

## 8 The Charles de Gaulle's Appeal of 18 June 1940 as a 'lieu de mémoire'

Between the categories of material and immaterial heritage, whose fundamental distinction is well-established, intermediary forms of heritage exist. The historian Pierre Nora conceptualised, developed, and popularised the theory of 'lieux de mémoire'<sup>535</sup> (sites of memory). According to Nora, memory does not only materialise in localised spaces or in a designated territory. It can also be 'unrooted', abstract, and can take all imaginable forms: a flag, a hymn, a slogan, even a speech. Certain speeches have created heritage and become inscribed in collective memory.<sup>536</sup>

To examine this process, this chapter focuses on Charles de Gaulle's famous 'Appeal' launched from London on 18 June 1940 to urge the French people to resist as Maréchal Pétain was about to sign the armistice that would hand military victory to Nazi Germany. What makes this a particularly useful case study is that the speech has also become a myth. It is a 'monument' within the memorial fabric of France. It has been designated the origin of the resistance movement against the Vichy regime and the German occupation (which is not entirely accurate). It is commemorated each year in France. All school children are supposed to know about it. In short, it is a cornerstone of French patriotic heritage. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the memory of the Appeal was institutionalised. On 19 March 2006, the *Journal Officiel* n° 67 published a decree establishing 18 June as a 'national day commemorating Charles de Gaulle's historic appeal to refuse defeat and pursue combat against the enemy'. It also received international recognition when it was inscribed on UNESCO's Memory of the World Register in 2005.

Memory, which arises from affect, is not history whose starting point is intellect. The historicization of memory can provoke an effect of desac-

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535 Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire*, Paris, Gallimard/Quarto, 1997. Published in English in a 3-volume edition by Columbia University Press as *Realms of Memory* (1996–98).

536 An example is the speech that Winston Churchill gave to students in Fulton, Missouri on 5 March 1946, during which he proclaimed: 'From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent.'

realisation. As Pierre Nora states: 'Memory installs remembrance within the sacred; history, always prosaic, releases it again.'<sup>537</sup> Recent work by historians has revealed that the file submitted to UNESCO contained two serious errors. The submission was said to include the 'manuscript text of the Appeal broadcast on BBC radio on 18 June 1940', and that its 'authenticity' is confirmed by a handwritten line and de Gaulle's signature in the margin on the reverse side of the second sheet ('Authentic manuscript of my Appeal of 18 June 1940. C. de Gaulle'). A hand-written calling card from Madame de Gaulle, front and back, was also submitted: 'Manuscript of the Appeal of 18 June (which is at the B. de F. at Chaumont). This manuscript was given to me by the General in London on 19 June 1940. He told me: Carefully preserve these manuscripts. If I succeed, they will form part of our children's heritage'.

As surprising as it seems today, unlike other speeches delivered by de Gaulle at the BBC during the Second World War, no recording of the Appeal of 18 June 1940 was preserved. It could thus be said that there is no definitive proof that this speech was delivered. This 'monument' has been the subject of recent discussions amongst historians, leading to new research and interpretations. The discovery of new documents has revealed that the text presented for submission to UNESCO was not the one delivered at the BBC on 18 June 1940. For the first time, it has been possible to establish an 'authentic' version of the speech. Moreover, artificial intelligence has made what seemed unimaginable some years ago a reality: this speech can now be heard. Reflecting on this example reveals the new perspectives opening up within the study of heritage.

### *June 1940: Winston Churchill welcomes Charles de Gaulle to London*

The Appeal of 18 June 1940, launched by Charles de Gaulle in London, has become a myth and the cornerstone of the French Resistance's heritage. As France succumbed body and spirit to defeat, one man alone on foreign soil tried to tell the French people that hope was not lost. It was an incredible act of defiance representing unparalleled foresight and maximum risk, and de Gaulle was aware of it, writing in his memoirs: 'I seemed to myself,

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537 Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Représentations*, No. 26, Special Issue: 'Memory and Counter-Memory' (Spring, 1989), pp. 7–24, (p. 8).

alone as I was and deprived of everything, like a man on the shore of an ocean, proposing to swim across.<sup>538</sup> Very few French people heard this extraordinary speech. For those that did, the words of an unknown general in exile were not viewed as credible and no one flocked towards him. Establishing the circumstances that led to this speech offers better understanding of its historical context.

On 3 June 1940, de Gaulle wrote to then-Prime Minister of France Paul Reynaud: 'Our initial defeat comes from the enemy's application of my own ideas and our command's refusal to apply those same ideas. After this terrible lesson, you were alone in supporting me, you found yourself in power partly because you supported me and it was known. But having gained power, you abandoned us to men of the past...'<sup>539</sup> De Gaulle had known Reynaud well from 1935 onwards. In the National Assembly, Reynaud was spokesperson for de Gaulle's ideas in favour of creating tank corps to relaunch the offensive. De Gaulle had developed these ideas in *Vers l'armée de métier* (1934) and *Le fil de l'épée* (1932), but the French high command, under the influence of Pétain's conservatism, did not judge them useful enough to consider. France's defeat in the space of weeks, followed by the invasion of two thirds of its territory, gave weight to them. It was a long time before historical analysis was heard in France that recognised it was less 'the insufficiency of means than the manner of making use of them that penalised the French army'.<sup>540</sup> The men were indeed defeated. They lacked material, the strategy was ill-adapted, and the government was unstable.

On 5 June 1940, de Gaulle was named Under Secretary of State for National Defence and War in a government led by Paul Reynaud (March 1940–16 June 1940) that had been voted in by a parliamentary majority. De Gaulle immediately requested to meet with the new British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to help give a more dynamic image of the French government. Reynaud instructed him: 'You will see Mr Churchill and you will tell him that the reshuffling of my cabinet and your presence at my side are the signs of our resolution'.<sup>541</sup> By 9 June, de Gaulle was in London where he met the British Prime Minister at 10 Downing Street

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538 *Complete War Memoirs of Charles de Gaulle*, trans. by Jonathan Griffin, 3 vols, Simon and Schuster, 1968, vol. 1, p. 80.

539 Cited in Jean Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, t.1, Paris, Seuil, 1984, p.320.

540 Jean-Pierre Azéma, « Le choc armé et les débandades », in Jean-Pierre et Bédarida, François (ed.), *La France des années noires. T.1 : De la défaite à Vichy*, Paris, Seuil Points-Histoire, 2000, p. 105.

541 *Complete War Memoirs of Charles de Gaulle*, p. 54

for the first time. Of this meeting, he later wrote, 'That day I explained to the British Prime Minister what the French Premier had instructed me to tell him as regards our government's will to continue the struggle even, if need be, in the Empire.'<sup>542</sup> Churchill told the French government's envoy that he did not believe in the possibility of a victory in France and that he could not send any new RAF squadrons. De Gaulle was disappointed but comforted by Churchill's determination, writing 'The impression he gave me confirmed me in my conviction that Great Britain, led by such a fighter, would certainly not flinch'.<sup>543</sup> In the Prime Minister's circle, it was said that this young and energetic man made a good impression. The two men, against all reason, against the ruthless admission on the French army's fate, had the same faith in peoples' capacity to resist domination by Hitler.

The German army reached Paris on 14 June 1940. The final hour was near. The French government took refuge in Bordeaux. On 15 June, de Gaulle headed to Brittany to carry out a mission. At dawn the next day, he boarded the navy destroyer *Milan* in Brest bound for London. His mission: discuss with the British the conditions for transferring the French government to North Africa. At the Hyde Park Hotel, he met Jean Monnet, head of the Anglo-French Purchasing Committee, and Charles Corbin, the French ambassador in London. They presented him with a proposal of a 'Franco-British union' foreseeing the complete and immediate fusion of the two countries and their institutions. This incredible proposal could only clash at full force with the anglophobia within the upper echelons of the military hierarchy, symbolised by Maréchal Pétain and influenced by the nationalism of Charles Maurras. De Gaulle understood that it could create an advantageous psychological shock, 'an element of comfort'<sup>544</sup> at a time when all seemed lost. Before going for lunch with the British Prime Minister at the Carlton Club, de Gaulle learnt that Reynaud had summoned his cabinet to examine a request for an armistice. Churchill responded to Reynaud that his government was not against an armistice on the condition that the French navy fleet was immediately transferred to English ports. The lunch focused on this question of the fleet. De Gaulle felt obliged to tell Churchill the fact he did not oppose an armistice between France and Germany was 'an unpleasant surprise': it was a sign of resignation and that

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542 *Ibid.*, p. 58.

543 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

544 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

Britain 'attach[ed] little value to [the two countries'] alliance'.<sup>545</sup> Despite everything, de Gaulle put forward the proposal of a Franco-British union, which Churchill and his cabinet accepted. De Gaulle called Reynaud to let him know. Churchill took the phone from de Gaulle's hands: 'Hullo, Reynaud! De Gaulle is right! Our proposal may have great consequences. You must hold out!'<sup>546</sup>

That very evening, de Gaulle returned to France. When his flight landed in Bordeaux at nine-thirty, he was told that Reynaud had just resigned and Pétain had been invited to form a government. The news profoundly affected De Gaulle. He did not yet know that his destiny would dramatically change. He met with Reynaud and confided that he wanted to leave for England to conceive a new plan. Reynaud gave him 100,000 francs in secret funds. De Gaulle then went to a hotel where he met with the British ambassador Sir Ronald Campbell, who, with Churchill's agreement, decided that General Spears would accompany him on the flight. On 17 June 1940 at 10 o'clock in the morning, de Gaulle flew to London. Just before boarding the flight, he is said to have proclaimed: 'The Germans have lost the war. They have lost and France must pursue the fight'.

In the early afternoon on 17 June, Churchill welcomed the two generals, de Gaulle and Spears.<sup>547</sup> It was the fifth meeting between de Gaulle and the British prime minister. Churchill had the immediate intuition that this man, who had shown perseverance and courage, who in some respects had saved France's honour, would be the face of a France that refused to accept defeat, and perhaps even the France of tomorrow. When later contemplating this meeting, De Gaulle wrote: 'Washed up from a vast shipwreck upon the shores of England, what could I have done without his help? He gave it me at once'. His first action was to make himself known: 'The first thing to do was to hoist the colours. Broadcasting was to hand for that'. Churchill immediately put the BBC at his disposal: 'We agreed that I should use it after the Pétain government had asked for the armistice'.<sup>548</sup>

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545 *Ibid.*, p. 76.

546 *Ibid.*, p. 77.

547 L Spears, *Two Men who Saved France*, London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1966, p. 157.

548 *Complete War Memoirs of Charles de Gaulle*, p. 83

*General de Gaulle's Appeal of 18 June 1940 at the BBC was not recorded*

De Gaulle spent his first night of exile in London. The next day was 18 June, the day it would all begin. The myth would be born. Yet, the road that led to this famous Appeal was fraught with difficulties.

The first difficulty came from the members of the War Cabinet who, towards midday, judged that an untimely intervention might have an impact on the actions of the new French government whose politics were not yet known. The British feared the surrender of the French navy and could not risk a complete break with Maréchal Pétain. Negotiations were held. It was necessary to consider the Foreign Office's view. Contrary to what de Gaulle suggests in his memoirs, he could speak on the BBC on the condition that his speech was submitted to the Foreign Office beforehand. The Foreign Office feared that a subversive speech from de Gaulle would compromise relations between the British government and Pétain's new government. The Appeal of 18 June was therefore reviewed by British authorities. At the beginning of the afternoon, over a late lunch, General Spears and the Minister of Information Alfred Duff Cooper informed de Gaulle of the British government's position. A modification to the text needed to be made, a fact that de Gaulle never wanted to be known. At around five o'clock in the evening, Churchill gave his agreement on the condition that cabinet members also agreed. Above all, de Gaulle's untimely speech could not compromise the mission that the British Minister for Colonies Lord Lloyd was to carry out in Bordeaux on 19 June.

The Appeal is a myth that was forcefully extracted from a set of complicated circumstances. Since its radio broadcast was not preserved, little is verifiably known about it, and it is often confused with the speech de Gaulle made on 22 June, which was recorded. The 18 June speech is the first appeal from London that de Gaulle made to the French people. The Appeal's four-page manuscript was preserved. Given the British government asked for changes, whether it was read in its entirety on the radio cannot be proven. After Elisabeth de Miribel typed up this manuscript,<sup>549</sup> were subsequent modifications made by de Gaulle and/or the British authorities? It is perhaps more apt to speak of the *Appeals* of 18 June. For a long time, there was no concrete evidence for the precise time that the speech was made, with suggestions of 6 o'clock, 8 o'clock, 10 o'clock.<sup>550</sup> The memories

549 Elisabeth de Miribel, *La liberté souffre violence*, Paris, Plon, 1981, p. 38.

550 Aurélie Luneau, *Radio Londres, 1940–1944*, Paris, Perrin-Tempus, 2010, p. 40.

of the main actors vary. There is further confusion with the text published in *The Times* on 5 August 1940, which, even today, is frequently presented as a poster with two tricolour flags and the title: 'To the French people. France has lost a battle! But France has not lost the war!' This magnificent and heroic maxim was immortalised in the commemorations and forever inscribed into French patriotic heritage. De Gaulle, however, did not utter these words on 18 June 1940. These conflicting versions demonstrate the central tension that exists between simplifications of heritage narratives, the power of myth, and the demands of historical knowledge.

Recent historical research has identified tangible contemporary traces of fact. The Appeal of 18 June 1940 did indeed exist as numerous direct witnesses have attested: de Gaulle's aide-de-camp Geoffroy Chodron de Courcel; Elisabeth de Miribel who typed up the text; Stephen Tallents, Controller of Public Relations at the BBC; the young English journalist Patrick Smith who checked the text of the Appeal for the censor; and Elizabeth Barker, a British assistant who was tasked with accompanying de Gaulle in the studio. Barker later recounted, 'He appeared very calm but quite tense as if he was concentrating all his strength in that one moment. I am sure that he didn't see anyone else who was in the studio, nothing but the microphone, which he stared at as if he could see beyond the device.'<sup>551</sup> French speakers present, amongst many others, also vouched for its existence.<sup>552</sup> Without knowing it would become 'historic', one of them said the 'historic' phrase: 'And now, General de Gaulle, former Under Secretary of State, speaks to you'.

Some journalists in France heard the Appeal and transcribed it for their newspapers — a somewhat surprising fact considering that de Gaulle, outside of the small circle of experts on questions of defence, was largely unknown to the French people. He had only just 'provisionally' been made brigadier general. The 19 June 1940 edition of the newspaper *Le Petit Provençal*,<sup>553</sup> presents its own transcription of de Gaulle's speech. This version of the Appeal begins with two sentences: 'The French government has asked the enemy for the conditions to cease fighting. It declared that if

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551 Account by Elizabeth Barker, *Le Figaro littéraire*, 17 June 1965. After the war, Barker confirmed that de Gaulle's speech had not been recorded. This indifference sums up how little importance was given to his intervention.

552 Such as Jean Marin and Jean Oberlé (one of the regular presenters of the BBC programme « Les Français parlent aux Français »).

553 Other newspapers mentioned the Appeal, including *Marseille-Matin*, *Le Petit Marseillais*, and *Le Progrès de Lyon*.

these conditions were contrary to the honour, dignity, and independence of France, combat must continue.'

These two phrases, however, do not appear in the 'canonical' speech of 18 June 1940 found on the official website of the Fondation Charles de Gaulle in Paris.<sup>554</sup> The 'official' version of the Appeal was published in the first *Bulletin Officiel des Forces Françaises Libres* on 15 August 1940, under the title 'Le premier appel du général de Gaulle' (General de Gaulle's First Appeal).<sup>555</sup> It begins with two sentences that are different to those from *Le Petit Provençal*: 'The leaders who, for numerous years, have been at the head of the French armed forces, have formed a government. Alleging the defeat of our armies, this government has entered into negotiations with the enemy with a view to cease fighting.' Its tone is more offensive and stigmatises the upper echelons of the military hierarchy. The phrase 'cease fighting' (*cesser le combat*) is taken directly from Pétain's speech.

Transcribed text after listening to the BBC	'Official' text of the Appeal of 18 June 1940
The French government has asked the enemy for the conditions to cease fighting. It declared that if these conditions were contrary to the honour, dignity, and independence of France, combat must continue.	The leaders who, for numerous years, have been at the head of the French armed forces, have formed a government. Alleging the defeat of our armies, this government has entered into negotiations with the enemy with a view to cease fighting.

It is important to note that the complete manuscript version of the Appeal was only released by de Gaulle's son Admiral de Gaulle in 2010.<sup>556</sup> It is easy to understand why: if General de Gaulle, the incarnation of the Resistance against Vichy and the Germans, thought that the so-called 'Vichy'<sup>557</sup> government could act with 'honour' and 'dignity', it then follows that this government was not intrinsically dishonourable, the polar opposite of what de Gaulle's subsequent speeches would attempt to demonstrate.

554 Henri Amouroux was the first to raise this inconsistency in *Le 18 juin 40*, Paris, Fayard, 1990, p. 341–342.

555 Facsimile reproduction in Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac, *L'Appel du 18 juin et les appels du général de Gaulle des mois de juin à juillet 1940*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2010, p. 124.

556 Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac, *De Gaulle, la République et la France libre, 1940–1945*, Paris, 2014, p. 49.

557 Following the defeat of the French military and German occupation, France was divided into two with the Loire River acting as a demarcating line: the Occupied Zone was governed directly by the enemy in the North (including Paris) and in the non-occupied, so-called 'free', zone in the South. The spa town Vichy, with its many hotels, was in the southern zone.



For the British government, this appeal would appear too violent towards a government that had not yet signed the armistice and over whom they still hoped to exert some influence. It was necessary to avoid any potential provocation in the eyes of the French military leaders, even if events would show de Gaulle's pre-war predictions against the French army were correct. The British thought that it would be possible to negotiate with the newly formed Pétain government and influence its politics. One of the crucial issues was the fate of the French fleet. It was necessary to impose moderation, silence even, on the impulsive de Gaulle. For this reason, it seems certain that these two sentences had to be removed at the request of the British government. New evidence that proves these sentences were not pronounced on 18 June has recently been uncovered.

### A (Self-)Censored Text?

The Swiss Federal Archives hold a contemporary institutional account of de Gaulle's Appeal from London on 18 June 1940, which was discovered purely by chance by doctoral student Christian Rossé during a research trip to Bern in 2008.<sup>558</sup> The text was transcribed after the BBC broadcast and appeared in the Bulletin n°153 published by *Gruppe Ohr* (the Swiss military's listening service for the press and radio). It was written in German on 19 June 1940 at 6 o'clock in the morning. The translation of the account reads: 'The French government has asked the enemy which honourable conditions could cease fighting. Moreover, it declared that fighting must continue if these conditions were *contrary to the honour, dignity, and independence of France*' (my italics). Whilst this formulation is very close to the version found in *Le Petit Provençal* newspaper, it is completely different to the text that is part of the 'official' heritage, which begins: 'The leaders who, for numerous years, have been at the head of the French armed forces, have formed a government. Alleging the defeat of our armies, this government has entered into negotiations with the enemy with a view to cease fighting.'

These two very different sources corroborate that the Appeal of 18 June started with the notion of upholding France's 'honour', which was then removed from the 'official' version, the version that became part of the

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558 I supervised Christian Rossé's thesis on the Swiss special services during the Second World War. Rossé brought the account to my attention. He also mentioned his discovery on a website on 6 July 2008, but no one took any interest in it until 2023.

country's 'heritage'. It can thus be supposed that the Pétain's new government was able to ask itself the question of 'honour' and 'dignity' (whilst de Gaulle, according to witnesses, had immediately classed Pétain as a 'traitor') and would have been able to envisage continuing fighting. Consequently, if Pétain's government accepted the conditions to cease fighting, i.e. the armistice, it could do so all the while preserving France's 'honour' with the desire to continue fighting in a different way (for example, leaving for Algeria). This was the view of the British cabinet which did not share de Gaulle's more radical position. On the basis of all evidence, De Gaulle had to accept a compromise. Yet, admitting that would have meant recognising, by taking refuge in London, he was obliged to comply with the orders of British authorities, a fact that does not square with the legend of a heroic man who would not compromise on his principles. After the war, de Gaulle responded to a journalist who asked him if the text had been read by Churchill: 'In my life, I have never shown any of my texts. To no one.'<sup>559</sup>

This is the 'official' version of the Appeal of 18 June, which corresponds to the draft manuscript that was preserved:

'The leaders who, for numerous years, have been at the head of the French armed forces, have formed a government. Alleging the defeat of our armies, this government has entered into negotiations with the enemy with a view to cease fighting. It is quite true that we were, and still are, overwhelmed by the enemy's mechanised forces, both on the ground and in the air. It was the tanks, the planes, and the tactics of the Germans, far more than the fact that we were outnumbered, that forced our armies to retreat. It was the German tanks, planes, and tactics that surprised our leaders and led them to their position today. But has the last word been said? Must we abandon all hope? Is our defeat definitive? No! Speaking in full knowledge of the facts, believe me when I say that the cause of France is not lost. The very factors that brought about our defeat may one day lead us to victory. For France does not stand alone! She is not alone! She is not alone! Behind her is a vast empire, and she can make common cause with the British Empire, which commands the seas and is continuing the struggle. Like England, she can draw unreservedly on the immense industrial resources of the United States. This war is not limited to the territory of our unfortunate country. The outcome of the war has not been decided by the battle of France. This

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559 Interview with General de Gaulle by Henri Amouroux, *Paris-Match*, n°1124, 21 November 1970.

war is a world war. All the mistakes, all the delays, all the suffering, the fact remains that there still exists in the world everything we need to crush our enemies one day. Today we have been hit hard by the sheer weight of mechanised force hurled against us, but, in future, with an even greater mechanised force, we can be victorious. The destiny of the world is at stake. I, General de Gaulle, now in London, call on all French officers and soldiers who are at present on British soil, or may be in the future, with or without their arms; I call on all engineers and skilled workers from the armaments factories who are at present on British soil, or may be in the future, to join me. Whatever happens, the flame of French resistance must not and shall not die.

Tomorrow I shall broadcast again from London. Charles de Gaulle’.

This text is based on the original version typed up by Elisabeth de Miribel, but it was not the speech that de Gaulle delivered on 18 June 1940. Changes were introduced in the interim. All evidence suggests that de Gaulle’s proposal was tempered by the British government who wanted to wait to hear Germany’s conditions in response to Pétain’s request of an armistice. De Gaulle wrongly states in his *War Memories* that he recorded a speech the next day, 19 June 1940, as it was not broadcast.<sup>560</sup> The British government had no other choice but to block it. The speech begins as follows:

‘Frenchmen must now be fully aware that all ordinary forms of authority have disappeared.

Faced with the bewilderment of the French people, with the disintegration of a government fallen under the servitude of the enemy, with the fact that our institutions are incapable of functioning, I, General de Gaulle, a soldier and military leader, realise that I now speak for France. In the name of France, I make the following declaration: all French men who still bear arms are bound by duty to continue the resistance. For them to lay down their arms, to abandon any position of military importance, or agree to hand over any part of French territory, however small, to enemy control would be a crime against our country. At this time, I speak above all for French North Africa – for the whole of French North Africa. The Italian armistice is nothing but a clumsy trap. In the Africa of Clauzel, Bugeaud, Lyautey, and Noguès, all that represents

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560 J.-L. Crémieux-Brilhac, *De Gaulle, la République et la France libre*, op.cit., p. 56.

honour has the strict duty to refuse to carry out the conditions imposed by the enemy. We will not tolerate the panic of Bordeaux crossing the sea. Soldiers of France, wherever you may be, arise!

In this speech, de Gaulle crossed a line. From now on, he spoke 'in the name of France'. Knowing how History turned out, it is difficult to determine how prophetic, but also how audacious this assertion was. He severely criticised the government: France's government had fallen into 'servitude'. He believed hope of a resistance movement could develop in North Africa. The British government could not support such a radical position. As J.-L. Crémieux-Brilhac stresses, up until 22 June 1940, the British cabinet was 'focused on the dual goal of ensuring that the French navy fleet evaded German hands and encouraging all or part of Pétain's government and the political French elite to take refuge in North Africa'.<sup>561</sup>

All would change once the conditions of the armistice, signed on 22 June, were known. The only appeal that was certainly broadcast in its entirety was that of 22 June 1940. Those who heard it subsequently confused it with that of 18 June. Indeed, it can be seen as a sort of mix of the first two. In addition to condemning the armistice, it presents the same theme of betrayal, enslavement and the demand for resistance and dignity: 'It can therefore be said that this armistice would not only mean capitulation, but also servitude.' The 'higher interests of the country' are put in danger. But, as de Gaulle explains, it is not only about France. What was at stake was France's word given to its allies, and therefore the country's honour: 'I say honour, for France has committed to only lay down arms with the agreement with her allies. As long as the allies continue the war, her government has no right to surrender to the enemy. The Polish, Norwegian, Belgian, Netherlands, and Luxemburg governments, though driven from their territories, understood their duty.' After a reminder of these principles, which de Gaulle, as a military man who wrote on army reform, was well placed to understand, he begins to speak about the causes of the defeat. Whilst he does not fail to mention 'the defeatist spirit shown by the government' in the final moments of the battle, blame is specifically attributed to the military: 'a faulty military system, mistakes in carrying out operations.'

After having denounced and criticised, the last third of the speech traces a potential route to hope in the final third of the speech. De Gaulle reminds listeners that France has resources, 'a vast empire', the 'fleet is intact', and

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561 J.-L. Crémieux-Brilhac, *L'Appel du 18 juin...*, *op.cit.*, p. 36.

the country possesses 'large sums in gold'. She also has 'allies with immense resources who dominate the seas', and there are 'the gigantic potentialities of American industry'. Neutral countries could also change their position and join the side of 'freedom', just as Germany's allies will not always remain her allies. De Gaulle asks listeners to abandon a Franco-French approach and understand that this war is a 'world war' that will not be decided in one single battle. The central and genius idea of this speech (and the actions of de Gaulle) is to consider that the French people must testify to the fact that France does not accept its submission otherwise, when 'powers of freedom' prevail, France will be despised by the future victors:

'If the powers of freedom ultimately triumph over those of servitude, what will be the fate of a France that submitted to the enemy? Honour, common sense, and the higher interests of the country require that all free French people continue the fight, wherever they may be and as best they can.'<sup>562</sup>

Based on the two sources discovered (*Le Provençal* and the transcript from the Swiss secret services), it is evident that the two mythical sentences at the beginning of the Appeal, found on the posters distributed in August 1940, were not pronounced on 18 June 1940: 'France has lost a battle! But France has not lost the war!' The same is true for the following sentence: 'I, General de Gaulle, am undertaking this national task here in England.'<sup>563</sup>

### *Can AI reproduce the truth?*

*Le Monde's* video service<sup>564</sup> had the idea of reconstructing the radiophonic version of de Gaulle's famous speech of 18 June 1940 and approached the music technology institute IRCAM and its spinout company Iqram Amplify, which specialises in new artificial intelligence technology.<sup>565</sup> IRCAM had already tested out a method that aims to make the archives speak in the documentary *Juger Pétain* produced by the TV channel Arte. The

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562 The translations of these three speeches were adapted from English versions of the transcripts available here: 'The flame of French resistance', *The Guardian*: <https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2007/apr/29/greatspeeches>

563 Aurélie Luneau, *Radio Londres, 1940–1944*, *op.cit.*, p. 43.

564 The project was initiated by Charles-Henry Groult, director of video services at *Le Monde*. [https://www.lemonde.fr/videos/video/2023/01/18/moi-general-de-gaulle-l-appel-du-18-juin-peut-il-etre-reconstitue\\_6158301\\_1669088.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/videos/video/2023/01/18/moi-general-de-gaulle-l-appel-du-18-juin-peut-il-etre-reconstitue_6158301_1669088.html)

project sought to give voice to silent archival images from Pétain's trial, so researchers at IRCAM reconstructed the voices of Pétain and other actors. To develop *Le Monde's* idea, the team employed 'voice cloning' technology, which uses artificial intelligence. Axel Roebel, Research Director at Ircam, explains: 'We developed an information model that can automatically reproduce all the emotions and dynamic articulations of an existing voice.' The technology first needs to establish what could be called a 'sonorous DNA', which can then be reproduced or modified. That DNA distinguishes the technology from existing text-to-speech tools, which produce a synthetic and robotic voice. Vocal cloning offers an authentic reconstruction of a voice by conserving its characteristics and its naturalness, meaning its tessitura, rhythm, tone, mode of articulation, and volume. The emotive dimension of a speech can thus be reproduced. After all, the Appeal is not a written text, but a speech delivered in dramatic circumstances which has become a founding myth.

This experiment sought to reproduce the real Appeal of 18 June 1940, so historians played a central role. Rossé was contacted, and he took the journalist from *Le Monde* to the Berne archives to consult the transcript. The result is unquestionably a work of historical research, which shows, it should be noted, that artificial intelligence cannot surpass human intelligence and the specialist skill set of professional historians. The translation of the transcript from German to French was given careful attention and supported by researchers. The technology needed to be trained on samples from speeches given by de Gaulle at the BBC during the war to create a vocal identity. Finally, the actor François Morel lent his voice, so that it could be transformed into that of de Gaulle.

The ethical question, which sparked some debate, was to determine whether it is lawful to give voice to someone who is dead and to exchange voice identities.<sup>566</sup> Transforming de Gaulle into a voice clone may seem disrespectful to some, but it could also be seen as a resurrection that immortalises this rediscovered speech and gives it new life. In doing so, the experiment conducted by *Le Monde* also dispels with another myth: that

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565 Ircam Amplify/Equipe Analyse et synthèse des sons – Laboratoire STMS (IRCAM, CNRS, Sorbonne Université, Ministère de la Culture). With the support of the Agence Nationale de la Recherche as part of TheVoice and ARS projects.

566 Elsewhere, I have explored the question of whether it is appropriate to colourise film archives. See Robert Belot, « Apocalypse, un documentaire sur la Seconde Guerre mondiale », revue *Vingtième Siècle*, July–September 2010, p 171–175.

artificial intelligence can work without humans, based on machine learning alone, which will condemn historians to unemployment. Machine learning can offer a lot. In this case, the technology provides an important resource for history and its diffusion. As Fabienne Charraire writes: 'All is believable but not real. It cannot be described as a deepfake because, to dispel any potential criticism, the project is presented as it is: the voice of General de Gaulle recreated using a speech reviewed by historians and read by an actor. Nothing has been added to the text. The project team has not made this famous speaker say any words that he did not speak.'<sup>567</sup>

In their work reproducing 'historical voices', ICRAM aims to respect a protocol that guarantees the ethicality of its approach: 'What is said by the synthetic voice must have already been said or written in real life', explains Frédéric Amadu, Chief Technology Officer at Ircam Amplify.<sup>568</sup> Yet, he also interrogated the possible derivatives of similar technologies: 'How are open access tools used? Is there any oversight? Are their terms of use respected? Are these tools open to abuse or manipulation?' The problem is more delicate for historical figures for whom no sound source exists. The Centre des monuments nationaux, for example, gave voice to Francis I following the inauguration of the Cité internationale de la langue française at the Château de Villers-Cotterêts in 2023. The tour includes a reading by the monarch of the Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts, which imposed the use of French in administrative and legal deeds. Similarly, there have been suggestions to make an Egyptian mummy speak.

Artificial intelligence offers new perspective for archaeoacoustics,<sup>569</sup> establishing a path between science and fiction. Sound is a fundamental dimension of historical reality, but it is difficult to create heritage from it. Sound is rarely part of museum collections. A time will come when it will be unimaginable that a museum on, say, the Great War will not reconstruct a soundscape of what the soldiers had to endure at the front, or that an industrial museum would not recreate the noise of the infernal

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567 Fabienne Charraire, « Trois approches pour recréer les voix du passé » <https://balises.bpi.fr/recreer-les-voix-du-passe/>

568 « Comment l'appel du 18 juin 1940 du général De Gaulle a été reconstitué grâce à l'intelligence artificielle » <https://www.lesnumeriques.com/vie-du-net/comment-l-appel-du-18-juin-1940-du-general-de-gaulle-a-ete-reconstitue-grace-a-l-intelligence-artificielle-n205099.html>

569 Juliette Volcler, « Entendre le passé », *Syntone*, 23 novembre 2016. <https://syntone.fr/ecouter-le-passe/>

machine-tools that workers were subjected to during the triumphant age of industrialisation, currently only found in photographic reproductions.

### *Conclusion*

The example of the Appeal of 18 June 1940 offers important insight into the heritage making process. First, it encourages a questioning of the description 'historic' that the media applies with a disconcerting ease. The origin of the heritage is not necessarily always a spectacular event that arises, to the general surprise, from one day to the next. It can be a discreet event like the Appeal of 18 June 1940. Mythification happens retrospectively and is contingent on the author's predictions being confirmed by facts. De Gaulle was right to believe that Germany was going to lose the war, but it could have turned out to be false.

Second, this example attests to the gap that can exist between the heritage status that an event acquires and its contemporary reality. The risk of over-estimating or over-determining an event after the fact is inherent to the phenomenon of creating heritage whose goal is to spotlight, to over-expose. The philosopher Paul Ricoeur recommends: 'For the professional historian there remains [...] the uncanniness of history, the unending competition between memory's vow of faithfulness and the search for the truth in history.'<sup>570</sup> This distinction should always be made, otherwise history and memory could be wrongly confused. History and memory are two different registers of relationship to the past. Despite its place in collective memory, the Appeal of 18 June had almost no impact at the time. Similarly, the beginning of 'Free France' in London was laboriously difficult. As Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac, one of the first men to join Free France, recognised, 'The start was less brilliant than what is remembered of the golden legend of Free France'. He also confirms the distortion between myth and reality: 'The contrast is immense between the immediate knock-on effects of the Appeal of 18 June and the importance that the passage of time has conferred to it.'<sup>571</sup>

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570 Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2001, p. 500.

571 Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac, *L'Appel du 18 juin*, Malakoff, Armand Colin, 2010, p. 61.



These circumstances only make the achievement of Charles de Gaulle, the lone man in London in 1940, all the more extraordinary and commendable. After the war, the number of French people who claimed to have heard the Appeal was incalculable: they wanted to be seen to have stood with reason against the majority and to have shared de Gaulle's unparalleled foresight, but it was purely a reconstruction of memory. Contrary to what a certain myth could lead us to believe, de Gaulle and Free France had to fight to establish themselves. In the first biography dedicated to de Gaulle published in London, Philippe Barrès underscores this 'rather cruel truth': 'it was not a great wave. Such a wave was not possible. France in July 1940 was too stunned, too beaten, too much a prisoner of the German invasion as well.'<sup>572</sup> De Gaulle, the unknown rebel, was also attacking a national treasure, the Maréchal Pétain. For that reason, the Appeal's short-term effectiveness was weak, but it plays an essential role as a source of legitimacy for wartime Gaullism and as a cornerstone of French Resistance heritage. It is necessary to guard against the bias of short-sightedness: the Appeal of the 18 June was not the point of departure for the French Resistance. The Resistance, as I have shown elsewhere, emerged in a complex and progressive way across the whole of the national territory.<sup>573</sup> Other appeals to the Resistance were made, but they remain in the shadows, victims of the memorial spotlight that retrospectively shines on the Appeal of 18 June.

Third, it is important to acknowledge the vital expertise historians can bring to the process of heritage recognition. Myth makers are always reluctant to accept the rational and distanced eye of the researcher. This reluctance explains why the file submitted to UNESCO in 2004 to recognise the Appeal on the Memory of the World Register contained errors. The file claims to include the 'manuscript text broadcast on BBC radio on 18 June 1940' and its 'authenticity' is proven, but that is not accurate. The myth, however virtuous and valued, cannot free itself from history.

Finally, it is necessary to remember that AI cannot do everything. The starting point for reconstructing the orality of the Appeal of 18 June 1940 was Rossé's discovery of the transcript produced by the Swiss authorities: the work and story of a researcher. A heritage approach can only be durable and credible if it is approached from a historical perspective and draws on

572 Philippe Barrès, *Charles de Gaulle*, Paris-Bruxelles, Librairie Plon-éditions Labor, 1941, p. 139.

573 Robert Belot, *La Résistance sans De Gaulle. Politique et gaullisme de guerre*, Paris, Fayard, 2006.

the work of historians, even if it means chipping away at the myth for the greater good of the truth.