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An emotional history of a long liberation in the Occupation diary of Madeleine Blaess

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In July 1939, Madeleine Blaess graduated with a first class honours degree in French from the University of Leeds. Passionate about her studies and wanting a career in academia, she was awarded a grant by the City of Leeds to study for a doctorate at the Sorbonne in Paris. Undeterred by Britain's declaration of war on Germany, she left for France in November 1939 and spent the next six months studying and sharing a life full of exciting interactions in the Paris boarding house Les Marronniers, with students, refugees from Eastern Europe, soldiers on leave, novelists, actors and actresses and sundry other short-stay lodgers. Madeleine's letters home told of her Sorbonne experiences and of the social whirl of Les Marronniers but the carefree tone of the early months progressively gave way to anxiety as Belgian refugees begin to arrive in chaos in Paris in spring 1940. Anxiety about the unfolding military conflict did not spur her into leaving the capital with many of her fellow postgraduate expatriates. Her French nationality may have made a hurried departure appear less necessary but complacency – she spent the last days before invasion shopping for trinkets for her parents – meant that she missed the last boat home. In her final letter on 1 June 1940 she told of the boat and train tickets she had bought for the return to Britain as she reassured her parents that she would soon be heading up 'The Great North road' to Yorkshire. It was a journey she did not make. The German advance had cut off the route to the ports preventing her departure and nearly five years elapsed before she saw her parents again.

On October 1 1940, she began a diary which she conceived as a continuation of the correspondence she had shared with her mother during the Phoney War. Now, unable to send letters other than Red Cross telegrams, she intended the diary to act as their substitute, to mimic 'dialogue' with her mother and to preserve traces of her life to be read, like a delayed letter, when she finally returned home. A number of factors particular to Madeleine's life influenced the style and content of her occupation diary. Had Madeleine not had French papers she would have been interned, possibly for the duration of the war. As it was, she was one of few British citizens to be at large in occupied territory and quite possibly the only one writing a daily diary of what she was living. Her

documentary diary style which favoured description over feelings and impressions reflected a contemporary trend in British journal keeping inspired by the Mass Observation project (as well as harking back to Pepys whom she regularly quotes).¹ It was also a style typical of migrant letter writers, who recorded banal everyday detail which appeared to them and their readers to be novel and extraordinary thereby producing very rich micro-histories of their day-to-day lives.² Both these characteristics make the diary a particularly valuable source of information about how civilians lived historical events through an everyday ordinariness which is largely invisible in histories compiled from events deemed retrospectively to be important. In such a descriptive diary, Madeleine's feelings and emotions are inescapably embedded in entries about her everyday life because she invariably gave an opinion about what she was writing down. When this meticulous, descriptive style intersects with major historical and military events like the Liberation of France in 1944, a unique narrative emerges. It is a narrative which presents the civilian experience through the finest grain of domestic detail and weaves it through a range of emotions encompassing the present moment and a future which Madeleine was beginning to glimpse. This chapter tells the story of Liberation in Paris through the eyes of Madeleine Blaess and, in particular, through emotions not commonly accommodated in the commemorative narratives through which these events are largely remembered and sustained. The diary acts as an alternative historical record, documenting the civilian Liberation experience through the emotions of the everyday.

Madeleine's diary runs from October 1940 and finishes in September 1944, a month after the Liberation. When her Canadian student friend Ruth Camp was arrested in front of her at the flat they shared on the rue Rollin on 5 December 1940, a frightened Blaess decided that it was 'better to keep

¹ Joe Moran locates the vogue for documentary diaries in the 1930s as coming from the Mass Observation project which valorised this form through its national appeals through the media for contributions. The project sought descriptive diaries and not diaries in which everyday life was abstracted and mediated through the writer's thoughts and feelings (J. Moran, 'Private lives, public histories: the diary in twentieth-century Britain'. *Journal of British Studies* 54.1 (2015), 138-62).

² An excellent example of this can be found in Alistair Thomson's *Moving Stories: An Intimate History of Four Women Across Two Continents* (Manchester University Press, 2011); see particularly Chapter 6, 'Letter Stories'.

quiet about political matters'.³ She mostly kept to this until 1944 when the reticence of cryptic allusions gave way to a frenetic account of the military liberation of Paris. For Madeleine, as for civilians across France, the Liberation was more than a military event. It was experienced as hope and expectation from the summer of 1943 when the Allied victory in North Africa, landings in Sicily and Soviet victories on the Eastern front gave the public confidence that liberation of central Europe was only months away.⁴

This chapter examines the meaning of the Liberation through the emotions stirred by the Allied military campaign to liberate France, from the Normandy landings on 6 June onwards. It took the Allies three months of hard fighting to reach Paris. The uncertainty of an outcome which threatened to embroil civilians in front-line fighting and which, over a two-week period, caused chaos to spill into the streets of the capital, prompted Madeleine to record a range of feelings and emotions which have been largely ignored by commemorative popular narratives of the Liberation. Madeleine's diarised account of Liberation corroborates an emerging historical consensus that the Liberation memory has been distorted in transmission through a selective range of uniquely positive emotions. Jean-Pierre Azéma has described it as a powerfully emotive image-driven narrative: girls climbing onto tanks, cheering crowds, men parading down the Champs-Élysées in their best clothes; a narrative from which the victims of the war have been expunged.⁵ Alain Brossat shares this view, pointing out too that a Liberation narrative simplified in this way cannot accommodate the vast range of emotions and experiences recorded in personal testimonies in particular.⁶ The definition of Liberation and the moment of its happening have been problematised in recent years. It is no longer seen as a specifically Parisian event which took place in August 1944. However, it is still the case that the military operation of 1944 remains central in the revised narrative. What Azéma writes is typical: 'Should one speak of the Liberation in the singular? I would say not. One must broach it in the plural [...]. A full

³ University of Sheffield Library, Special Collections and Archive, MS296/3/40: M. Blaess, Documents, Letters; and MS296/3/42: M. Blaess, Journal (hereafter Blaess, diary). Blaess, diary, 10 January 1941.

⁴ P. Laborie, *L'Opinion française sous Vichy: les Français et la crise d'identité nationale 1936-1944*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2001), pp. 289-90.

⁵ J.-P. Azéma, 'Les Libérations de la France: prologue', *French Cultural Studies*, 15.5 (1994), 223-226, p. 223.

⁶ A. Brossat, *Libération, fête folle, 6 juin 1944 - 8 mai 45: mythes et rites ou le grand théâtre des passions populaires* (Paris: Editions autrement, 1994), p. 62.

six months separate the beginning of Operation Overlord on the Normandy beaches and the taking of Strasbourg.⁷ These military narratives of Liberation, whether they centre on Paris or recognise that Liberation took place across metropolitan France well into 1945, are narratives of heroic soldiering, strategy and planning from which women are largely excluded.

Madeleine's long liberation

Between the summer of 1943 and the Liberation of Paris in 1944, Madeleine's diary records her emotional response to the prospect of Liberation. In the same way that the German Occupation provided a backdrop to Madeleine's everyday life and feelings across the four previous years, now the idea of Liberation was articulated in her diary as a stimulus for thinking about her own future. The events so often at the heart of historical and popular representations of the Liberation are obliquely present, in the background of her life or as an imagined future. In the summer of 1943, the Liberation exists – if one can say as much – as the set of emotions that its contemplation provokes.

For Madeleine Blaess, the prospect of Liberation was heartening but it also made her anxious because she feared that the future which lay beyond it would be one of restricted freedoms and frustrated ambitions. Universities had opened their doors wider to women in the wake of the First World War. A generation of men had been killed in the trenches and young women who had grown up in the hey-day of first-wave feminism expecting greater educational opportunity were replacing them. But this abrupt improvement in access to higher education did not sweep away chauvinist prejudice. Blaess encountered sexism and hostility from male teaching staff and students at the Sorbonne and the pages of her diary are troubled by the conflict between her professional ambitions and the self-abnegating domesticity she felt was expected of her. In the 1940s women were still expected to prioritise marriage and children over careers. By the summer of 1943, with Liberation seemingly in the offing, Madeleine was preoccupied with her future and the dilemma of whether to choose career or family. She was now twenty-six years old, the average age at which British women married in the 1940s, but was as committed to her dream of being an academic as much as she had

⁷ Azéma, 'Les Libérations de la France', p. 224.

been when she first arrived in Paris in 1939.⁸ However, very little progress had been made on the thesis and her university funding had run out. Longer, reflective passages irrupted from the more neutral descriptions of everyday events, and these were fearful about the prospect of surrendering her life of autonomy in Paris for one of financial dependency and limited horizons back in Yorkshire with her parents. Tumbling forth across the passages is an anxious ‘re-voicing’ of the gender prejudice encountered by women in the 1940s which she does not challenge but appears resigned to having to cope with somehow. A good marriage with an academic might save her, she mused before concluding that men tended not to find women with qualifications attractive. On 15 August 1943, woefully foreseeing a future stuck at home caring for her ageing parents she wrote:

If I stay, I will be dead as a woman and will be doing the same work again; the housework, the gardening, I’ll embroider beautiful tapestries and I’ll take the dog out with mum and dad. I will have to get married [...] But, who will I find to marry? Who would want me? I am not beautiful but I’m not ugly either - but I am fat - and then, of course, the education I have had – ! Oh Good Lord!! (15 August 1943)

Hanna Diamond has observed that many women were ‘deeply changed by their wartime experiences’ and were reluctant ‘to pick up their lives as they had been before the war’, and Madeleine was one of them:⁹ She was reluctant to relinquish the greater freedoms she had known during the Occupation. The struggle of Occupation had raised her expectations and she set this down in her diary in August 1943: ‘I have been too close to misery and to death to be how I was before and I do not share the same opinions as my parents. And what about my freedom?? [...] A girl, a girl stays at home – well, yes, perhaps but not when she has had to earn her crust all alone for three years dictated to by necessity and with only herself to keep her going’ (15 August 1943).

Madeleine’s anxiety about what the end of the war might mean for her dominates the diary in the summer and autumn of 1943, which was now focussed firmly on the future for the first time in four years. It was a future about which she anxiously started to seek reassurance in tarot card readings

⁸ J. Fulcher and J. Scott, *Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 275.

⁹ H. Diamond, ‘Women’s aspirations, 1943-47: an oral enquiry in Toulouse’, in H. R. Kedward and N. Wood (eds), *The Liberation of France: Image and Event* (Oxford and Washington DC: Berg, 1995), 93-101, p. 93.

and kinesiology. She also began to write down her dreams and nightmares which seemed to articulate deep-seated fears about the future. On 8 August 1943 she described a dream in which she had had to beg the Franco-British College for a modest grant of £40 a year because her parents had refused her the financial support she needed to finish the thesis. In a particularly violent and vivid dream on 30 October 1943, a brutal and controlling husband burned her books, kept her incarcerated at home with their child and raped her to impregnate her again when she tried to escape. Madeleine's liberation, the liberation she envisaged from 1943 when she first seriously contemplated its possibility, was beset by fear and anxiety about a future of closed, not open, doors. For many women and men, the Liberation meant getting plans back on track. For some this meant marrying, settling down and having a family. For Madeleine, and no doubt others like her, the Liberation opened a new chapter of uncertainty and struggle.

From the Normandy landings to the Paris insurrection

Antoine Lefébure has attributed the anxiety he found in letters and phone calls intercepted by Vichy ahead of Liberation to fear of civil war, fear of Allied failure and fear of the political aftermath of Liberation. These ephemeral fears were, Lefébure claimed, briskly 'swept away' by the great 'wind of freedom' accompanying the Allied victory.¹⁰ Pierre Laborie has also analysed private letters and concluded that the fears and anxieties dominating the public mood stemmed from the daily struggle to survive rather than from more abstract concerns. He noted that the excitement over the Normandy landings faded quickly as civilians turned their attention back to surviving the worsening conditions of their everyday.¹¹ Laborie's findings mirror Madeleine's reaction. Initially she was excited when she heard the news on the morning of 6 June: "“They” have landed!!!!!! [...] At 1.30 am at Carenton (near Cherbourg). They are at the mouths of the Rivers Orne and Vire and at the Seine, Le Havre. Parachutists landing in Caen. [...] Jacqueline is sticking to me like glue to listen to the radio and

¹⁰ A. Lefébure, *Les Conversations secrètes des Français sous l'Occupation* (Paris: Plon, 1993), pp.363-4.

¹¹ Laborie, *L'Opinion française sous Vichy*, pp.314-15.

getting on my nerves.’¹² By the following day, she was already complaining that there was no bread to be had. Indeed, hopes of liberation were raised and then dashed within days.

On 7 June tanks were present on the streets and Madeleine reported a mass public exodus towards Versailles.¹³ The next day she noted the German military out in strength in camouflaged Tiger tanks and lorries, and worriedly wrote that she had heard on Radio Paris that the Allied campaign was in difficulty: ‘The Germans are carrying out a stalling offensive which the Allies haven’t been able to stop [...]. At Falaise, the German troops are pushing the English troops towards the South (??!!)’¹⁴ This seemingly stuttering offensive worried Madeleine and, over subsequent weeks, news of the fierce and bloody battle raging across northern France was frightening and disheartening, not least because it presaged what might await Parisians themselves. News arrived first-hand from refugees fleeing from the front-line in Normandy. A friend’s father told of mayhem and death:

Françoise has just brought some butter and some meat because her father was in Normandy. He’s had a nightmare journey back. The Germans are going to battle in everything they can find, even French cars and so the English are machine gunning everything. The lorry that was following them was machine gunned. The teeth of the person driving were found incrusting in the dashboard. It was impossible to get them out.¹⁵

The following day she overheard a refugee from Normandy addressing a crowd anxious for news:

At the Gare Montparnasse I saw a woman who had come from Normandy with her dog and two little suitcases. There was a huge crowd around her and she was answering questions. She was hard, fiery and tough, lots of bravado. One could feel her shaking from the struggle to get out.¹⁶

Thus, the wait for the Allies began to be coloured by dread as the ‘Liberation’ stretched out across the territory and hopes of a rapid victory diminished. Within a very short time, the euphoria of the Normandy landings, had given way to the realisation that French civilians in northern France were

¹² Blaess, diary, 6 June 1944.

¹³ Little is known about the exodus from Paris in 1944 but it is clear from Madeleine’s diary that there is a repeat of the panic and flight of civilians in 1940.

¹⁴ Blaess, diary, 8 June 1944.

¹⁵ Blaess, diary, 22 June 1944.

¹⁶ Blaess, diary, 23 June 1944,

now in the path of a bloody battle, which risked embroiling Parisians too. Thus, it is hardly surprising that there were few signs of excitement to be found in Madeleine's diary after the Normandy landings.

From the pre-invasion bombing campaign of 1943 through to the 'Phoney Liberation' of 6 and 7 June, and beyond, Mary-Louise Roberts writes, the lives of the Normans had been a litany of horrific 'sights and smells – the rot of animal and human flesh, the stench of death [...] a terrible grammar of sounds, sights, smells and tastes'.¹⁷ The Liberation conducted across northern France during the spring and summer of 1944 was far from exhilarating for those caught up in the fighting. Of the Liberation in Normandy Roberts writes: 'anger, fear and loss stripped the moment of its bliss. Liberation was a harrowing experience in which happiness had to share the heart with sorrow.'¹⁸ Parisians had been trained in civil defence since before war broke out in 1939, but the dreaded aerial bombardment had not arrived for those in central Paris. Yet the news from Normandy in June 1944, and the increasing frequency of Allied air raids on industrial and railway areas of the Paris suburbs awakened Madeleine's fears. Like many people across France, before the spring of 1944 she had experienced air raids only as distant and rather beautiful pyrotechnic displays of tracer bullets, flares and light showers of bursting flak shells, watched from afar on her balcony. By spring 1944, her diary entries frequently made reference to death and near-misses, from both bombs and anti-aircraft fire. Madeleine's friend Madeleine F. had a narrow escape at the Closerie des Lilas on the Boulevard Montparnasse when a flak shell fell from the sky killing two people and injuring many others, an experience which left her 'very shaken up by all the screaming and the blood'.¹⁹

On 2 August 1944, three weeks before the Liberation of Paris, Madeleine herself was caught in a bombing raid in the Paris suburb of Montreuil. The raid killed 147 people including many children in a convent which had taken a direct hit. Madeleine's description of the raid gives insight into the psychological pressure many French people faced during the most intense period of bombing, as the Allies sought to destroy the rail infrastructure in advance of D-Day, and thereafter as part of the

¹⁷ M.-L. Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 17.

¹⁸ Roberts, *What Soldiers Do*, p. 18.

¹⁹ Blaess, diary, 22 June 1944.

military campaign.²⁰ Her shocked and shocking account describes the explosion and its grisly aftermath:

The anti-aircraft guns are firing. Aunt tells me to stay. Then, there is a terrible crash, like thunder and crashing planes at the same time. Impossible to describe. Everything black. A huge flame. The window jumps out of its frame and goes back in again letting the smoke and dust in etc, terrible noise, glass falling, everything shaking. Then our thoughts turn to André who is next to the window but all he is bothered about is protecting René's head and telling him not to be frightened. We pull the beds to the end of the room and pull down the blind. We hear other bombs but they are in the distance. The electricity has gone off and we can hear screaming. After a bit we pull up the blind and all around seems to be in flames. Aunt says that it is the clinic. Several houses have been hit, some are burning, a school has been flattened. They take away the injured from the street and those injured in the courtyard of the clinic which is in flames. André was remarkably calm. I treat a woman who is in a state of shock (her lips are burnt). Then they send me to the convent. It is difficult to walk in the road, glass, telephone lines down, shutters, bricks etc. Lots of dust and rubble. Lots of houses on fire. The emergency services are trying to rescue as many people as possible. There is no water. The cop doesn't let me through because I haven't got an armband. Help to evacuate a burning house but a tile falls on my head and I haven't got a helmet. I have to get out. Very hot. Dazed people stare. A little girl stumbling holding her doll 'Let's leave here Mummy, I want to go. I am frightened, I want to leave here'. No one knows who she is or where her mummy is. A tall man. Blood running down from his nose and ears his right arm limp, doesn't want to be helped. He wants to see his wife. His friend was killed right next to him. Go back to the stretcher bearers. Piles of rubble in the road. Difficult to walk in wooden shoes. My heel gets caught in a shutter. We requisition a coal truck, whistles are blown, detour because the road is flooded. No water. Carrefour Pleyal. No more

²⁰ See, on bombing, A. Knapp, *Les Français sous les bombes alliées, 1940-1945* (Paris : Tallandier, 2014) ; on civilian experience of bombing see L. Dodd, *French Children under the Allied bombs, 1940-45: An Oral History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

wounded. A lot of ambulances. We have something to drink, requisition an empty coal lorry and off we go again.

The young male stretcher bearer gives me his arm band. We go to the convent. The cop wants to stop me. He recognized me but I have an arm band. They don't want to let us in but we break down the door. Luckily our team leader is brilliant. It is 6 o'clock. 40 children and 5 nuns have been killed in the shelter. The fire brigade are super but they have to come up every 5 minutes. They bring out the corpses or limbs in sheets putting them down on stretcher to be identified. There are 2 packets of flesh pieces or two bodies per stretcher. They bring a man from the D[éfense] P[assive]²¹ to identify his little girl. It takes time to clear a way through, to get back up putting in beams for support at the same time. Finally, at 7.30 I am in front of the hole with my stretcher. Other than the nuns there were three women on the site. Now there is only me. The men send us away. They take my arm band off me but I keep hold of my stretcher. I want to do something. In the end, I have two little girls on the stretcher. Took them to the ambulance. Came home. Very tired. Madeleine F. was lovely, she made dinner etc. I don't think I shall ever cry again.²²

Madeleine's harrowing account of the bombing raid and its obvious psychological impact are important to bear in mind when examining what Parisians were feeling during the long wait to be liberated. Urban destruction on a mass scale was familiar to them through newsreels of the 1940 Battle of France, the London Blitz and the German campaign on the Eastern front. They had heard the tales from Normandy and were now experiencing regular bombing themselves. The population hoped for liberation but dreaded what they might have to go through to get it.

Intensifying crisis

²¹ The Défense Passive was the civil defence organisation which presided over local air raid precautions, including blackout, first aid and bombsite clearance.

²² Blaess, diary, 2 August 1944.

Jean-Pierre Azéma attributes the euphoria felt by the French at the Liberation to their relief at having survived. He quotes Stanley Hoffman's review of *Le Chagrin et la Pitié* to make his point: 'He who didn't live in a French town or village in the weeks before and following the Liberation cannot understand the sheer pleasure to be still alive at the end of such an unspeakable ordeal'.²³ Madeleine's diary gives the same impression: that the joy and euphoria of Liberation are a release from months of intensifying stress and anxiety. Her meticulous, uninterrupted logging of day-to-day vicissitudes and emotional turbulence is a unique barometer of the public mood as Liberation approached. Just as it seemed that the Occupation was coming to an end, the difficulties which had ground down the morale of the populace over four years intensified.

After the débarquement, food shortages instantly became more acute as supply chains were interrupted. On 7 June, there was no bread and 'at the Sorbonne they were appealing for students to help distribute food by pulling carts'.²⁴ The following day, there was virtually no food at all: 'no bread, not a single vegetable in Paris. No lettuce, nothing.'²⁵ On 10 June, Madeleine went to the market in Auteuil: 'There was absolutely nothing other than parsley and flowers. That's it. There've been no vegetables, nothing in Paris for a pretty long while.'²⁶ During the four years of Occupation, food had been routinely pooled and shared, ration tickets sold or bartered and food given as payment in kind for work which, in Madeleine's case, was usually English language teaching, baby-sitting or caring for the elderly and infirm. This saving recourse, reliant on arrangement-making, was badly disrupted from June by a ban on telegrams, telephone calls and, one would suppose, the pneus of the widely used Parisian subterranean pneumatic messaging system. The Liberation thus disrupted habitual survival strategies, and by the end of June the mood was desperate. On 26 June Madeleine reported that she could only buy food on the black market. On 6 July she wrote of having managed to get 'half a pound of butter for 200fr [...], some rolls, lettuce and peaches – but at astronomical cost'.²⁷ Before, Parisians had been able to bring food into the city from the surrounding countryside, but now

²³ Azéma, 'Les Libérations de la France', p. 225.

²⁴ Blaess, diary, 7 June 1944.

²⁵ Blaess, diary, 8 June 1944.

²⁶ Blaess, diary, 10 June 1944.

²⁷ Blaess, diary, 6 July 1944.

food was scarce there too. Even if they reached countryside – which, by July, was already more difficult with a Sunday-only service, and by August was impossible as all public transport was cut – their journeys met with disappointment.²⁸ Madeleine describes the pointless ‘odysseys’ of her friend Denise: ‘6am she was at St Germain where they refused to sell anything to Parisians. She got back on the train and went to Chatou. She walked across fields and queued for 2 hours for 10kg of carrots (100frs). Went to Montesson on foot, nothing, and got back to Paris at 2pm.’²⁹ Ironically, Madeleine’s only fresh food came from Normandy, brought with stories of death and destruction by her friend’s father.

Madeleine’s liberation had been difficult from June, but by August it was an ordeal of endurance. By mid-August, two months after D-Day and the beginnings of the pre-Liberation food crisis, she felt perpetually faint and nauseous. On 15 August, she reported worsening living conditions: ‘I don’t think we have enough to eat [...] The water is cut off and the Germans are saying there will be no food unless terrorist attacks stop.’ The situation was so desperate that Madeleine reported the slaughter of a cow in the grounds of the Senate building, chopped into chunks there and then and sold at 100 francs a kilo. By 16 August Madeleine was contemplating her own death. In one of her bleakest entries she wrote:

The undertakers are on strike. Fine time for it! Let’s see where we are with the dead in a few days. Didn’t sleep. Nice has been captured. The Germans have announced that there is fighting on the road between Dreux and Chartres. Guns firing all night. At South-South-West there was a continuous glow in the sky with very bright flashes all night. I dreamt that I returned home but it was strange. A night terror - will I ever see my parents again etc. Packed suitcase and wrote a goodbye letter etc. Fell asleep at dawn.³⁰

²⁸ Blaess, diary, 9 July 1944.

²⁹ Blaess, diary, 26 June 1944

³⁰ Blaess, diary, 16 August 1944.

So in the early weeks of August 1944, as the Allies fought across France towards Paris, Madeleine waited anxiously, suffering ever more intensely from shortages and frightened about what would happen when the Allies arrived. It was clear in Madeleine's account that into the information vacuum flooded pessimism and anxiety. She worriedly noted down rumours she heard about the progress of the Allies and her anguish that the Allies might fail was an emotion shared by many. For Parisian Françoise Seligman, failure was unbearable to contemplate: 'A kind of inner panic paralyzed me [...] If they fail, if they leave, the proof will have been made that France has become an impregnable bastion of Nazi power.'³¹ Another fear was of the violence the Germans might inflict on the civilian population. On 20 August, Madeleine noted down a directive which she believed to have been issued directly by the SS:

1. Curfew from 9pm to 7 am.
2. All windows to be closed. No one to stand at the windows.
3. All main and side doors to buildings have to be kept open even during the night.
4. All cinemas, theatres, cafes and other going out places are to be closed (a bit late there).
5. Gatherings of more than 3 people are banned.
6. Certain zones are off-limits to civilians who will be shot without warning.
7. Anyone giving information to the enemy will be treated as a spy.³²

Entries made on 17 and 19 August, written progressively over the course of the days as events unfolded, vividly describe the anxious uncertainty:

We can hear gun shots. It is worrying. Everybody is restless and anxious. They are saying that the Germans have blown up the power stations, the bridges, the hotels where they have been staying, the Senate building. Meanwhile, the suburbs are well alight. The water came back on this evening. There is a little gas but it takes 1½ hours to sauté

³¹ Seligman's diary, cited in Roberts, *What Soldiers Do*, p. 20.

³² Blaess, diary, 20 August 1944.

potatoes. Explosion after explosion and one which sets the building rocking but I don't know where that one was. Fires near Villeneuve St George ³³

Madeleine's account of 19 August gives a particularly vivid picture of public fear in the final days before the Liberation. It also betrays a degree of anger and frustration. The Allies were needed to support an insurrection which had begun to look vulnerable and exposed, but they were nowhere to be seen:

The Préfecture is surrounded. 500 men inside. Nearly out of ammunition. They are worried about bombing. Huge explosions, the Hôtel de Ville and the Préfecture we think. And these God-forsaken allies who don't come. Flags being hung everywhere - then taken down because the Germans are shooting at decorated windows. They are evacuating their injured, piled up in open wagons in the full glare of the sun without bothering. Jacqueline came. She is so tense. Good Lord, if only we knew something, were able to know.

Madeleine's wait for liberation was one of mounting tension and anxiety in a city where, for nearly a fortnight, it was not at all clear what was happening or who was in control. In her diary entries now, there was nothing about hopes and dreams of a life beyond the Liberation: everything was tied up with the present. Paradoxically, when freedom was so close, she wrote of the fear of not surviving to see it. The wait for liberation was a battle to survive material deprivation. It was also a battle of nerves.

The arrival of the Allies

Rod Kedward drew on the theory of carnival to frame the 'joyful exuberance, anarchy and violence' of the celebrations after the Allied arrival. To do so was not new he pointed out. Jean-Marie Guillon had explored it in relation to the 'enactment of collective exaltation, excess, transgression and inversion of the social order' in his account of Liberation in the Var. Alain Brossat also invoked it for the retributive head shaving of 'collaborator' women which he describes as the 'ugly carnival' of

³³ Blaess, diary, 17 August 1944.

misogynist violence running as an undercurrent in popular public celebrations. Kedward also evokes Foucault's ideas that events do not need their immediate historical context to explain them; their causes can be found elsewhere in longstanding cultural rituals. He sees both carnival and Foucault's discontinuities repeatedly in written and oral memoirs which tell of the Liberation as 'a kind of unreality, a vacuum in time, a highly charged present without past or future, a period of dislocation or hyper-action'.³⁴ We see something of all this in Madeleine's account of the military liberation of the capital. There is sense of carnival and the diligently observed chronological pace of the diary is upset as 'happenings' cascade one after the other through dates which appear, on occasion, to have been written down in advance and for which the allotted space cannot contain the detail. The erstwhile neat longhand script also becomes an untidy scrawl as the diary object itself seems to mediate the emotions of its writer. From 22 August, three days before the military liberation of Paris, excitement and exhilaration displaced anxiety, temporarily at least, as Madeleine finally left her flat to see what was happening on the streets. Ever the flâneuse who had previously described the withering decline or blossoming regeneration of the city's flowers and trees as she walked through the seasons, Madeleine now documented every barricade, every chunk of detached masonry, every tract and proclamation stuck up on the walls:

Went round the barricades to see the damage. Beautiful barricade up at the Panthéon. On the Rue d'Ulm I nearly got myself killed by one of the militia on the roof next to the École normale. I sheltered in a porch for 10 minutes. There are barricades on all the streets. Those on the Rue Berthollet and the Boulevard Port-Royal are fantastic with overturned lorries and everything!³⁵

By 22 August the civilian insurrection was in full swing. There was a 'magnificent spirit' she wrote, 'volunteers sawing wood for the Free Forces, coming round from door to door collecting sheets, bandages, safety pins etc'. She headed out into the thick of the action, going to see her friend Coutelier at the town hall in the 5th arrondissement which had been attacked by 'two big guns'. Now

³⁴ H. R. Kedward, 'Ici commence la France libre', in Kedward and Wood (eds), *The Liberation of France*, 1-11, p. 6.

³⁵ Blaess, diary, 24 August 1944.

far from anxious, she was caught up in the thrill of pitched battles which raged around her. Impatient with frightened friends, there was now no place for either her own fear or that of other people: 'Jacqueline Eichhorn came over. I want to throttle her. She is such a scaredy-cat and feeble.' The same exuberance was clear when at 7am on the morning of 25 August, General Leclerc's tanks arrived under her window and she raced to greet them in her dressing gown. She returned to her apartment to dress - the soldiers having drawn attention to her attire - and then, still wild with excitement, she followed them to the Luxembourg Palace, putting herself in grave personal danger:

They fire on the Senate and the Senate fires back with its heavy gun causing the branches of the trees above us to break off. There are two blasts. We go in. Madeleine F is scared stiff. She has to bandage herself because she threw herself down on the ground too quickly scraping her knee and her arm. To be fair, today she hasn't gone on too much.'³⁶

In Madeleine's account of the morning of the Liberation, we read a very familiar account of joy and exuberance but this mood lasts literally for moments and is interspersed and surrounded by emotions which are much less positive.

Negative Liberation

An examination of how and why emotions have been edited out of official narratives of the Liberation suggests that certain emotions have been judged inadmissible because they are cannot be assimilated in a virile and heroic masculine discourse. Keith, Aubert and Roberts all see evidence of the displacement or marginalisation of women in the Liberation narrative chiefly reducing them to a symbolic sexual presence over which both Allies and French men could assert (re-assert) their virility.³⁷As Aubert notes, citing Ricoeur, there is a need for the story of women's civilian life to be told via a 'kind of parallel history [...] of victimisation, which would counter the history of success

³⁶ Blaess, diary, 25 August 1944.

³⁷ S. Keith, 'Collective memory and the end of Occupation: remembering (and forgetting) the Liberation of Paris in images', *Visual Communication Quarterly*, 17.3 (2010), 134-46; M.-L. Roberts, 'La photo du GI viril: genre et photojournalisme en France à la Libération', *Le Mouvement social*, 219 (2007), 35-56; N. Aubert, "'We have nothing better than testimony': History and memory in French war narratives", *Journal of European Studies*, 45.5 (2015), 287-300.

and victory'.³⁸ Madeleine's day-to-day account challenges the standard war narrative of the Liberation, in which men occupy centre stage in a positive story and women are marginalised or completely absent. The challenge comes in the form of 'negative' emotions (anger, shame, pity, fear, anxiety, and so on) responding to the exclusion of women and male violence towards women, which are disallowed by Liberation narratives foregrounding triumph and joy.

When the Allies reached the outskirts of Paris and the insurrection became visible on the streets, Madeleine, a trained first-aider, went straight to the Red Cross to report for duty: 'took my report to the Red Cross this afternoon and volunteered but it is useless. They don't want women - they only want men for the barricades, to drive and to courier. I am furious'.³⁹ She was forced into the role of observer and her account was by no means full of cheering, flag-waving, climbing onto tanks, arranging dates with GIs, and posing for the newsreels – even though all of these are present nonetheless. There was a darker, frightening side to the insurrection and she was distracted by the anarchic retributive justice taking place on the streets. The Resistance frightened her. On 19 August she wrote:

No lesson with Corneau. Too dangerous outside just here in this district. Stormy weather. Listened to the radio. Not a single word about Paris. The Resistance uprising has been premature. These fellows who are walking around without a care with machine guns or grenades in their hands as if they were holding an umbrella or a walking stick. They are still killing. Good Lord, when will it end. I was frightened of the bullets this morning. We don't know where they come from.

Even though Madeleine had contributed to acts of civilian 'passive' resistance at various points over the Occupation she shrank from violence, and had written on 9 October 1943: 'At the office - the parents of M. Delbot (collaborator) and their daughter (17 years old, a collaborator too) received little coffins on which was written "Sentenced to death". I find all that pretty puerile'. She was similarly contemptuous of vengeful excess during the Liberation events, noting on 18 August: 'People are behaving in a dignified way. It's only the rabble who went out to laugh at the Germans moving out of

³⁸ Ricoeur as cited in N. Aubert, "We have nothing better than testimony", p. 295.

³⁹ Blaess, diary, 22 August 1944.

the “Trianon”.’ Her admiration of the valour displayed at the Senate, the Hôtel de Ville and on the St Jacques barricades quickly gave way to disapproving and worried descriptions of the first malicious (and anarchic) manifestations of the *épuration* (the purge of collaborators).

On 20 August, she wrote that the FFI, armed with revolvers, were roaming around the district on their way to execute people at ‘72 Bd. Port Royal’ which was, at the time, the hospital of the Val-de-Grâce. Criticisms of Resistance violence are also accompanied by descriptions of the abuse of women suspected of having collaborated. Fabrice Virgili states, somewhat over-confidently, that the public supported this violence perpetrated against women despite their distrust of the Resistance itself. Brutalising these women was, he claims ‘an opportunity for the public to share with the Resistance an act of hostility against the Occupier’ and ‘if disputes took place then they were between different Resistance groups, the priest, the mayor or the police’.⁴⁰ However, there was nothing gleeful about Madeleine’s descriptions of the suffering of the victims of Resistance vigilantism. She was discomfited by the aggression, felt pity for the victims, contempt for their aggressors and a generalised distrust and disdain for the mob violence is as prominent in her account as the glad-handing joy and exuberant camaraderie running alongside it. There are several examples:

Saw German women with huge letters F.F.I attached to them. Everyone was clapping.

Saw a prisoner who they were bringing in with his left hand behind his neck, his right wrist was being held behind his back and there was a revolver stuck into his waist. He looked wretched.⁴¹

On Saturday 26 August, there are more examples of this same concern for women attacked by the Resistance and supporters:

In front of the Lycée Montaigne a German lorry full of paper is still burning. Five women go by, their heads have been completely shaved and a swastika stuck on them. They are wearing a Nazi flag around their necks and are making the Nazi salute. They are ashen with hatred and with rage. The crowd just says ‘ha ha’ but doesn’t do anything else.

⁴⁰ F. Virgili, *Shorn Women, Gender and Punishment in Liberation France* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), pp. 89-93.

⁴¹ Blaess, diary, 20 August 1944.

And, later that same day, the most moving description of their suffering:

In the afternoon I went out with Madeleine F. On the corner we saw another woman, bare feet, hair shaved off, a red cross on her head, left to make her way through the crowd heckling at her. She looked to be suffering terribly with the shame of it all. People who looked as if they knew her said that she deserved it. I worry that she will be so terribly poorly after that. I saw a portrait of Hitler hung from a lamppost.

Madeleine's descriptions of newly liberated Paris do not fit, therefore, with the exhilaration narrative, at least not in any sustained way. The moments of joy are soon overtaken by fear, doubt and concern. Within days, the Liberation moved away from centre-stage and Madeleine became, once again, concerned with her own everyday life. On Tuesday 29 August, four days after the arrival of Allies, she was back at work:

Was up at 6 am. 7.30 I was en route to work in the drizzle and in new shoes. They don't hurt me as much I had feared they would but they hurt enough. Furious with Kort. There is nothing to do at the office but he makes me come in on purpose and I will have to come in tomorrow afternoon for my pay and Thursday as usual.

Conclusion

Disgust, fear, anxiety, horror, gloom and pessimism characterised Madeleine Blaess's Liberation, through which she had lived in fear of starvation, bombing, illness and violence from both the Germans and from Resistance fighters. The future beyond the Liberation was not yearned for. Rather, it was feared because, for the scholarly, career-minded woman that Madeleine was, it seemed to offer little prospect of the freedoms she craved. Within days of the German capitulation, the diary entries shortened to become, once again, the routine, workaday observations typical of the first three years. They ceased on 17 September even though she stayed in Paris until February of the following year. Two years after the Liberation, in September 1946, Madeleine returned to Paris and for three weeks she kept a diary which is a frenzy of descriptions of restored relationships and reformed families, of people making children and making futures in a country racing to recoup a lost four years. This zest for the future is a distant echo of August 1944 but her diarised record of aftermath also showed very

keenly the grief and the psychological pain for which there had been no place in the carnival of Liberation. In the three weeks she notes down, Madeleine visited the grave of a close friend who had died of influenza in 1943: ‘Godmother’s grave was alright, just about. I didn’t get the feeling that she was waiting for me to come like Cécile who hasn’t left me since. She is with me everywhere I go. May she rest in peace.’⁴² And of her sister’s fiancé, labour camp survivor Michel, Madeleine wrote:

Normally he only speaks about things which are amusing and funny [...] Terrible things have happened to him. [...]. When he speaks about it, he was like a caged monkey. Normally it doesn’t show. It did this time. Not being able to move or to say a word without permission. How awful.

These 1946 entries, as fiercely observant as those in the war diary, are a logical appendage to Madeleine’s Liberation account, in that they countenance a parallel narrative of pain, and hint at new narratives opening up around the conflicting needs to forget and to remember.

⁴² Blaess, diary, 1 November 1946