French ineligible for citizenship, such as the Algerians, were omitted from the official academic accounts for decades (Gildea, 2015, p.3; Marco, 2018, pp. 155-159; Poznanski, 1995, pp. 127-128) However, towards the end of the 1960s, the contribution of foreigners to the French Resistance slowly became more visible through the publication of memoirs and the presence of non-French members of the Resistance at official ceremonies. During the following decade, with the broadcast of the first television documentaries and the publication of academic studies of foreigners in the Resistance, this national myth began to be questioned (Gildea, 2015, pp. 6, 458-464; Peschanski, 2002, pp. 13-14) Furthermore, since then there has been a tendency to study the participation of different groups of foreigners, particularly the Spanish, German, Jewish, Polish and Italian fighters, rather than to analyse their contribution from a transnational perspective.

The resistance in France is the most significant case in history of transnational mobilization in wartime, both for its ethnic diversity and for its key role in the context of armed struggle (Laroche, 1965, p. 21) Within their ranks were men and women from Spain, Poland, Germany, Italy and the Jewish communities of several Central European countries, in addition to those of other
European and non-European origin. The degree of ethnic and linguistic diversity was similar to that found in the Republican army during the Spanish Civil War due to the participation of the International Brigades (Marco & Thomas, 2019). However, the foreigners involved in the French Resistance were more significant in military terms than in Spain, since, in some areas, they were the first to organize themselves into clandestine groups, leading the resistance and even liberating some French departments (Marcot, 1992, p. 13; Laborie, 1992, p. 146; Gildea, 2015, 386-387, 401-402) For this reason, Robert Gildea considers it more appropriate to refer to “the resistance in France” than to the traditional “the French Resistance” (2015, p. 239).

The important part played by foreigners in the resistance in France is hardly surprising, since, after WWI, France became the European country with the highest number of foreigners. During the 1920s and 1930s there was a constant influx of economic migrants together with refugees from all parts of the world, particularly from Spain at the conclusion of the Spanish Civil War and Jews fleeing Nazi persecution in central and eastern Europe (Gildea, 2015, p. 205) Prior to these political migrations resulting from the aggressive advance of Fascism in Europe around 3 million foreigners were living in France by 1931, approximately 7% of the population (Schor, 2004, pp. 6-7; Georges-Picot, 2000, pp. 19-20) This melting-pot of economic and political migrants was later to feed the resistance in France. Surprisingly, given the immense bibliography and the greater visibility of foreigners over recent decades, no study on the role of languages in the transnational resistance in France has been carried out to date.

The British researchers Hilary Footitt and Michael Kelly have recently developed a productive area of investigation on “Languages at War.” Using several monographs and collaborative books they have analysed the role played by language intermediaries, language contact, language practice and language policy within regular armies in modern conflicts from the 19th Century to the present day (Footitt & Kelly, 2012a; Footitt & Kelly 2012b; Footitt & Tobia, 2013; Kelly, Footitt & Salama-Carr, 2019) Other authors have combined this work with studies on transnational soldiers in order to analyse the challenges relating to
communication and organization in a newly-created regular army such as that of the Republic during the Spanish Civil War (Marco & Thomas, 2019)

This study does not analyse the role of language in regular armies during the Second World War. The aim of this article, which uses the resistance in France as a case study, is to delve deeper into the subject by opening up a new and hitherto unexplored field: the role of languages in irregular armed groups with a great ethnic and linguistic diversity. This presents certain methodological challenges since irregular groups, with no firm connection to the state, lack two key elements common to regular armies: a centralized hierarchical structure allowing the imposition of a linguistic policy and the ability to apply this consistently.

This article analyses how linguistic policies within irregular groups, rather than the result of a decision taken, are a set of fluid possible decisions which adapt to the requirements of the moment in a military structure that is more horizontal than vertical. It also considers how these policies were not developed from scratch but were connected to previous experiences and structures such as the linguistic organization in pre-war French trade unions and in the International Brigades in Spain (Skoutlesky, 1998, pp. 299-317)

As a result of the clandestine nature of the groups, whose actions were carried out behind enemy lines, language acquired other dimensions and presented other challenges to those faced by a regular army in a conventional war. Obviously, both irregular groups and regular armies need to create a militarily-efficient communication system when their ranks contain transnational soldiers exhibiting high linguistic and ethnic diversity (Ginio, 2017, p. 48) However, clandestine life behind enemy lines also demands a high degree of invisibility, especially when the individuals carrying out clandestine actions are posing as normal citizens. In this case, failure to have a sound command of the language and all its vocal cues (pitch, lexical diversity, accents, etc.) would endanger the survival of the clandestine resistance networks consisting of foreigners. Consequently, this article also considers language attitudes and the social psychology of language (Holtgraves, 2014, pp. 1-7) to grasp the challenges
faced by transnational members in irregular groups and the policies they developed to overcome them.

The contingent nature of the linguistic policies implemented by the irregular groups of the transnational resistance in France, together with the lack of records and documents, makes their practices difficult to trace. In view of this, the present article has principally relied on secondary sources, some archives, and, above all, testimonies, and memoirs. The latter are particularly useful for reconstructing the linguistic difficulties faced by foreigners involved in the resistance in France although the information is usually fragmented and unevenly distributed.

Another challenge for those studying the role of languages in the resistance in France during WWII is the hugely diverse nature of the subject. The resistance was a tightly-woven network of civil and military groups, with different degrees of organization, carrying out clandestine non-violent or armed operations against fascist domination. This network mainly comprised irregular groups although there were also regular units linked to the French Army. In addition, there was collaboration with different regular armies such as those of Britain and the USA, and with their special operations groups and intelligent services (SOE, OSS and SIS) (Bédarida, 1995, p. 46; Lagraou, 2006, p. 2.209; Semelin, 1993, pp. 27-30) Given the enormous variety of participants in the resistance in France, each with different characteristics and linguistic challenges, this article focuses on studying the irregular armed groups consisting totally or partially of foreign fighters. The Communist parties of several European countries, including France, Germany, Poland, Spain, and Italy were the organizations which made most effort to place foreigners in the resistance and are consequently the principal object of study. However, other national and transnational protagonists are also referred to for the purpose of comparison and as possible subjects for future studies.

**Facing underground work in a foreign country**
Members of the resistance acted outside the law. Nonetheless, as their roles were varied so too was their relationship with the law. The *maquisards* (irregular armed groups in rural areas) had declared themselves in open rebellion. On the other hand, the majority of resistance members led a double life, going about their daily activities like normal citizens while secretly carrying out underground activities.

It was much easier for the French fighters to maintain this front than for the foreign fighters. Many of the latter were economic immigrants and political exiles without a residence permit. Others were pursued on account of their nationality, as in the case of Germans and Austrians, who were considered enemies of France from September 1939. Survival was particularly arduous for the French and foreign Jews, persecuted by the race laws implemented in the summer of 1940, who faced capture and deportation to German concentration camps (*Association pour la Recherche sur l'Histoire Contemporaine des Juifs, 1985, pp. 13-15*) To lead a double life under such circumstances was so risky that many foreigners went underground, without even having taken part in any actions of the resistance.

“To create the impression” of being a native French citizen was one of the keys to survival for both the agents of the SOE and the OSS (*Footitt & Tobia, 2013, p. 48*) The scholar Juliette Pattinson defined this process as a “passing performance”, which included linguistic, visual, and performative features. This concept, which allows the author to define the “attempt to appropriate the characteristics” of ordinary French civilians made by SOE agents during WWII (*2010, pp. 291-305*), also applies to the experiences of foreign resistance members in France.

Joseph Boczov, the Hungarian Jew who led the first detachment of the FTP-MOI (urban guerrilla group linked to the Communist Party of France) in Paris – mainly formed of Hungarian and Romanian Jews -explained this rule to his men using a simple metaphor: “our lives depend on us holding our soup spoon exactly the same as a regular Frenchman” (*Raymond, 1975, p. 43*) However, the imitation or assimilation of the non-verbal behaviour (*Dovidio & Gluszek,*
of the locals was not enough; physical appearance, lack of knowledge of accents or fluency in French were difficult obstacles to overcome. The increase in xenophobia and antisemitism in France since the 1930s (Schor, 1992, p. 22), combined with regular citizens’ collaboration with the Vichy regime and Nazi authorities in occupied France, resulted in appearance and language becoming dangerous distinguishing features.

Military organisations such as the SOE, the SIS and the OSS were able to carry out a meticulous selection process of the personnel to be sent to continental Europe, choosing agents whose appearance would not be out of place in the region where they were to be deployed (Pattinson, 2010, pp. 293-297; Footitt & Tobia, 2013, p. 66) However, this capability was much reduced in the case of foreigners trapped in France and wishing to join the resistance. Claude Lévy, a French Jew belonging to the FTP-MOI, acknowledged that one of the greatest difficulties for his group was that many of his members had “foreign faces” (Lévy, 1994, p. 141)

Possible solutions to this problem were limited. Resistance groups tried to choose the least “foreign-looking” members to carry out actions requiring the greatest public presence (Moratilla, 1994, p. 268; Raymond, 1975, p. 72) Martin Kalb remembered how his group encountered problems with the German members, who were too pale-skinned and blonde, and were required to dye their hair in order not to stand out (1987, p. 88) In Algeria, Spanish women took advantage of the invisibility of Algerian women in French colonial society to achieve double concealment, physical and cultural, beneath the hijab (Partido Comunista de España, ca. 1944) However, the best option for “foreign-looking” resisters was to join irregular groups in the mountains, where they could hide and easily avoid visual contact with both police forces and the population. That was the case, for example, of Addi Bâ, a black Guinean former soldier in the French Army who was a co-funder of the Maquis des Vosges in 1943 (Étienne, 2013)

Nonetheless, the most problematic aspect of daily life in hiding was the language. The speaker’s voice provides an enormous variety of information to be interpreted by the listener in terms of ethnicity, class, emotional state, and
The language of each region possesses specific standard features. Failure to employ these correctly, particularly in the case of vocal cues such as accent, will negatively impact on the speaker, who will be stereotyped, rejected or mocked (Dragojevic & Giles, 2016) In the case of the transnational resistance in France, non-standard-accented speakers endangered the key element of the underground struggle: invisibility. Their voices identified them as not local, or, even worse, as foreigners, which would result in their being suspected of working as enemy agents. Consequently, as indicated by Philippe Ganier Raymond, the foreign fighters in the resistance in France formed “an army of mutes in disguise” (1975, p. 35)

The fear of being unmasked due to lack of fluency in French and non-standard accent was common to both the foreign fighters and the British and North American SOE and OSS agents. Paul, a German member of the FTP-MOI in Paris, was aware that “his accent aroused suspicion and so spoke little, only employing around 20 words with which he was comfortable” (Raymond, 1975, p. 113) The British agent Harry Ree, sent by the SOE to France to set up a spy network, mirrored this approach: “In public I avoided talking as much as possible, say in trains or in shops. When police inspectors asked for my identity card at a roadblock, I’d give it them without saying more than a couple of words. And in fact, I avoided talking to strangers. It was like being a respectable girl!” (1976, p. 36)

Due to certain peculiarities of their accents some foreigners were able to camouflage themselves behind regional accents. For example, in Toulouse, several members of the FTP-MOI, central European Jews with a Yiddish accent, managed to pass themselves off as being from Alsace while the Italians claimed to be Corsicans. However, as Verbizier recognized, the difficulties were greater for the Polish, Hungarians and Romanians with the concomitant increase in risk (1994, p. 39) Dragos Sas, alias Jaroslav Martunek, was a Hungarian-born Romanian member of the FTP-MOI in Paris. In October 1942 he took part in one of the first violent actions carried out by the resistance, in which grenades were employed against German soldiers. While trying to escape by blending into the
crowd he was stopped by the police. His face had already aroused their suspicions, but it was his accent that gave him away. “What is your name?” – a policeman asked. “Jacques Forrestière” – Sas replied timidly. “Very good – said the policeman–. Foreign undesirables. Take them away!” (Raymond, 1975, p. 78)

Two German members of the maquisard in northern France, Lisa Ost and Hedwig Rahmel-Robens, were arrested in similar circumstances. Having been ordered to leave the mountains for a mission in the south they had been given false Alsatian passports. However, their accent gave them away while signing the register in a hotel where they were to spend a night before taking the train. The hotelier became suspicious of their identities after hearing them speak and reported them to a fascist militia group (Hilgert, 1987, p. 285)

Several accounts note the strong accent of the foreign fighters in the resistance when speaking French (Lévy, 1994, p. 141; Simmonds, 1995, p. 66) At times, the situation was even worse. Leaders of the FTP-MOI in Paris, such as the Czech Ladislav Holdos and the Austrian Albert Hirsch found speaking French enormously difficult while a companion of Norbert Kugler, a German Jew responsible for the military side of the FTP-MOI in southern France, stated that Norbert simply “massacred” the French language (Raymond, 1975, pp. 17-18, 32; Collin, 2000, pp. 117, 154; Gildea, 2015, 226) Other accounts went even further by admitting that many foreign fighters simply did not know how to speak French. This lack of linguistic knowledge caused serious difficulties for the resistance in France, both in terms of the success of an operation and in creating mistrust among the local population, who preferred to collaborate with indigenous members of the resistance (London, 1967, p. 336; Baldia, 1987, p. 14; Dronne, 1969, p. 379) For these reasons, the transnational fighters and the organisations to which they belonged had to implement a series of linguistic policies to overcome these limitations.

Overcoming the language barrier
Gestures are the most basic means of communication, employed out of necessity by the foreign fighters on occasions. Claude Lévy remembered how “Charles”, one of the leaders of his group, tried to explain the mission they were to carry out: to put a bomb in some offices of the Vichy regime. Claude, a French-born Jew, only spoke French while “Charles”, a Jew of Polish origin, hardly spoke a word of French. After several unsuccessful attempts “Charles” abandoned his limited French and resorted to hand gestures to show how to light the fuse, escape the scene uninjured and avoid arrest (1994, p. 141) Another basic resource for those who did not speak French was a dictionary. A Spaniard, Pilar Claver, remembered how, with the aid of a dictionary, she managed to obtain information on train arrivals and departures at a station which she passed to a resistance group planning an act of sabotage (1994, p. 153) Although both operations were successful these precarious methods were not ideal for overcoming linguistic barriers within the resistance.

Non-verbal means of intercultural communication such the humming or whistling of songs were also used as identifiers by foreign and national members of the Resistance. This was the case of ‘Le chant des partisans’, one of the most famous songs of the resistance in France, composed in 1943. According to Maurice Druon, the melody of this anthem was used as a signal to inform members of the resistance and Allied pilots that there were no patrols on the border and, therefore, that they could cross the frontier safely into France (1991, p. 69)

In any case, there were limitations to all these strategies. Acutely aware of the situation, attempts were made to promote the learning of languages, particularly French, within the irregular groups of foreign fighters. In fact, this policy of language learning as a key resource for life in hiding was initiated in the refugee camps in France in 1939, where the first resistance networks were formed. These camps, which became concentration camps during WWII, had been set up for the internment of Spanish republicans and members of the International Brigades fleeing Spain at the beginning of 1939. Following the commencement of WWII the camps were also used to intern a diverse group of persons considered
dangerous, traitors and enemies of France such as French and foreign communists, Germans and Austrians, Jews, etc. (Peschanski, 2002)

As early as the spring of 1939, the Communist Party of Spain ordered all members interned in refugee camps in France and North Africa to learn French in order to be able to carry out clandestine actions when they were released or managed to escape (Partido Comunista de España, 1939) The Spanish exiles and International Brigaders in the camps organized “culture huts”, also known as “people’s universities”, and, in the North African desert, “universities of the sand”, from 1939 (Grynberg & Charaudeau, 1994, p. 143; Laharie, 1989, pp. 95-96) These schools offered courses in history, geography, arithmetic and hygiene but the most popular were general culture and languages, especially French, although Spanish, English, German and Italian were also available (Saqué, 1972, p. 164; Yuglá Mariné, 1989, p. 137) Although the figures are incomplete and are for only a small number of camps in France, more than 31,000 inmates are thought to have attended classes in the “culture huts” at the Vernet, Saint-Cyprien, d’Àgde, Gurs and d’Argelès camps, with more than 7,000 studying French or other languages (Luis Martín, 1994, pp. 368-370).

The resources for language learning were rudimentary. Newspapers were restricted in the refugee and internment camps with only those which were favourable to the authorities or apolitical permitted. These newspapers, read aloud or used as reading texts, were the first materials used for learning French. In the camps with libraries classic French novels, dictionaries and books in other languages, donated by humanitarian organizations, were also used (Pelayo, 1989, 66; Jiménez Margalejo, 2008, pp. 96-97) The clandestine political organizations, particularly the communist parties, in the camps soon started to publish bulletins in French, Spanish and German, such as L’Humanité, Voz de España and Arbeiter Zeitung, which also served as texts for language study (Laharie, 1989, p. 95)

Some inmates only learned a few words and basic phrases to survive in France. The Spaniard, Felipe Aberturas, remembered learning the rudiments of French in the camps of Argelés, Bacarès and Bram (2016, p. 408) In contrast, others learned the language well enough to occupy important positions as
intermediaries and leaders of the resistance. This was the case of another Spaniard, Luis Fernández, head of the Spanish guerrilla fighters in France, who learned enough French at the Gurs camp to be able to co-ordinate collaboration with the French maquisard (Garrido, 2006, p. 195)

The minority of foreign fighters who attained fluency in French or already knew it were often placed in intelligence roles. Those with little or no knowledge of French, or with a strong accent, were frequently encouraged to join the maquisard, who were active in the mountains (Hartmann, 1987, p. 124) or to form their own groups. The resistance in France began in a fragmented manner without any hierarchy or co-ordination in 1940. This lack of co-ordination initially prevented the creation of a common linguistic policy, thus favouring the formation of independent resistance groups based on the most spoken languages amongst the foreign fighters in France: Spanish, German and Polish. This led to the development of pragmatic contingency plans for which reason most foreign fighters who spoke one of these languages preferred to join the resistance in France through an organization in which theirs was the predominant language. As a result, they felt more confident, which, in turn, increased their aptitude for clandestine activities.

The armed resistance in France was slowly but steadily organised between 1940 and 1941. Among the irregular groups created during this period, several groups made up of foreign members were important. Polish officials and political leaders created the Organisation Polonaise pour l’Indépendance (POW) in 1940, later renamed Organisation Polonaise de la Lutte pour l’Indépendance (POWN) in 1944. German speakers (Germans, Austrians and Czechs) joined to Travail allemand (TA) in 1941 and the Comité Allemagne libre pour l’Ouest (CALPO) from 1943, while Spanish speakers (Spanish and Latin Americans) generally joined to the Agrupación de Guerrilleros Españoles (AGE), organised in 1941. The AGE mainly comprised irregular armed groups, active in rural areas, while the other organizations were involved in unarmed and armed activities in both rural and urban areas (Ángel, 1971; Fernández, 1973; Brès & Brès, 1987; Bonte, 1969; Zgorniak, 1975)
Although not all their members were communists, the AGE, the TA, the CALPO, the POW and the POWN were created and directed by the communist parties of Spain, France, Germany, and Poland. The part played by the communists in organising foreign fighters in France during WWII was not coincidental. Since the 1920s the PCF had been the most significant political force to defend immigrants in France against a rising tide of xenophobia (Courtois, 1989, p. 16) In fact, the PCF had been managing the linguistic diversity of members and sympathizers since before the war. To prevent the language barrier from affecting integration of immigrants into the party, in 1924 the PCF created the Main d'œuvre Étrangère (MOE), renamed in 1932 Main d'œuvre Immigrée (MOI). Both organizations contained around 12 language sections, which facilitated the incorporation of foreigners into the ranks of the PCF during the 1920s and 1930s (Collin, 2000, p. 13; Bourderon, 1985, p. 24; Courtois, Peschanski & Rayski, 1989, pp. 16, 26-34)

These language sections formed the basis for the creation of the best-organized foreign irregular armed groups in France during WWII. In 1940 the PCF created a paramilitary organization named Organisation spéciale (OS), setting up some groups composed of French fighters and other groups composed of foreign fighters from the language sections of the MOI. This model was replicated in 1943 when the OS groups were converted into the Francs-tireurs et partisans (FTP), known as Francs-tireurs et partisans – Main-d’œuvre immigrée (FTP-MOI) for those formed of foreign fighters. The FTP-MOI groups mainly carried out armed operations (principally sabotage and attacks on buildings, Nazi personnel, and collaborators) in urban environments. Those in Paris, Lyon, Grenoble and Toulouse were particularly active, although there were also less active sections in Marseilles, Nice and Limoges (Courtois, Peschanski & Rayski, 1989, pp. 122-127, 144-149; Collin, 2000, pp. 11-12, 35)

As shown by the PCF’s internal reports during the war, the division between French and foreign groups was intended to overcome the language barrier affecting the foreign fighters. Language groups were also created within the FTP-MOI to reduce obstacles to communication and increase operational
efficiency (Parti Communiste Français, 1943, pp. 29-30) The first detachments in Paris were formed by five language groups, mainly led by former members of the International Brigades, veterans of the Spanish Civil War. There were particularly large numbers of Jews from central and eastern Europe. The first group mainly comprised Romanian Jews from Transylvania, the second Polish Jews, the third Italians, the fourth International Brigade members of different nationalities and the fifth Spaniard (Courtois, Peschanski & Rayski, 1989, pp. 146-149) Over time, and depending on circumstances, the FTP-MOI language groups gradually changed, adapting to contingencies such as arrests or surges in recruitment, but always with the aim of achieving maximum efficiency in terms of language.

Managing Multilingualism

Despite the efforts of the most linguistically diverse resistance groups to create the most homogeneous sections possible the fragile structure of the irregular groups and the unregulated recruitment meant this was not always possible. This is illustrated by at least six armed resistance groups in France with an atypical multilingual composition. Three of these were militarily important: 1) The 35th Brigade FTP-MOI, an urban guerrilla group in Toulouse formed initially of Spanish, Polish, Italians and Jews, later joined by Germans, Romanians, Hungarians and Palestinians (Boursier, 1992, pp. 8, 11, 67, 76, 141, 155, 209; Verbizier, 1994, 42-50); 2) the company led by the French captain known as ‘Roland’ which operated in rural areas of Puy-De-Dôme, comprising French, Spanish, Italians, Yugoslavians and Vietnamese (B. E., 1965, pp. 341-342); and 3) The Montaigne Brigade, led by the German Otto Kühn (or Künhe), operating in the mountains of Lozère, and initially composed of Germans, Czechs, Yugoslavians, Polish, Spanish and French, later joined by Italians, Belgians and Soviets (Bonte, 1969, pp. 193-194, 197, 208; Brès & Brés, 1987, 21, 130-131, 144-145, 157, 205, 222) The remaining three groups were smaller and less is known about them: 1) the Limoux Batallion of the FTP-MOI, led by the German, Helmut Thomas, comprised Germans, Spanish, Italians and Poles (Bonte, 1969, pp. 221-222); 2) the Compagnie Marat, based in Marseilles comprised French, Italians,
Romanians, Spanish, Jews, Armenians, Poles and Germans (Georges-Picot, 2000); and 3) the FTP-MOI group in the Pas-de-Calais region, directed by the Czech, Jósef Kunda, formed of Polish, Czech, Yugoslavian, Hungarian and Spanish fighters (Ouzoulias, 1967, p. 162)

These six groups shared two characteristics: all were led by communist cadres and most original members were former International Brigaders, ex-combatants in the Spanish Civil War. The feelings of camaraderie, the common experience of combat in Spain, the networks constructed in the internment camps in France from 1939 onwards, and the complex idiomatic world created by these transnational soldiers in Spain undoubtedly provided the foundations on which to build these multi-ethnic, multilingual groups.

A recent study has shown how the difficulties experienced by transnational soldiers in the Spanish Civil War led to the development of “a kind of hybrid language which contained words and grammatical structures from several different languages” (Marco & Thomas, 2019, p. 157) The International Brigaders brought this translanguage tool to the resistance in France as a precarious means of communication. Norbert Kugler, the German Jewish military leader of the FTP-MOI in the south of France, “spoke Yiddish badly. He had fought in Spain, but he spoke Spanish badly. French, he massacred. He spoke a mixture of all those languages” (Gildea, 2015, p. 226; Collin, 2000, pp. 114, 157) Claude Lévy gave a similar description of the Polish Jew, Schimmel Gold, alias Charles Michalak, ex-International Brigades and technical leader of the 35th Brigade in Toulouse, who spoke an “international language”, a “mixture of Yiddish, Spanish, Polish and French requiring a double translation” (1994, pp. 48, 141)

Translanguaging was a very limited resource, which, although intended to overcome language barriers in a multilingual context, created more problems than it solved. Consequently, a key role in the resistance in France was that of the language intermediaries, both to facilitate communication within linguistically diverse groups and to establish contact and collaboration between resistance groups which spoke different languages. The role of interpreters became
especially important in 1943 and 1944 during the project to unify the resistance in France, which required co-ordination between different civilian and military groups hitherto unconnected.

This was the task given to David Granda, an exiled Spanish republican, who, due to having worked in France before the war, was able to speak French. In 1943 the resistance movement in St. Georges-de-Mons brought together under military command all the irregular armed groups, previously independent and including a group of Spanish guerrilla fighters. The latter’s leader started to receive his orders in French, “but couldn't read French, so he asked me to act as interpreter [translator]” (1990, pp. 160, 173) Similarly, the Headquarters of the French resistance group in Haute-Savoie asked two young Italians, fluent in French, to take charge of the radio used to communicate with the local Spanish resistance group as these spoke French with such a strong accent that it was impossible to understand them (Maffioletti, 2007, p. 157) This was a recurring situation in all the groups of foreign fighters. For example, the groups composed mainly of Germans looked to French interpreters to aid communication with the local community and with the new leadership of the resistance (Beling, 1987, pp. 29, 58, 62) In addition to French, Russian also became a key language during the final phase of the war due to the high number of escaped Soviet prisoners of war joining the resistance in France with the concomitant need for interpreters to facilitate their integration and co-ordination (Bohacek, 2000, p. 256; Nicolas, 1987, p. 272)

In contrast to regular armies and intelligence agencies, the resistance in France lacked the capacity to recruit professional interpreters and translators and had to resort to members of their organization able to speak two or more languages. These were often former members of the International Brigades who had fought in Spain. Many had a long history of fighting fascism in different European countries, which had enabled them to learn various languages. Artur London, head of the MOI, spoke perfect French, Czech, German, Spanish, Russian and English, also understanding Yugoslavian (Raymond, 1975, 32; London, 1971, p. 114) Mendel Langer Eiger, leader of the 35th Brigade, spoke
German, Yiddish, Spanish and French (Verbizier, 1994, pp. 43-44) One of the members of the resistance with the greatest linguistic ability was the Polish Jew Hillel Gruszkiewicz, alias Robert Bil, a member of the leadership of the FTP-MOI in the north of France and the link with the British intelligence services, who spoke Spanish, French, English, German, Russian, Arabic, Hebrew, Polish and his mother tongue: Yiddish (Diamant, 1984, pp. 51-53) Many of these polyglots were central and eastern European Jews, where multilingualism was frequent (Marco & Thomas, 2019, p. 156) Due to their military experience combined with linguistic ability these former International Brigade members occupied important posts in the hierarchy of the communist resistance in France.

However, these polyglots were a minority amongst the foreign fighters and other sources of linguistic ability were also required. One of the most common groups of language intermediaries in the resistance in France were the children of the first generation of immigrants, who had arrived in France for economic or political reasons. The parents had learned the language and/or integrated with varying degree of success. In contrast, their children had been enrolled in the French education system and were effectively bilingual with double nationality. Consequently, they would play a key part in the war as informal interpreters and translators (Pattinson, 2010, pp. 294-295) A paradigmatic example is that of Richard Andrés, born in Paris in 1913 to Spanish parents and a fluent Spanish and French speaker. A fervent patriot, he joined the organization Le Coq, part of the French movement Combat, after hearing General De Gaulle’s speech of 18th June 1940. A small group of Spanish guerrillas, led by Miguel Vera, who spoke no French, were operating in the Haute-Savoie region. Due to his bilinguism Richard Andrés became the link between the French and Spanish resistance fighters in the region, achieving complete union between them in 1943 (Olivares Salou & Reynaud, 2007, pp. 42-43) Similarly, Captain Victor Gardon, the son of Armenian immigrants, was able to mobilize a large number of Armenians in the Lozère region and integrate them into the resistance thanks to his fluency in French and Armenian (Brès & Brès, 1987, p. 293)
The precarious and contingent nature of the selection of language intermediaries and leaders with language skills was not unique to the irregular armed groups. When Philippe Leclerc initiated the reconstruction of the French Army in Africa following De Gaulle’s orders, he realized that a significant number of soldiers were foreign, especially Spanish republicans. To manage this linguistic diversity he decided, wherever possible, to form groups based on the language spoken by the soldiers. Thus, in July 1943, the 9th Company, popularly known as ‘La Nueve’, was formed and incorporated into the 3rd Battalion of the Marche du Tchad Regiment, in which the official languages were French and Spanish since 80% of its members were Spanish (Gaspar Celaya, 2015, p. 421) Leclerc chose Commander Putz to lead the 3rd Battalion as he knew some Spanish as a result of his participation in the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War. Captain Raymond Dronne was appointed as head of ‘La Nueve’ (Stein, 1983, p. 193) Dronne later stated that Leclerc chose him for his Spanish language skills, although he admitted these were not as impressive as Leclerc believed (1969, p. 372)

To sum up, groups characterized by significant linguistic diversity experienced many difficulties in terms of integration and coordination. As far as possible, efforts were made to avoid organizing multilingual groups. However, the fact that irregular groups were not always able to carry out selective recruitment led to the emergence of some organizations which were linguistically mixed. In this context, these groups had to resort to informal translation and interpretation in order to organize internally and to coordinate with other resistance groups.

Conclusions

There is an apocryphal tale from the end of WWII in France, and constantly repeated in the accounts of Spanish resistance members: the Nazi governor of Paris, General Dietrich von Choltitz, on being arrested in the Hotel Meurice on 25th August 1944 could not understand the first words addressed to
him. The general spoke to his captors in French but the three young men levelling rifles at him did not understand. While they disarmed him, the general asked them where they were from, again in French. “I do understand that. I’m Spanish” replied Antonio Gutiérrez, a member of La Nueve, in halting French (Vilanova, 1969, p. 455; Fernández, 1973, p. 193; Botella Pastor, 1988, p. 272) True or not, with this story the Spanish were showing that, despite the language barrier, foreign fighters could still be at the forefront of the resistance in France.

References to the Tower of Babel, the biblical story in which God punishes humanity’s hubris by cursing it with linguistic division, are constant when discussing the different aspects of the resistance in France, from the internment camps to the armed resistance groups (Koestler, 2006, p. p. 80; Muracciole, 2009, p. 60; Serrano, Aragón & Puerta, 2014, p. 69) Boris Matline, known in hiding as Gaston Laroche, stated, decades later, that, with the exception of the multinational Soviet Union, France was the country where the role of foreigners in confronting the Nazi occupation was the most diverse and intense. In this linguistic and ethnic melting-pot, individual polyglots of his type were vitally important. Born in Russia, he emigrated to France with his parents to become, in the 1940s, one of the leaders of the FTP-MOI. His skills in Russian, French, Spanish, German and English enabled him to create channels of communication between the different linguistic groups in the resistance in France (Laroche, 1965, p. 21)

However, the number of polyglots able to contribute was small, as, unlike the regular armies and intelligence agencies such as the British SOE and SIS, and the North American OSS, the resistance movement possessed neither the capacity nor the infrastructure to recruit and train its members for these vital linguistic roles. In 1939 Spanish exiles and International Brigaders incarcerated in camps in France organised “culture huts” where thousands of prisoners made an effort to learn the basics of French, Spanish, English, German, and Italian. Some individuals also tried to grasp some rudimentary knowledge of French grammar and expression in their underground lives, but language learning in the resistance was precarious and improvised due to the clandestine nature of the organization.
Despite all these efforts, a huge number of foreign fighters had a limited knowledge of French. In this context, they adopted different procedures to overcome the linguistic barrier such as gestures, non-verbal codes, or dictionaries. Nevertheless, these precarious methods were not sufficient to achieve the construction of an efficient clandestine network.

Consequently, the resistance in France had to develop strategies to overcome the language barriers resulting from the enormous linguistic diversity of its members. One of the measures adopted was to encourage the transfer of non-French speakers or those who struggled with the language's vocal cues to the mountains. In contrast, those foreigners with a good command of French and its vocal cues were more likely to operate in the public space of the cities where they would not arouse suspicion.

Foreign members of the resistance tended to organize themselves around language, particularly around those most widely-spoken: Spanish, German, Polish, Yiddish and Italian. This increased the efficiency of the groups and enabled greater recruitment amongst the different linguistic communities in France. In this sense, the transnational networks built during the Spanish Civil War were the basis of some of the most prominent foreign irregular armed groups in France during the Second World War. These networks were also assembled using the previous structures created by the PCF to organise foreign workers during the 1920s and 1930s: the language sections of the Main d'œuvre Étrangère (MOE), later named Main d'œuvre Immigrée (MOI). Both of these networks and structures merged in the new clandestine groups set up by the PCF to channel foreign members into the resistance: the Organisation spéciale (OS) from 1940, transformed into the Francs-tireurs et partisans – Main-d'œuvre immigrée (FTP-MOI), made up of foreign fighters.

Along with these organisations linked to the PCF, there were also other language-based groups who operated under the umbrella of the resistance in France with some autonomy. In this sense, the high number of Polish, German and Spanish speakers in France boosted the creation of national organisations such as the Organisation Polonaise de la Lutte pour l'Indépendance (POWN),
Travail allemand (TA), the Comité Allemagne libre pour l’Ouest (CALPO), and the Agrupación de Guerrilleros Españoles (AGE) This one-language organisations allowed thousands of immigrants and exiles to became members of the resistance in France within their own linguistic comfort zones.

However, as the war progressed, the processes of unification and coordination among the resistance groups in France were strengthened. In this context, groups made up of foreigners needed to establish fluid channels of communication between them and their French counterparts. Faced with this situation, two types of members became informal interpreters and translators: dozens of international brigadiers who had accrued multilingual experience through their participation in the Spanish Civil War, and the children of immigrants and political exiles in France, whose bilingualism was vital in building a bridge between two different resistance communities. They were also crucial to the (exceedingly rare) multilingual groups which existed within the resistance in France. These groups were able to survive thanks to the work of these bilingual and polyglot fighters.

Language policies among the resistance in France were contingent, fluid, and responsive to changing situations. The nature of clandestine activity, and of the irregular groups themselves shaped the process. However, the work undertaken around languages not only improved the efficiency of the resistance, through co-ordinating the different language groups in France, but also took on great symbolic importance. The ethnic and linguistic melting-pot of the resistance in France was the direct antithesis of the fascism it sought to overthrow.

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