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Partisans, godmothers, bicyclists, and other terrorists: women in the French resistance and under Vichy

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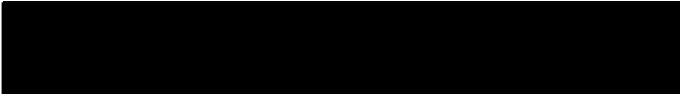
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF Rayna Kline for the Master of Arts in History presented January 27, 1977.

Title: Partisans, Godmothers, Bicyclists, and Other Terrorists: Women in the French Resistance and Under Vichy.

APPROVED BY MEMBERS OF THE THESIS COMMITTEE:


Michael F. Reardon, Chairman


Charles A. LeGuin


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During the years 1940-1944, the period of the German Occupator, French women played an active role in the political sphere as part of the organized Resistance movements. The women who participated were not isolated examples, but

an extremely diverse group that cut across social milieux, political alignments and religious persuasions. The range of their activity in the spectrum of roles and the differences in their style challenge the stereotypes and persistent attitudes in French culture about women's nature.

Women were leaders in the principal Resistance movements, participated in the organization and dissemination of the underground press and in the organization of the networks of passage. Their role was crucial in liaison activity. With ingenuity and resourcefulness, women, as women, made their own unique contributions to the Resistance movements. Those who were arrested and deported continued their resistance, even in prison and in the all women's concentration camp, Ravensbrück.

I have attempted to place the women Resistants in the context of the social history of the period. Under the collaborationist Vichy government, the domestic policy of France moved in a direction that reinforced and sharpened the most conservative attitudes towards women's role. Some of the effects of Vichy policy carried over to the post-war period, and were built into the social policy of the Fourth Republic.

I have considered two models used by American sociologists and social historians to evaluate the effects of social crisis on women's roles. My purpose in so doing is not to

compare the role and status of French women with that of American and British women, but merely to test whether the hypotheses are applicable to the situation of French women in the political sphere.

I have used the underground press and témoignages (first-hand reports) assembled and published by women's committees. I have examined documents at the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand in Paris, and at the Musée de l'Histoire Vivante at Montreuil. I have talked to women who actively participated in the Resistance movements. In addition, I have used published Resistance histories, both regional and general.

PARTISANS, GODMOTHERS, BICYCLISTS, AND
OTHER TERRORISTS: WOMEN IN THE FRENCH
RESISTANCE AND UNDER VICHY

by

Rayna Kline

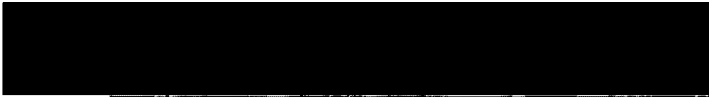
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1977

TO THE OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH:

The members of the Committee approve the thesis of
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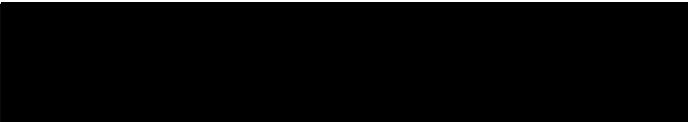

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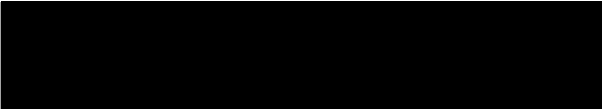

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	INTRODUCTION AND CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS	1
II	THE WOMEN OF THE RESISTANCE: DIVERSITY OF ROLES	9
III	FIVE PORTRAITS	26
IV	THE TWO ZONES	41
V	TRAVAILLE-FAMILLE-PATRIE.	52
	Women Under Vichy	52
	The <u>Service de Travail Obligatoire</u>	56
VI	FOLKLORE OF RUTABAGA: THE COMMITTEES OF HOUSEWIVES	65
VII	CAMOUFLAGE	73
VIII	WOMEN AND THE RESISTANCE PRESS	79
IX	RAVENSBRÜCK	88
X	SOCIAL CRISIS AS A FORCE FOR CHANGE	98
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	111

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

In Paris, June 10, 1940, the brilliant sun was veiled with soot from the burning petrol dumps in Rouen. Everywhere, people were weeping and piling belongings into all kinds of vehicles. At the Gare de Lyon, where trains were packed, people sat on the ground and waited. Some were leaving by bicycle, and some were pushing old people in baby carriages, with children trailing behind. Long lines of cars, four abreast, blocked the arteries leading to the south. On June 14, 1940, the German army entered an almost totally deserted Paris.

At Bordeaux, where the French government had moved after leaving Paris, the Parliament met until midnight of June 16 to weigh their alternatives. The choice between armistice and a fight to the finish never came to a formal vote. Their decision was to seek more information about what German peace terms might be. Paul Reynaud, the outgoing premier, proposed as his successor the World War I hero, Marshall Philippe Pétain, "the victor of Verdun." On the very next day, June 17th, in a radio broadcast that stunned many, and came as a relief to many others, Marshall Pétain announced: "It is with a heavy

heart that I tell you today that the fighting must cease."

Even as Pétain made his announcement, the German army was still sweeping across France. On the 20th of June, Bordeaux itself was bombed.

On that same day, Pétain made a second radio broadcast explaining the reasons for France's defeat--too few allies, too few weapons, too few babies. Then, moving away from the military aspect and questions of foreign policy, he admonished the French for their social decadence. ¹

Weaker than we were twenty-two years ago...we also had fewer friends. We did not have enough children, we did not have enough arms, and not enough allies--these are the reasons for our defeat...Since our past victory, the spirit of pleasure has been stronger in us than the spirit of sacrifice...²

The Armistice was signed on June 25, 1940; under its terms, France was divided into Occupied and Unoccupied zones. With Bordeaux in the Occupied zone, it was necessary to find another "temporary" headquarters for the French government. Other cities in southern France, historically meaningful or otherwise suitable, were rejected because they were dominated by a political leader. Vichy, politically neutral, was a "negative choice." Famous as a cure center because of its hot springs, it had the added advantage of possessing the most hotel facilities in southern France.

¹Robert O. Paxton, Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), p. 21/

²Alexander Werth, France 1940-1955 (London: Robert Hale, 1956), p. 30.

On July 8, the French deputies met informally at Vichy and heard that what France needed was a National Revolution, a "New Order" with emphasis upon a return to the soil and with the family as the basic unit of French life. Its motto was to be Travail, Famille, Patrie. On the 10th of July, the National Assembly voted itself out of existence, giving "full powers" to Marshall Pétain to promulgate a new Constitution which would safeguard "the rights of Work, Family, Fatherland." 3

In a sense, the Demarcation Line was a deal between Germany and Vichy. Germany occupied all of Northern France, thus a base from which to continue operations against England, the frontiers of the Alps and the Pyrenees, and all of the Atlantic coast. In the Unoccupied Zone, Vichy was able to give the appearance of maintaining an autonomous French government. For the most part, the Northern Zone was strictly controlled by Germany, although some of Vichy's domestic policies had an effect in the North. In the Southern Zone, Vichy's first hundred days, at least, took place without close, direct political supervision by Germany. 4 It was possible to maintain the fiction of an independent French government. This situation created an ambiguity in the Southern Zone in terms of resistance. After November 1942, with the Allied invasion of North Africa, all of France was

³Dorothy M. Pickles. France Between the Republics (London: Love and Malcomson Ltd., 1946), p. 22.

⁴Paxton, p. 48.

occupied, and that ambiguity no longer existed.

In the early days of Vichy's existence, one question arose for those who might be considering resistance. Did one resist against the Germans only, or against Vichy, or against both? For the organized Resistance movements that developed, there was no difference. Since they took a position against the Armistice, they were necessarily opposed to the regime that had accepted the defeat and that was collaborating with the enemy. ⁵

On June 18, 1940, the day after Pétain's debilitating "il faut cesser le combat," General de Gaulle broadcast from London the memorable slogan: "The flame of French Resistance must not and will not be extinguished." ⁶

In Paris, where the presence of the Nazi uniform was in itself sufficient provocation to trigger traditional French reflexes, little acts of passive resistance began to take place. In the Metro, people would take malicious pleasure in courteously misdirecting German soldiers to transfer points as far as possible out of the way. Bus drivers would forget to stop at the requested stops. German posters were torn down, and later, with the announcement of the first executions, bouquets of flowers would appear under the posters

⁵Henri Michel. Histoire de la Résistance (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958), p. 16.

⁶Ibid., p. 7.

that announced the executions.⁷ Listening to the broadcasts from London was in itself an act of passive resistance. As Werth says, "one of the main purposes of the active Resistance...was precisely to create a mood of passive resistance throughout the country..."⁸

The active Resistance began to take shape in the support given to escaped prisoners-of-war. At the end of the fighting in 1940, two million Frenchmen were prisoners,⁹ with many of the camps on French soil. In the very process of working out their escape and safe passage, a Resistance network was established. At the time of the Armistice, military men hid some of the arms they were supposed to hand over to Germany. Trade unions, forbidden by Vichy's Charte du Travail, formed an underground organization. Groups of individuals began to give aid and shelter to Jews, to find homes for Jewish children. The University of Strasbourg, relocated at Clermont-Ferrand, became a hot-bed of resistance activity. At Riom, close to Clermont-Ferrand, the September 1940 trial of Third Republic leaders who opposed the Pétain regime intensified activity at the university.¹⁰ At Lyon,

⁷Lucie Aubrac, La Résistance: Naissance et Organisation (Paris: Robert Lang, 1945), p. 12.

⁸Werth, p. 5.

⁹Paxton, p. 18.

¹⁰Henri Noguères, in collaboration with M. Degliame-Fouche and J. L. Vigier. Histoire de la Résistance en France, de 1940 à 1945, Vol. II (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1969), p. 109.

which came to be known as "the capital of the Resistance," a number of Paris intellectuals, lawyers and journalists formed a nucleus of Resistance. And in Paris itself, in December 1940, another group of intellectuals connected with the Musée de l'Homme issued a call for Resistance under the name of the Committee of Public Safety, borrowing their name from the Committee of 1793.

After Pétain's meeting with Hitler on October 23, 1940, Pétain's statement, "It is with honor...that I embark today on the route of collaboration," supplied the Resistance with a choice manifesto, fuel with which to rally new recruits to the cause. The shock of hearing the word "collaboration" succeeded in convincing many who may have still believed in the good faith of Pétain.¹¹

As might be expected, the organizers of the active Resistance movements were men and women who already had a political position or a religious or philosophical view fundamentally opposed to National Socialism. In most cases, the composition of Resistance groups was diverse, both in terms of social milieux and political alignments. COMBAT included a number of ex-army officers as well as intellectuals, while Liberation South, with a base in the University of Strasbourg, also recruited trade-unionists. Front National in the North had a number of specialized groups, including a Front National of lawyers and jurists, one for doctors, and a women's group

¹¹Aubrac, p. 22.

l'Union des Femmes Francaises. In May 1942, the three major movements of the Southern Zone--Combat, Libération and Franc-Tireur--joined together to form the M.U.R., the United Movements of the Resistance. A Catholic group, Témoignage Chrétien, known for its efforts on behalf of Jewish children, cooperated with the M.U.R.

There were two events that had a major impact. In July 1942, the round-up of 13,000 Jews in Paris prior to shipping them to the east prompted formal opposition from the Catholic hierarchy.¹² In February 1943, when young Frenchmen were drafted to work in German factories, thousands took to the mountainous regions of the Alps, the Massif Central and the Pyrenees. The encampments they formed, named after the dense brush and scrub, were known as the maquis.

In May 1943, all of the Resistance groups--as well as representatives of the Communist Party, the Socialist Party, the Mouvement Républicain Populaire, the two major trade unions, and the French Committee at London--met secretly in Paris to form the National Council of the Resistance.

Women were involved in all of the major organized Resistance movements. They participated in all forms of Resistance activity and, with innovation and audacity, made some unique contributions. Working from factual material--

¹²Paxton, p. 82.

the underground press, first-hand reports (témoignages) gathered by women involved in the women's committees, studies of Ravensbruck by women who survived deportation, as well as general and regional histories of the Resistance movement, I will make some general observations on the roles that women played in the Resistance and some judgements about those roles in the context of the social history of the years 1940-1944. Beyond that, I will make some observations and judgements about those roles in the context of long-standing social values and attitudes.

CHAPTER II

THE WOMEN OF THE RESISTANCE: DIVERSITY OF ROLES

One of the persistent myths in French cultures is the myth of "the eternal feminine." This is the notion that women have an ensemble of characteristics, natural and unchanging, independent of history and sociological context. For centuries, it was the basis for denying women the droit de cité, or political emancipation. It fits neatly with the defense of separate spheres, expressed in French culture as la vie intérieure and la vie extérieure. This is not the place to develop the literary and poetic forms of the myth. I introduce it at the outset merely to clarify a term which will be used, one which is the obvious corollary of la femme éternelle. The term is la femme au foyer, woman's eternal vocation, her homemaker role.

The Occupation was an unlikely time to be promoting the foyer. With millions of Frenchmen in prisoner-of-war camps, families divided by the Demarcation Line, and later with the program of forced labor in Germany, the pattern was likely to be separation and dislocation. Vichy's stress on the foyer, with its connotations of family hearth, continuity and female dependence, seemed bizarre and irrelevant.

For the women who participated actively in the Resistance, the dislocations were even more apparent. As Lucie Abrac put it, "it was a fragmentary life, a life of chance, without homogeneity,"¹³ In personal accounts of some of these women, retracing the pattern of their own lives during the early period before the movements took shape, there was frequently a period of personal reflection, followed by decision and movement to establish some kind of link. Several examples, drawn from the experiences of four women who played leadership roles, will help to show the ways in which this happened.

Germaine Tillion, who was on scientific mission in Africa at the time of the debacle, abandoned her work and flew directly to Paris where she joined with Paul Rivet, her former professor, Boris Vilde, the Arctic explorer, and a group of other scientists and intellectuals, to form the first Resistance movement in the North. Claude Gerard, who was employed as a technician in a factory behind the Maginot Line, moved around the Southern zone, "trying to make a connection with Free France." After a period of working with the Red Cross, helping to relocate refugees from Alsace-Lorraine, then moving on to Lyon where she surveyed parachute terrain and organized teams of reception, she finally made contact with the movement COMBAT. Renée Mirande-Laval, in that first uneasy period

¹³Abrac, p. 10.

for Communist Party members following the German-Soviet pact, reflected on her situation. Her husband was a prisoner of war, she had two children, and no resources except her training as a lawyer. Travelling across France during the bombardments, sleeping in barns, she left her children with her family in the provinces and returned to Paris, where she made connections with friends in the university movement. From a totally different milieu, Martha Desrumaux, a militant trade-unionist, active among the miners and textile workers of Northern France, returned to France illegally after a period in Belgium where she had gone when the Communist Party was outlawed in France.

The roles of these women were as diverse as their backgrounds. Germaine Tillion organized and directed one of the sectors of the Haut-Vilte network that succeeded in "passing" people across the Demarcation Line and out of the country. Claude Gerard was military chief in charge of the Maquis for the Limousin-Périgord area for the three movements of the M.U.R. Renée Mirande-Laval was a member of the Front National of Lawyers, acting as liaison between Resistants who were in prison and the outside world of the Resistance movements. Martha Desrumaux was one of the Directors of Francs-Tireurs Partisans, the direct action group in the North, and gave leadership to the miners during the big miners' strike of May 1941. Three of these women--Germaine Tillion, Renée Mirande-Laval and Martha Desrumaux--were arrested and deported

to Ravensbruck. Claude Gerard was imprisoned twice and tortured, but was saved from deportation by the arrival of the Liberation forces.

Reprisals were swift in the North. In the Southern Zone, an energetic minority had more time to devote themselves to the practical details of building a press and shaping an organization. Two women--who contributed to the vitality of the major movements, and whose roles were somewhat comparable--are Bertie Albrecht and Lucie Aubrac. At the end of the war in 1940, Bertie Albrecht was doing personnel work in a factory at Vierzon, a town literally cut in half by the Demarcation Line. Here, she was already secretly involved in organizing one of the lines of passage from the Occupied Zone to the so-called Free Zone. Lucie Aubrac was a history professor teaching in a lyc ee in Lyon, a dynamic woman active in the intellectual left. Albrecht, together with Henri Frenay, an ex-army officer and friend from pre-war days, organized the movement later to become COMBAT. Aubrac, in an analagous role with Emmanuel d'Astier, a journalist and ex-naval officer, organized the movement that took the name Lib eration. Long before the events of June-July 1940, both women had been apprehensive about the development of fascism in Europe; they came to the movements with a strong ideological commitment and a realistic view of the risks involved. Both women helped develop policy and were influential in bringing others into the Resistance movement. Albrecht initiated a network,

known as the Assistantes Sociales, which created a link between Resistants who were imprisoned and their families and comrades. When arrested herself, she convinced the Vichy authorities that she was insane in order to get transferred from prison to a mental hospital where she was able to escape and continue her Resistance activity. Lucie Aubrac's ingenuity in arranging escapes saved many from the hands of the Gestapo. Emmanuel d'Astier, her co-worker in Liberation, and a journalist of some wit, called her "a learned amazon" (une amazone agregée d'histoire).¹⁴

The fiery orator of the Resistance movement, Danielle Casanova, was a Corsican woman who organized the wives of the prisoners-of-war and led them in a demonstration, two thousand strong, on the quai of a Paris Metro early in 1941.¹⁵ Earlier, on November 11, 1940, the students of the Latin quarter, inspired by her eloquence, paraded on the Boulevard St. Michel and unfurled the tricolor, commemorating that national holiday in defiance of the Occupation. Shots were fired to disperse the parade, and the first blood was shed on the paving stones of Paris. On Bastille Day 1941, Casanova again led a parade, this time down the Big Boulevards of Paris. The thousands of marchers, singing the Marseillaise, were joined by others who happened to be on the street. The parade broke through a barrier formed by the police, but was

¹⁴Emmanuel d'Astier, Seven Times Seven Days, trans. Humphrey Hare (London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1958), p. 33

¹⁵Simone Bertand, Mille visages, un seul combat (Paris: Les Editeurs Francais Reunis, 1965), p. 43.

finally stopped at the crossroads of Richelieu-Drouot by several detachments of the Wehrmacht. Nevertheless, for two hours, from three to five o'clock in the afternoon, they had carried off this act of defiance.¹⁶

It was as a result of Casanova's original efforts in organizing the wives of prisoners-of-war that the Union des Femmes Francaises was organized and the the underground newspaper La Voix des Femmes came into existence.¹⁷ She had begun to organize women's committees when she was arrested in February 1942. Among the women who continued her work were Yvonne Dumont, Josette Cothias and Maria Rabaté.¹⁸

In the student movement, the group Défense de la France turned out an underground newspaper, underground in both the literal and figurative sense since it was mimeographed in the cellar of the Sorbonne. Helene Mordkovich had the keys to the Physical Geography lab which opened into the complicated subterranean network of the university and furnished the students with an ideal location to complete all the processes of their publication. Guided by their professors, the students involved in this audacious journalism lab included Geneviève de Gaulle, Charlotte Nadel, Geneviève Bottin, Anne-Marie Jeanprost, Julianne Migneret, and Héléne Mordkovich. The paper

¹⁶Louis Saurel, Les Femmes Héroïques de la Résistance (Paris: Fernand Nathan, 1945), pp. 24-25.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Nicole Chatel, Des Femmes dans la Résistance (Paris: Juilliard, 1972), pp. 190-191.

was mimeographed twice a week at night in the deserted and silent Sorbonne, and on significant dates, like the 14th of July, distributed openly by young men and women in the Metro and on the streets of Paris.¹⁹ In addition to making direct appeals for Resistance, Défense de la France contained well-developed analytical articles on recent events and on Vichy policy. For example, there was a running statistical summary of German pillage of French foodstuffs and a critique of Vichy educational policy.²⁰

Schoolteachers, directly affected by Vichy's attempt to dictate curriculum and its campaign against women in public service, fought against the policies of Abel Bonnard, Minister of Education who did not hide his admiration for the Nazis. With history books expurgated, books by Jewish authors removed from the shelves of libraries, and essay topics imposed on teachers, the Resistance newspapers called on teachers to "change the essay topics" dictated by Bonnard in his frénésie Germanique, and to "teach the true history" of France.²¹ L'Université Libre printed the names of women schoolteachers and university professors who were martyrs of the Resistance.²²

¹⁹Marie Granet, Défense de la France, quoted in Noguères, Book II, p. 245.

²⁰Le Journal "Défense de la France," ed. Marie Granet (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961), pp. 28-29, 48-54, 84-85.

²¹"Institutrices, Resistez," La Nouvelle République, December 1943.

²²L'Université Libre, April 1, 1941, March 15, 1944, April 15, 1944.

From the numerous examples of schoolteachers who furnished false identity papers, arranged lodging and carried documents, it seems safe to generalize that schoolteachers, along with postmistresses, were frequently the liaison agents in the provinces. Typical was Madame G. in the Limousin area, who hid arms under the floor of her classroom, put up young Frenchmen on their way to join the Maquis and acted as liaison in the parachute drops.²³ Young Lea Blain, an instructor at the Catholic school Ames Vaillantes, furnished STO réfractaires with false identity papers, found them lodging, and went on missions. Later she took on a responsible assignment with the famous Maquis of the Vercors. She was killed in action on July 1944.²⁴

Apart from the liaison activity of the postmistresses, the postal and telephone workers of the P.T.T. were part of a complicated enterprise which involved two Resistance organizations, the O.C.M. (Organisation Civile Municipale) and the militant trade union group of the P.T.T. The Communications engineers of the O.C.M., the most technocratic of the Resistance organizations, in what seemed an almost impossible assignment, worked out a system for tapping the underground cables and, using special amplifiers on the circuits, were able to obtain information on German liaison activity. The

²³Bertrand, p. 80.

²⁴Amicale de Ravensbruck and Association des Déportées et Internées de la Résistance, Les Françaises à Ravensbruck (Paris: Gallimard, Editions Denoël, 1965), p. 38.

next step was to obtain the active cooperation of workers who understood and could translate German as well as those who would transmit information. At the administrative and technical level, Jeanette Drouin and Simone Michel-Levy were involved in this enterprise. Marie-Therese Fleury, Antoinette Weibel and Marie Couette were among the trade-union leaders of the Resistance group.²⁵

In Paris and in the provinces, women telephone and telegraph workers carried on the daily activity of listening and transmitting messages. Marie-Louise Laguerre, for example, organized and directed the transmission of telephone messages, work that she carried on right next to the office of the Controle Allemand. She received and transmitted messages from fifty agents of the P.T.T. who "worked" with her. In June 1942, nine of the trade union leaders were tried and condemned by a German court martial, among them Marie-Therese Fleury and Antoinette Weibel.²⁷ At Ravensbrück, Simone Michel-Levy continued her resistance, and was shot for sabotaging production at a German armament factory.²⁸

²⁵Noguères, Vol. II, pp. 216-218; Arthur Calmette, L'O.C.M. Organisation Civile et Militaire, Histoire d'un Mouvement de Résistance (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 1961), pp. 72-73.

²⁶Amicale de Ravensbrück, pp. 37-38.

²⁷Noguères, Vol. II, p. 470.

²⁸Amicale de Ravensbrück, p. 38.

Of the three major Resistance groups in the Southern Zone--COMBAT, Libération, and Franc-Tireur, the latter specialized in direct action, including sabotage and bold strategies to rescue comrades from prisons and prison hospitals. While cooperating with COMBAT and Libération in the M.U.R., Franc-Tireur was fairly autonomous. In the Marseilles area, the responsible women were Bernadette Ratier, Suzanne Duprat, Eliane Eldin and Madeleine Baudoin. Eldin and Duprat did liaison work, Ratier was regional head of the Service Social for the United Movements, while Baudoin was one of the leaders of the direct action group.²⁹ Based on her own experiences, Madeleine Baudoin has written an account of a typical escape project, with the strategy used from the moment that word was received that one of their comrades was arrested to the follow-up arrangements for safe hiding and new identity papers. As a first step, Baudoin went to the hospital where the wounded comrade was being held and, with the complicity of a nurse, a former student of hers, she entered the hospital ward. Dressed in a white blouse with hospital insignia and carrying a thermometer, she was able to move from bed to bed, determining the location of the wounded comrade as well as the presence of Resistants from other movements. After two trips to pin down information, she returned with the men from her group who were wearing German

²⁹Madeleine Baudoin, Histoire des Groupes Francs (M.U.R.) Des Bouches -du-Rhone, de Septembre 1943 à la Libération (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), introduction.

S. S. uniforms and bearing false papers. The papers demanded the release of the political prisoners because of information that a raid by "terrorists" was in the offing. With the guards intimidated and with the hospital staff informed and passively cooperating, the prisoners were carried on stretchers to a waiting Food Service truck borrowed from the City of Marseilles. Through this and similar daring projects, twenty-one patriots were saved from possible execution or deportation. In May 1944, Madeleine Baudoin was wounded in the course of action.³⁰

The comparable direct-action group in the North was Francs-Tireurs Partisans, connected with the Front National. The women's press appealed to women to enlist in support groups to aid the FTP. They could, for example, collect food and medicine, or they could nurse the wounded. However, it was not unusual for women to be directly involved in the sabotage operations, as Martha Desrumaux shows in her accounts of the women in the mining regions of the North.³¹ In the Dijon area, some of the younger women enlisted as partisans. An outstanding example is fifteen year old Jeanine Lejard. After winning the respect of her chiefs, she became an inter-regional liaison agent and succeeded in passing through German barriers. On a barracks wall of Dijon, the townspeople paid

³⁰Baudoin, pp. 122-128.

³¹Chatel, pp. 85-98.

tribute to her remarkable intelligence, her courage under stress, and her cran, or guts.³² France Bloch-Serazin, a chemistry professor, daughter of the savant Jean-Richard Bloch, made explosives for the FTP and also participated in the sabotage.³³ Apparently, direct action was not considered "unfeminine." Women saw the incongruities all around them in the presence of the Occupation. At the time of her arrest by the Gestapo, Denise Vernay, a Franc-Tireur Partisan, was struck by the disproportion between her own personality and toute la machine allemande. The Gestapo had arrived with a convoy of trucks and a hundred armed men, expecting to take a group of male "terrorists." They found only a petite fille. In the truck, on the way to prison, she reflected on the contrast: "My fragile dress, with a soft print...fragile decor of another life...and all these mechanised men."³⁴ It should be remembered that young French women had before them the example of the women of the Spanish Brigades. Anne-Marie Comert, who parachuted into France, told of going on some expeditions with a group of Spanish fighters in the Maquis. These men "were very attached to the memory of their own women, who had fought by their side in the Civil War."³⁵

There was a group of fifteen young Frenchwomen who volunteered for training as parachutists and managed to get

³²Amicale, p. 40. ³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., p. 42.

³⁵Chatel, p. 231.

to England where they spent several months learning to jump as well as several other skills, including coding and decoding messages and radio assembly. One of the first Frenchwomen to jump back on French soil was Marguerite Petitjean, who landed in Valence one snowy January night. Jeanette Bohec, another early woman parachutist, described her first jump, over Alencon:

Galilee, the parachute chief of the sector, was astonished when he saw me coming out of the sky. He was expecting weapons, money and mail, but not a little woman. After that, I took full part in the Resistance. I blew up a railroad track with my own handmade detonator. I decoded and coded secret messages. I gave instructions in sabotage to the men of Marbihan. Later, I became chief of the parachutists in the Finistere.³⁶

Four young parachutists are remembered by the women who shared their last hours at Ravensbrück. Marie-Louise Cloarec, Pierret Louin, Suzanne Mertsizen and Jenny Silvani were on a mission near Paris when they were arrested. Pierret, the daughter of a French army officer, had been working in the service de repérage, which involved giving information for bombing of enemy lines. Suzanne and Jenny were radio operators. Although, for a while, in the prison camp, there was "an illusion that they would have the normal fate of prisoners-of-war, since they were arrested in soldiers' uniforms after their parachutage," all four women were shot at dawn on January 18, 1945.³⁷

³⁶Marie Wilhelm, For the Glory of France. The Story of The French Resistance (New York: Julian Messner, 1968), p. 105.

³⁷Amicale, pp. 39-40.

Women's more traditional roles took on a new dimension in the Resistance. Giving refuge to prisoners, Resistance workers, young Frenchmen on their way to join the Maquis, and aviators shot down--meant entering the "community of risk." For the Gestapo, these were acts of complicity, labeled "political." If the woman who gave hospitality was "denounced," or if the police tracked the Resistant to her home, the hostess might find herself accompanying her house-guest to prison. Later, women helped feed the nomadic Maquis and nursed the wounded maquisards. In some regions, convents served as hospitals. In Northeastern France, in Meurth and Moselle, nuns cared for the wounded Francs-Tireurs and gave hospitality to Resistants who stopped at the convent for the night.³⁸

In the folklore of clandestine hospitality, there are some stories that shatter the stereotypes. Lucie Aubrac tells one about three elderly spinster ladies and their complicity with Resistance leaders in a little town in the Jura. Daughters of a general, they had a brother who was killed in World War I, and had lived alone for many years in a big chateau. They were known to be very pious and politically somewhat conservative. When they did their marketing, they were not afraid to openly criticize Pétain for having permitted the Occupation. As soon as it became known that the

³⁸Chatel, p. 65.

Occupation was being extended to the Southern Zone, Resistance leaders sought a safe place to hide arms that had been held back by French military men. The village cheesemaker approached the haughty demoiselles to ask if they would hide the arms. "Certainly," they replied. "Bring them."

In October 1943, two young men, who had refused to leave for Germany in the forced labor program, were pursued and wounded by the police after sabotaging a railroad close by. The fromager returned to the chateau. "This time I come to ask you to take care of two young men. They are Communists and have been wounded by the police." And so it happened that for two long months, without the knowledge of the village, the three aristocratic women took their turn at the bedsides of the young workers.

Their discretion and devotion was such, and the chateau so spacious, that their home became one of the essential stopping points for the airlifts between England and France. It was never revealed, until after the war, that d'Astier, Rucart, Frenay, Aubrac, Moranda and many other Resistance leaders had dined at their table while waiting for the plane that would take them on mission outside of France.³⁹

It is difficult to generalize about the motives for women's resistance. Of the 1,524 persons arrested and deported from the North, half of them were women--Communists, Gaullists,

³⁹Aubrac, pp. 67-69.

and those with no political identification.⁴⁰ Among them was Mademoiselle Duriez, the plant nurse in a Lille factory producing for Germany, who was described as "a Resistant without knowing it." She engaged in deliberate sabotage, although she did not identify either with the Francs-Tireurs nor with the pro-Gaullists. When one of the workers suffered a minor injury or cut, for which some medication would have sufficed, she bandaged it heavily and prescribed two weeks off.⁴¹

In considering motivation, it would be misleading to classify only in terms of women's identification with the then current political alignments. Ideology was important--whether political, religious or philosophical. For some, however, it was a matter of the daily humiliations of the Occupation, or caring about the influence of Nazi propaganda on school-children, or an initial act of complicity that led to deeper involvement.

...each one of us was moved to pursue the task which was assigned to her by her circumstances...Under these conditions, the militant Catholic, the militant Communist, those who did not belong to any movement, but who had been aroused or who simply had reflected, all these women became involved and sometimes met each other.⁴²

At the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand in Paris, I have read the handwritten témoignages of women from every department of France. Some are written by friends of women who never returned from deportation. They hid réfractaires, hid

⁴⁰Chatel, p. 144.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 144-145.

⁴²Amicale, p. 43.

Jewish children, hid and fed aviators who were shot down, furnished false cards of identity, hid the typewriter used for the newspaper, participated in the parachute drops, participated in the derailments, attacked a convoy of Germans and executed two Germans, transported arms, nursed the wounded maquisards,...

There was a Mme. Rosier in the Gironde who not only gave lodging to aviators and STO evaders, but also "mounted her bicycle at no matter what hour of the day or night to carry an urgent message."⁴³ The illustration is typical, but also an appropriate image for the role of women in the Resistance. It blurs the distinction between dedans/dehors, or the dichotomy of "inner and outer space," to borrow a phrase from a neo-Freudian. Delivering the message was critical in the Resistance movements, and women were messengers of the first order. The diversity of their roles carried its own message. But that message has yet to be received.

⁴³Michael Slitinsky, Trois filles, vingt garçons: la Résistance en Gironde (Bordeaux: Editions des Cahiers de la Résistance, 1968), p. 180.

CHAPTER III

FIVE PORTRAITS

I BERTIE ALBRECHT

Bertie Albrecht grew up in the Marseilles region, known for its Mediterranean exuberance; her parents were Swiss Protestant. Perhaps these two seemingly contradictory influences account for her complex personality. Henri Frenay, her co-worker in COMBAT, says that she always bore the mark of her Swiss Protestant background, even in her manner of dress. She wore her blonde hair severely coiffed, and her style was always "sober elegance." Determination came through - in her speech and facial expressions. Yet all this was tempered by a great deal of openness and warmth.

The collaboration of Albrecht and Frenay was based on a friendship dating back to the mid-thirties. During the period of the Popular Front, Frenay was often present at gatherings at her home in Paris where she entertained a circle of artists and intellectuals, including many from the French Left. This was the time of support for the Spanish Republic and concern that Franco Spain, with the military aid of Hitler and Mussolini, would become a new base for European fascism. Often, Bertie's guests listened incredulously to the experiences

related by some of the great scholars who had fled Nazi Germany. Thus, Frenay sees Bertie as an important person in the development of his political awareness. "I owe her a lot, particularly in the political sphere."⁴⁴

Louis Saurel, who sees her as a martyr, classes her, along with Danielle Casanova, among those French women who in every epoch of French history have forgotten their "natural timidity" when their country was threatened or when liberty was endangered. In his biographical sketch, somewhat in the genre of saints' lives, he evokes Saint Geneviève, Jeanne Hachette, Joan of Arc and Louise Labé.⁴⁵

Saurel stresses the self-abnegation involved in her decision to undertake a program of training in personnel work, enabling her to act as an intermediary between plant administrators and factory workers. At the time that she did so, she was already in her forties, married to a successful Dutch financier, and a wealthy woman in her own right. She had traveled extensively, and was living a comfortable, interesting life. By choice, both in her role as a factory superintendent, defending the interests of workers, and as an anti-fascist, aiding refugees from Nazi Germany, she was already engagée even before she entered the Resistance.

⁴⁴Henri Frenay, La Nuit Finira, Book I (Paris: Co-edition Robert Laffont-Opera Mundi, 1973), pp. 57-59.

⁴⁵Louis Saurel, Les Femmes Héroïques de la Résistance (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961), p. 3.

According to her friend Jeanne Sivadon, Bertie did say, at the beginning of the Occupation: "I am ready to make every possible sacrifice to serve France."⁴⁶

Still, she might have been amused at the Joan of Arc category. Frenay shows that she had a good sense of humor and could mock seriousness, even in her most serious moments. When they met at Vichy in December 1940 and made their Resistance pact, she warned him of the heavy risks. Then, she smiled, and imitating the accent of the Swiss clown, Grock, she said: "Voulez-vous que je travaille avec vous?"⁴⁷

In the early period, getting the newspaper under way, initiating and directing the Service Social, she was creative and full of enthusiasm. At the time that COMBAT was seeking literary contributions and support from church people, she arranged a liaison with Karl Barth, the Swiss theologian.⁴⁸ While she was able to maintain her public role at the Bureau of Unemployment for Women in Lyon, she brought a number of women into the movement. Among them were Marcelle Bidault, Alice Sichel, Jacqueline Bernard, Claude Gerard, Yvette Baumann and Colette Peck.

In May 1942, after a systematic search by the police of her apartment, a fruitless search since she managed to keep them waiting long enough for her to burn all compromising

⁴⁶Marie Granet and Henri Michel, COMBAT, Histoire d'un Mouvement de Résistance, Juillet 1940 a Juillet 1943 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957), p. 36.

⁴⁷Frenay, p. 61; ⁴⁸Ibid., p. 129.

papers, she was arrested. Letters from prison, delivered by her sixteen-year old daughter Mireille, now living alone in Lyon, harassed by the police and asked to leave the lycée that she attended, show that Bertie was beginning to be torn. "Was I right to follow you?" she questioned herself in a letter to Frenay. "I have sacrificed my daughter to the Resistance..."⁴⁹

She was indignant over Vichy's refusal to bring her to trial. Finally, Bertie, together with two other Resistants, decided to go on a hunger strike. On June 19, Mireille brought Frenay a letter in which Bertie expressed her determination:

...I have decided to go all the way. In losing my life, I will gain a peace that seems to me ineffable.
...This time my life is in the hands of God.⁵⁰

On the eighth day, she lost consciousness. Vichy authorities, aware of the possibility of heart failure, yielded on the twelfth day. Three weeks later, she was transferred to the women's prison at Lyon.

In December 1942, she feigned madness so convincingly that she was transferred to a psychiatric hospital. With the help of a nurse and her daughter Mireille, duplicate keys were made, and her comrades organized her escape on Christmas Eve. Frenay had to convince her that she needed rest and a chance to regain her strength before returning to Resistance activity.

Sometime later, in 1943, after her long imprisonment and convalescence, Frenay noticed a profound change. The old

⁴⁹Frenay, p. 304; ⁵⁰Ibid., p. 305.

sparkle and laughter was gone from her eyes; all that remained was a cold resolution. On the very evening of her return to activity, she remarked: "Henri, I cannot accept the idea of another arrest. I cannot go through what they inflicted on me before. If they take me again, I'll kill myself."⁵¹

It is believed that she did take her own life. For, in May 1943, she was arrested again when she took Frenay's place at a crucial rendez-vous.⁵²

II LUCIE AUBRAC

In the Autumn of 1940, Emmanuel d'Astier spent three months, moving around from Vichy to Marseilles, looking for people who would work with him. Finally, he says, he found five who were "fired with rational despair or irrational hope: A Professor of Philosophy, a journalist who squinted, a manufacturer of bedding, an Amazon with a history degree, and a Metro employee." The philosopher was Jean Cavailles. It was through him that d'Astier met Lucie Aubrac, the Amazon with a history degree.⁵³

Apart from some vignettes provided by d'Astier, there is no character sketch or personal history of Lucie Aubrac in the Resistance histories. Vistel, who mentioned her in connection with the development of the movement Libération, was hard-put to characterize her. Perhaps she is too full of surprises,

⁵¹Frenay, p. 460; ⁵²Ibid., p. 506.

⁵³Emmanuel d'Astier, Seven Times Seven Days, trans. Humphrey Hare (London: Macgibbon & Kee, 1958), p. 33

too flamboyant. D'Astier can only express his amazement: "she tamed luck"--she "had everyone eating out of her hand in a moment"--"Lucie still had her enormous appetite for life, undertaking little things as hungrily as great."⁵⁴

Alban Vistel described Lucie as "a Valkyrie,"⁵⁵ giving d'Astier's epithet a Wagnerian connotation, most inappropriate-ly, in view of the historical context. Besides, the image of a handmaiden to dead heroes in the other world hardly fits Lucie Aubrac. She was more concerned with live patriots--as shown by her career of helping Resistants escape from prison and execution.

We know that she was a thirty--year old history professor in a lycée in Lyon, active in the intellectual left, married to Raymond Aubrac, a structural engineer. D'Astier, who was not interested in hagiography, shows her in one of her angry moods, full of anxiety because Raymond had not returned home, and striking out at d'Astier who was close: "If Raymond is arrested before you, I shall denounce you..."⁵⁶ D'Astier had come to tell her that among the twenty-five people arrested in the Combat movement, there were at least three who knew her address.

Evidently, changing addresses was not an uncommon

⁵⁴d'Astier, pp. 101, 185.

⁵⁵Alban Vistel, La Nuit Sans Ombre, Histoire des mouvements unis de résistance, leur rôle dans la libération du Sud-Est (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1970), p. 75.

experience for the Aubracs during this period. When Etienne Bauer came to Lyon in November 1941 to make contact with the movement Libération, he met this "extraordinary couple," Lucie and Raymond Aubrac, who were "extremely agitated and in the process of rapidly moving out of their apartment."⁵⁷

D'Astier relates an anecdote that involved Lucie's "infallible" system for crossing the Demarcation Line. In December 1942, they were to travel to Paris together and had decided to avoid the Lyon station, since the Gestapo was checking all "sensitive points." Instead they met at Macon. Using a combination of guile and charm, Lucie arranged their passage on a freight train.

Night had fallen. Lucie had managed her negotiations with drums beating and flags flying. After a quarter of an hour, six people paid for their drinks and discovered that they all needed a breath of fresh air. I was one of them. And we found ourselves in a goods train, in a truck full of shoes; we hid under a mountain of them protected by a few planks. There were three of us in our hiding place: Lucie, a Marseillais pimp and myself.

I was too thin: not enough flesh between my bones and the iron. I suffered from cramp all over. Lucie slept on my shoulder; the pimp ate.

At Chalon, four hours later, while the German patrol was inspecting the wagons, the pimp almost gave them away by belching and coughing. Lucie threatened to "knock his block off" when they reached the other end of the line.⁵⁸

⁵⁷Noguères, Book II, p. 210.

⁵⁸d'Astier, pp. 100-102.

In February 1944, immediately after Raymond Aubrac's dramatic escape from prison, Lucie and Raymond left for London. As Lucie was expecting the birth of her second child, and was "sure that the baby would be born before the 20th of February," she had given that date to friends for an announcement via BBC. On that day, the Germans, along with her friends, heard the following message: "Jean-Pierre has a little sister Catherine born on the 12th." It was later revealed from German archives that German Intelligence had tried to find out the identity of the parachute chief designated as "Jean-Pierre," and the location of the terrain designated as "Catherine"--in the assumption that the message signaled a successful parachute-drop.⁵⁹ Thus maternity provided this unexpected fillip in Lucie's Resistance career.

III CLAUDE GERARD

"There were no women in the Maquis," I was told. "The Maquis was made up primarily of men who refused to participate in the forced labor program." And then, after a moment's reflection, my informant, Jacqueline Bernard, remembered Claude Gerard, who was chief of the Maquis for the Limousin region.

Even as a young girl, Claude Gerard had considered serving in the French army. She was born near Nancy, the daughter of people from Alsace-Lorraine, and her father had been an artillery officer in World War I. Growing up in that

⁵⁹Aubrac, p. 73.

border region, previously annexed to Germany and restored to France under the Treaty of Versailles, she had been acutely aware of developments on the other side of the Rhine. She had hardly finished her schooling when she heard talk of Nazism. Persuaded that a second World War was inevitable, and "regretting that women were not allowed to join the Army," she decided to prepare for an engineer's diploma. If need be, she could at least serve in an armament factory. She continued to study while working as a teacher. At the same time, she began a self-imposed physical fitness program which included long hikes in the mountains and bicycle trips.

In November and December of 1940, hundreds of thousands of people from Alsace and Lorraine were expelled from their homes. And "trainloads of refugees with little more than the clothes they were wearing were dumped into an already impoverished France."⁶⁰ It was while Claude Gerard was involved in helping these refugees that she made contact with Allied Information Service. She did research on terrain for parachute jumps, organized reception teams and transmitted military and industrial information.

At Lyon, she joined the movement COMBAT, and travelled all over the Southern Zone to assure the distribution of the newspaper. Arrested by the Vichy police in August 1942, she was allowed to go free, since they lacked certain proof. COMBAT then assigned her to the Dordogne area, where she organ-

⁶⁰Paxton, p. 55.

ized the Secret Army. "I moved from village to village, organizing the sections, the sectors, the liaisons, and preparing the plans for sabotage and the recovery of arms."

When Combat, Franc-Tireur and Libération joined forces to become the United Movements of the Resistance, she was in charge of the Maquis for the seven departments of the Limousin-Périgord region. Her own account of all this is remarkably understated. "Nobody showed surprise. Nothing was astonishing--in those exceptional circumstances."⁶¹

IV RENÉE MIRANDE-LAVAL

In the May 1943 edition of Le Palais Libre, the clandestine newspaper of French jurists, an article appeared headed "Women Lawyers Arrested," reporting the arrest of a Mademoiselle Odette Moreau and a Madame Mirande-Thomas.

The authorities actually succeeded in finding an examining magistrate, Monsieur Grenier, who was willing to sign a warrant against these noble-hearted patriots, against these lawyers, against these women. Then he turned them over to the Boches.⁶²

One of these women attorneys, Mirande-Thomas, later Mirande-Laval, survived deportation to Ravensbruck.

Her first act of Resistance was to help an escaped prisoner. Fleeing Nevers with her children during a bombardment, and full of anger as she watched the columns of prisoners

⁶¹Chatel, pp. 15-19.

⁶²Le Palais Libre, May 1943, quoted in A. J. Liebling, The Republic of Silence, trans. Ramon Guthrie (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1947), p. 338.

file past, she found some peasant's overalls for a priest who had been taken prisoner and managed to escape.

"Strangely enough," she says, "it was while reading the Persian Letters of Montesquieu that I knew my decision. It was a marvelous letter that I kept with me in prison..." The letter was the parable of the Troglodytes, a peace-loving people who were invaded. After reading it, she said to a comrade, "I wouldn't be a good Communist if I didn't love my country and defend it...And if something happened to me, what would become of my children? They would understand later that I had to make that choice."

In Paris, she joined the University Resistance movement, working with a friend, Joe Nordman, a Paris attorney. Her work involved maintaining liaison between prisoners and the Resistance movement. One other woman attorney who was at the Palais de Justice at that time, Renée Coste, later became her good friend and co-worker. "We kept in touch with each other by the most extraordinary detours." To camouflage her Resistance activity, she maintained a regular clientele.

Another of her responsibilities was to smuggle out reports on the torture inflicted on prisoners by the Special Brigade of the French police, information that was then transmitted to London. She considered the defense of comrades a professional activity, but the smuggling of documents and a key to the Prison de la Santé was a Resistance activity.

The smuggling of the key from Sante was "a miracle",

a collaboration with prisoners who traced it in the few moments when a guard, momentarily distracted, had left it on a table in the prisoners' cell. Renée brought out the tracing, thus enabling Resistants on the outside to make a duplicate; the key was then smuggled back in the prison hidden in a cake. After verification, she brought it out again by hiding it in the crevice of a little hat, covered with flowers and bows, and worn over the corner of the eye. These hats were very a la mode at the time, but it embarrassed her to wear one.

She recalls that she gave a lot of attention to being fashionably dressed, partly to keep up the morale of her comrades, but mostly because an elegantly dressed woman was less likely to be suspected of being a "terrorist."

Once, she was carrying with her a particularly dangerous document, a list of the industries ready to put their industrial and financial resources at the disposition of the Germans, with tonnages and other specific figures. She had just emerged from the Metro, when suddenly the police had everybody open their bags right there on the quai. Unhappy women were dumping their carrots and leeks all over the sidewalk. "I had a charming little umbrella, a pretty hat, and lots of style and assurance." She placed her hands on the shoulders of one of the inspectors, pushed him lightly, and said "Pardon me, Monsieur," as if all this was none of her concern. He replied, "Pardon, Madame," and she continued on her way. "I didn't run...at least not until I was close to

home, and then a terrible panic seized me."

In working with the Front National des Juristes, she went to see a number of magistrates to ask them to resist wherever possible by applying the laws of exception. She found only one, Maître Python, who was arrested about the same time that she was.⁶³

V MARTHA DESRUMAUX

Martha Desrumaux went to work when she was eleven years old, first as a nursemaid, then in a textile factory, hiding when the government inspector came around. She said she was a Marxist before she became a militante. Her association with the Communist Party was as old as the Party itself.

Her trade-union activity goes back as far as 1917, when she participated in a textile workers' strike. In the 1920's she took part in the struggles of the textile workers of the North and became a trade-union leader in 1930. She was born in the North close to the Belgian border, she knew that country well, and was known and respected by the miners, the metal workers and the textile workers.

In September 1939, when the Communist Party was declared illegal, she left her two-and-a-half year old child with a trusted family and went to Belgium, where she organized the illegal publication of Enchainé. Arrested by the Belgian police for having false identity papers, she was released in May 1940 and returned to France illegally.

⁶³Chatel, pp. 85-98.

She has a rich store of anecdotes, expressed with the flavor of Northern speech. One that she tells is the story of Gilberte Renard, a thirteen year old girl, who knew that a regiment of Sengalese had not given up their arms, but had hidden them in a mushroom shed near Lille. Gilberte located the arms and transported them in baby carriages to the center of the town of Lille. It was with these arms, and others later acquired, that a group of young people began a program of sabotage.

Martha tells how the miners smuggled dynamite out of the pits by hiding it in thermos bottles that she provided. Wives of the miners hid the dynamite. In one instance, at the Bernard pits at Denand, women stood outside the Grand Bureau while the explosives were being placed. Even when the Germans came with machine guns, the women did not move until the charges were placed.

As a member of the Francs-Tireurs Partisans, Martha herself took part in sabotage. One experience, vividly described, was the destruction of a reservoir of gasoline at an airfield. "If I said that I wasn't afraid, I'd be lying."

She gave leadership in the miners' strike of May 1941, which involved 100,000 miners of the North and Pas-de-Calais. The work stoppage and occupation of the mines by the workers resulted in a severe curtailment of coal shipments to Germany and was followed by harsh repressive measures, including condemnation to death for some of the men and forced labor

for the women who supported the strike.

Martha traveled all over the North Region and knew many of the women who were active in the Resistance. She names some of them;

I can't list them all: Georgette Cadras Yvonne Alas, Marie Chieus, Henria Wasquez, Emilienne Mopty...Madeleine Vincent, Rose Debruyne, Yvonne Levecque...all those women who are no longer here...and those who, when they did return from the camps, found their homes completely destroyed, their husbands and sons having been arrested and shot.

Once, in 1950, when she was very sick, she pulled herself through by reminding herself that all the Resistance histories "would be written by the bourgeoisie." She felt she didn't have "the right to die" before telling about the role of the workers in the North.⁶⁴

⁶⁴Chatel, pp. 85-98.

CHAPTER IV

THE TWO ZONES

In the memoirs and témoignages of Resistance activists, there are two experiences that are frequently mentioned. One is the moment of fear and apprehension when, crossing the Demarcation Line, they were asked for their identity papers. The other is their intense awareness of the more repressive atmosphere in the Northern Zone.

In the Southern zone, it was necessary to adapt to a more ambiguous milieu. In June 1940, with the exception of the presence of its agents and friends, the enemy was not yet there. In the Northern zone, if life was more difficult, at least the situation was clear: the enemy was there...⁶⁵

The reality of the Demarcation Line had, in itself, created a form of Resistance activity--moving people from the Occupied to the Unoccupied Zone. Renée Cossin of Amiens, who enabled some of the first Resistants to move out of the Occupied Zone, had made three hundred passages when she was arrested.⁶⁶

In the North, working out the escape of prisoners was a fairly elaborate procedure. First, there would be the

⁶⁵Granet, p. 26.

⁶⁶Bertrand, p. 38.

visits to the prison camps, usually made by women, then the smuggling in of civilian clothing, identity papers and money which would enable the prisoners to take the first steps towards freedom. Beyond that, it was necessary to arrange the innumerable stops where they could find a brief respite and lodging for the night, on a long trip which might end in a big city or at the line of demarcation, or all the way to the Mediterranean or the Pyrenees.⁶⁷

One of the figures in these famous filières d'évasion, Suzanne Thiam, a young woman from Metz, in Alsace-Lorraine, used her familiarity with the German temperament and language to advantage. She was arrested for having helped sixty-five prisoners make their escape. Actually, the number of men who had escaped with her help was over five hundred. Her home, a veritable storehouse of maps, compasses, civilian clothing, and false identity cards, was also the point of contact where a forester, a nun, or an elderly woman would lead the prisoner right to the crest of the Vosges, on the other side of which the zone "interdit" ended. One day, the mail brought thirty cards of thanks from prisoners who, with Suzanne's help, had found their families. The Gestapo seized her and she was kept "les bras en croix" for fourteen hours without revealing the names of any of her associates. She was liberated when the Allied troops arrived and found her condemned to

⁶⁷Aubrac, p. 17.

perpetual labor.⁶⁸

Another young woman, Micheline Adam, was employed at the Préfecture of Police at Strasbourg, where the Germans had their Secret Service. She became a specialist in the fabrication of false papers, using the engraving stamps at the Prefecture. When the Germans decided to move a large number of the Alsaciens to Germany, many young people had papers that enabled them to pass into Occupied France. From this group, came many active Resistants.⁶⁹

One of the important networks was connected with the group at the Musée de l'Homme at the Palais Chaillot in Paris. Their trial in February 1942 was a profoundly moving event for Paris. The event is significant not only because of the stature of the French intellectuals who were condemned to death and deportation, but also because this was one of the earliest Resistance groups to be organized, and because the fate of the group illustrates the danger involved in Resistance activity in the North from the start.

The group comprised a number of scientists, teachers, lawyers, priests and other intellectuals who organized a network to move people out of France, "des services de passage all along the line of demarcation, then to the Spanish frontier, and embarkation points on the English Channel."⁷⁰ The four leaders of this network were Colonel de la Rochere, Boris Vilde, Colonel Hauet and Germaine Tillion. On February 23,

⁶⁸ Aubrac, p. 18; ⁶⁹Ibid.; ⁷⁰Ibid., p. 36.

1942, seven of the group were shot on Mount Valerien. Others were imprisoned and eventually deported.

In addition to Germaine Tillion, who organized one sector of the network, several other women were involved. Among the nineteen Resistants who were tried were Agnes Humbert, Yvonne Oddon, Alice Simonnet and Sylvette Leleu.⁷¹

A journal kept by Agnes Humbert during their imprisonment at Sant  and Fresnes, and which describes the trial itself, is a very moving record of the camaraderie that enabled the group to sustain each other during the long period of suspense and interrogations by the Gestapo.⁷²

Germaine Tillion, informed of the arrest of her Resistance comrades, spent a year organizing their defense and trying to obtain their pardon. On the eve of their execution, she was asked to inform their families, and "still unwilling to believe in the worst," she attempted to take further steps to save them, although they had already been shot. The steps she took to eliminate the traitor who had betrayed them and to organize the escape of three other men condemned to death were the cause of her own arrest on August 13, 1942.⁷³

At the time that she was presented with the charges against her and interrogated by the Germans, they made a special appeal to her as a woman:

⁷¹Nogu res, Vol. II, p. 324.

⁷²Agnes Humbert, Notre Guerre (Paris: Editions Emile-Paul Freres, 1946), pp. 145-161.

⁷³Germaine Tillion, France and Algeria, Complementary Enemies, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), pp. 42-43.

When he had finished detailing the charges, he assumed a solicitous air: We are not like the French police, or the English. We are lenient with women. Very lenient. And, if we get a little help, we might even release a woman who has committed espionage..."...I made an effort to appear suddenly full of interest, and my reply literally made them gasp: "And those who have not committed espionage--what do you do with them?"⁷⁴

In both the Occupied and Unoccupied Zones, the Resistance movements had to improvise methods to meet their need for intense communication between services: making appointments, giving assignments, reporting the results of assignments. Since it was out of the question to use the official postal system, the clandestine mail drops, or boîtes-aux-lettres, had to be arranged.

In the Paris area, one of the assets of the Resistance workers was the presence and active cooperation of the legendary Paris concierges. These women, who traditionally have been the custodians of apartment buildings, were "a first-class auxiliary" for the Resistance. Although popular legend has characterized them as overly curious, they demonstrated that they could keep a secret.⁷⁵

As many Resistance workers have noted, these women gave "countless proofs of their patriotism" by warning tenants about a police inquiry about them, of a trap that had been set in the apartment of someone under suspicion, or by giving the

⁷⁴Germaine Tillion, Ravensbrück (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973), p. 16.

⁷⁵Aubrac, p. 51.

police false information. They delivered the mail punctually and with discretion. When inquiries were made, they knew how to distinguish the authentic from the phoney; they avoided the traps of the police; and when it was necessary to allay the suspicions of a too curious inquisitor, they were fantastic actresses.⁷⁶

And they did more than that, as Jacqueline Bernard shows in her account of a meeting that took place in the fall of 1943 in the rear part of a Paris concierge's "loge," the occasion when Albert Camus joined the newspaper staff of COMBAT.

...Meanwhile, our hostess, the concierge, remained in the front part of her "loge" (separated from us only by a thin, screen-like partition) to answer occasional visitors who peeked in and asked her for instructions on how to get to the apartment of one of the tenants. When we took leave of her, she told us we would be welcome any time we wanted to come back. We all knew the risk she had just taken--and which she had volunteered to take again--was quite equal to our own. Any one of us might have been followed by the Gestapo on the way to her place and might be arrested in the near future and--under torture--reveal her address. And, just as there are no mild cases in an epidemic of plague, so with the Gestapo there were no light penalties.⁷⁷

In the provinces, other methods had to be devised for the delivery of mail. Sometimes mail was left with people in business, preferably where there was a lot of activity and it

⁷⁶Aubrac, p. 51

⁷⁷Jacqueline Bernard, "The Background of the Plague: Albert Camus" Experience in the French Resistance," Kentucky Romance Quarterly, Vol. XIV, November 2, 1967, p. 165.

was easier to come and go without attracting attention. In Lyon, where there were usually extra mailboxes in apartments, used normally for clandestine love affairs, the Resistance made use of these in the beginning. When the police caught on, this resource had to be abandoned.

Many young women acted as liaison agents, and were particularly helpful in inter-regional communication. For shorter distances, they used bicycles, but often had to take the train. Young women made good couriers because they seemed less suspect and were less likely to be searched. The risk was great, however, and a considerable number of them were arrested and deported. Many whose cran, cool heads and tirelessness enabled the movements to continue to function, were known only by their first names:

It is impossible to cite all those who assured this perilous service, for whom we knew only the first name or last name: Eliane, Violette, Josette, Clarisse, Simone, Nicole, Clotilde, Frederique, Beatrice, Carmen, Michelle, Alice Sichel and Colette Sanson, and also Marguerite and Monique de Revel at Toulouse, and many more...⁷⁸

In the Southern Zone, the relatively less repressive atmosphere permitted the development of the Service Social. Roughly speaking, this service might be compared with social work. With the application of considerable ingenuity and resourcefulness on the part of the women who built this service, it became an elaborate Resistance network, one with unlimited possibilities.

⁷⁸Granet, p. 173.

The need for the Service arose as more and more Resistants were thrown into prison. Its immediate purpose was to provide them and their families with food and moral support. Considered "an act of simple humanity," it was also "a political necessity" to enable the militants to continue to resist in the face of their isolation, the endless interrogations and confrontations, and often torture. The treatment of prisoners varied according to the zone and the time period. While prisons in the North were always under the control of the Germans, those in the South, up to November 1942, were under the control of Vichy. They were dirty and full of vermin, and the food was bad, but the normal French penitentiary administration continued to function. Prisoners in the South could receive packages and even, on occasion, have visitors; they were in rapport with the chaplains and assistantes sociales of the prison system. Thus, it was possible for chaplains, social workers, lawyers and guards to serve as intermediaries between the comrades imprisoned and the Service Social of the Resistance movements.

Further, it opened the possibility of obtaining information on what went on inside the prison, on who was being detained, including information in their dossiers, and on what the interrogations revealed of what was known about the Resistance, the Germans or Vichy. This information then served to warn suspects, to give them the opportunity to go into hiding, and alerted the chiefs of the movements.

Sometimes, through rapport with chaplains and prison workers it was possible to arrange the transfer of a prisoner to a hospital where the treatment was better, and where it was possible to arrange an escape. In these instances, the Groupes Francs, the direct action groups, came into the picture.⁷⁹

Many young women presented themselves as the fiancées or friends of the prisoners, and talked with the lawyers, accepting the risk of being interrogated themselves, in the course of which they gained information on who was in prison, the charges against them, and the threats to the rest of the movement.⁸⁰

Women combed the countryside in search of the food for their packages, always facing the possibility that the police would want to check the contents of the heavy sacks that weighed down their bicycles. Sometimes, they traveled by train, loaded with heavy valises. In both cases, they risked charges of operating on the black market⁸¹

This service, created by Bertie Albrecht as part of the COMBAT movement, was extended to all members of the Resistance, and eventually became part of the United Movements of the Resistance. As the project grew, it involved considerable organization, the storage of food, and assembly of packages. In this huge enterprise, Albrecht was aided by Yvette Baumann,

⁷⁹Granet, pp. 188-189.

⁸⁰Aubrac, p. 88.

⁸¹Granet, pp. 191-192, 251-252.

later by Denise Mantoux and Bernadette Ratier. The Lyon region was assigned to Colette Peck, and Marseilles to Marcelle Bidault.

After November 1942, when the Occupation was extended to the Southern Zone, the prisons were run by the German police, aided by Vichy and the notorious Milice of Darnand. Then Resistants were subject to the same harsh treatment as those in the North: sometimes thrown into dungeons, tortured and often executed, individually or in groups, or released for the convoys that left regularly for Germany. Although packages and visits were no longer possible, the Service Social continued to aid the families of prisoners.⁸²

Beginning in 1943, the Service Social took on the task of helping the families of the maquisards, and often the maquisards themselves. Later, a medical service was added, with field hospitals to serve the maquis.⁸³

The nature of the project built good will in the communities and drew in auxiliaries: chaplains, hospital personnel, city hall employees, lawyers, even certain magistrates and police officials.

Although the "helping" nature of the Service Social has led at least one historian to describe it as an example of women's "eternal vocation,"⁸⁴ it should be clear that the

⁸²Granet, pp. 261-262.

⁸³Ibid., p. 193.

⁸⁴Vistel, p. 259.

special quality of the service was its open-endedness and the possibilities it offered for improvisation. In both the Northern and Southern Zone, whether women were travelling back and forth on trains doing liaison work, mounting bicycles as couriers or scouring the countryside for food to make their packages, their roles were responses to specific urgencies.

CHAPTER V

TRAVAIL-FAMILLE-PATRIE

I WOMEN UNDER VICHY

In addition to the severe food shortages and endless queuing, and the insufficiency of allotments to the wives of prisoners-of-war, women under Vichy encountered a series of laws which attempted to reduce the number of working women.⁸⁵ The effects of Vichy policy, felt as early as 1940, are reflected in the underground press and in other sources.

On October 7, 1940, a meeting took place at Nîmes between trade-union representatives of the so-called Free Zone and the Department of Labor. The collaborationist press mentioned the cordial atmosphere and mutual understanding that existed at the meeting where "an attempt was made to promote the reforms of Pétain." Roger Bourderon notes that "this was the period when certain responsible trade-unionists of the P.T.T. (Postal Telephone and Telegraph) at Nîmes followed the policy of Vichy which called for dismissal of female personnel."⁸⁶

Among the earliest collective actions by women was a

⁸⁵Paxton, p. 167.

⁸⁶Roger Bourderon, Libération du Languedoc Méditerranéen (Paris: Juilliard, 1972), p. 36.

demonstration of three hundred women in the courtyard of the Michelin factory in Lyon in 1940. These women had been dismissed from their jobs in accordance with the laws of Petain to return "la femme au foyer."⁸⁷

In the underground newspaper l'Université Libre of April 1, 1941, there is an article protesting the forced retirement of women who have reached the age of fifty. The writer refers to these dismissals as "part of the plan of the Messieurs de Vichy against secular teaching and against women as teachers." Then, alluding to the collaborationist criticism of Third Republic policies, the writer added: "Don't be naive enough to believe that this means opening the doors to young teachers. They can't repeat the ZAY experience ...they can't give jobs to debutantes. One doesn't improvise professors." ⁸⁸

In August 1940, there had appeared the first laws calling for dismissal of women from their jobs, "at the very least, in those cases where there was a male breadwinner," and specifying subsidies to "young married couples" who were starting a family. Taking as its slogan the famous Travail-Famille-Patrie, the Petain regime enunciated "the simple rules which, for all times, have assured the life, health and prosperity of nations, including, first of all respect for the family and for children."

⁸⁷Bertrand, p. 49.

⁸⁸ "La Mise à la Retraite," l'Université Libre, April 1, 1941.

The French families remain the depositaries of a long and honorable history. They have the duty to maintain, across the generations, the ancient virtues which make people strong.⁸⁹

Vichy promised subsidies to the virgo nationalis if she would agree to give up remunerative work, and special benefits to women with three children, such benefits to include a priority ration card, the right of her husband to work overtime as well as special tax exemptions,⁹⁰

In addition, on August 15, 1941, Vichy announced an elementary education program for girls, with the accent on domesticity. All of this prompted Paxton to comment: "One is forced to conclude that Vichy preferred women barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen."⁹¹

Collaborationist newspapers, picking up Vichy policy blaming the Third Republic for its antifamily climate of "high divorce and rampant individual license," ran pictures of a smartly dressed career woman standing in front of her car. The caption carried the stern warning: "This is what brought about the defeat of France." Other pictures lauded "the French woman with her child" or "the French woman with her husband."⁹²

This promotion of the unity of the family contrasted sharply with the situation in the homes of workers who had

⁸⁹Robert Aron and Georgette Elgey, Histoire de Vichy 1940-1944 (Ottawa: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1954), p. 193.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 218.

⁹¹Paxton, p. 168.

⁹²Chatel, p. 35.

departed to work in Germany. An article in Résistance on December 23, 1942, after describing the almost total failure of la relève, the exchange of three French workers for one prisoner of war, goes on to comment on the non-existence of the foyer in Paris working-class suburbs. Wives of these workers had been permitted to work at their husbands' former jobs at a portion of their husbands' salaries. The demi-solde, or half pay, irregularly received, was insufficient for women to feed their families. Payment was left to the "good will" of the employers. And, finally, in the Parisian banlieu, there are entire apartment buildings where the only occupants are women trying to make ends meet. The famous foyer of the Marshall, notes the writer, is a "foyer abandonné."⁹³

With their usual verve and irreverence, French people parodied the Vichy slogan: "Trahison, Famine, Prisons," "Travail forcé, 200 familles, patrie trahie," and "Marché noir, Bibliothèque rose, Terreur blanche."⁹⁴

⁹³Résistance, December 23, 1942.

⁹⁴Jacques Duclos, Germaine Willard, Jean Gacon, Basile Darivas, and Henri Rol-Tanguy. Le Parti Communiste Français dans la Résistance. (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1967), p. 130.

II THE SERVICE DE TRAVAIL OBLIGATOIRE

Vichy had no problem in modifying its policy on women leaving the home when it became necessary to supply German factories with French workers. The point has frequently been made that the dogma of "la femme au foyer" has been conveniently abandoned in the episodic use of women in industry when circumstances required. Michel and Texier stress the point, recalling that French women were encouraged to enter the labor force in World War I, as well as in 1939 when France was still producing for her own defense.⁹⁵ Vichy's hypocrisy was even more startling. By November 1943, there were 44,000 French women working in German factories.⁹⁶

The Resistance press reflected their shock that "even women" were being taken in this campaign to get French workers to "forge their own chains." Although I have isolated this fact because it appears to contrast so dramatically with Vichy family policy, it should be seen in the total context. The recruitment of French workers to fill the manpower gap in Germany falls into two time periods, the period of the relève, followed by the Service de Travail Obligatoire. The

⁹⁵Andrée Michel and Geneviève Texier, La Condition de la Française d'Aujourd'hui (Geneva: Editions Gonthier, Collection Femme, 1964), Book II, p. 233.

⁹⁶Paxton, p. 366.

shift represents a hotting-up of the campaign. The relève was Laval's counter-proposal when Sauckel, the Führer's deputy, came to Paris in June 1942 to apply the German labor policy to France. "Two million able-bodied young Frenchmen were already in Germany as prisoners of war, and Laval now threw them into the bargaining scales with the notorious relève scheme: the release of one prisoner of war for every three French workers who volunteered to work in Germany."⁹⁷ When the voluntary program failed to produce the required number of workers, beginning in February 1943 Vichy instituted a program of forced labor, the Service de Travail Obligatoire.

During the period of the relève, an appeal was made directly to women. Huge posters, directed to the wives and children of prisoners-of-war, outlined the procedure for the return of the prisoners: "Il en reste, relevez-les." (They are still there; relieve them.) Other posters, appealing to the families of workers, showed a mother and child smiling as they thought of their father: "The bad days are over. Papa is earning money in Germany." Wives of prisoners-of-war were promised that they would be located in the same area as their husbands' prison camp. All that was required was the signing of a one year's contract.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Paxton, p. 367.

⁹⁸ Bertrand, p. 63.

Further study could be done on the 44,000 women working in German factories by November 1943. How and when these women were recruited, whether they went voluntarily in the early period of the relève, genuinely believing they were relieving French prisoners, or whether they were actually conscripted, is not clear from my sources. There is one clue in an article which appeared in Front National early in 1944, entitled "S'unir, s'armer, se battre contre la déportation," which comments that Laval tried to give the impression that he was negotiating to exclude women from conscription. However, the writer notes, since he made his counterproposal on January 28th, and the law went into effect on February 2nd, it was apparent that Laval's resistance didn't last long. The article goes on to predict a "comb-out" of factory workers in all the big plants and reports a statement made by a local official that in one town where twenty-four beauty salons were working a reduced schedule, it was decided that three or four would be sufficient, and that shops that made lace and beauty products would be closed.⁹⁹

Since Paxton also mentions that the Vichy government, in its earlier efforts to get volunteer labor, had worked frantically to meet its quota by closing "inefficient shops," it seems likely that many of the women came from these plant

⁹⁹Front National, Series No. 3. No date appears on this issue. However, since it includes a summary of sabotage operations for December 1943, and precedes No. 4, March 30, 1944, it was either the January or February 1944 issue.

"comb-outs" and small shops considered inessential.

According to the Resistance press, certain industries turned over a percentage of their work force.

Now it is open season on French workers. Four hundred thousand of them are needed...They don't report voluntarily? Then the police come to grab them...All the factories it appears will soon be obliged to turn over 12 per cent of their personnel. Fourteen aviation plants in the Lyon region are sending their machinery to Germany. Labor contracts are signed in the workers' names and they are forced to leave.¹⁰⁰

Apparently, deportation was also used as a threat when workers had grievances. Madeleine Marzin reports a visit to Nancy where women were employed in a shoe factory producing for Germany. In the cold winter of 1944, no heat was provided. The women were afraid to complain because they had been threatened with forced labor in Germany!¹⁰¹

During the period of the relève, militant women were already organizing street demonstrations. In Paris, on August 1, 1942, three women, Lise Ricole, Maria Rabate and Claudine Chomat led a demonstration of women on the rue Daguerre, in the 14th arrondissement, during the marketing hour. Lise Ricole addressed the hundreds of housewives: "It is time to act...Not one Frenchman to work for the boches. Women, advise your husbands to leave for the country where they will find a refuge...help them to hide." Tracts were

¹⁰⁰Franc-Tireur, January 20, 1943, quoted in Liebling, p. 212.

¹⁰¹Chatel, p. 64.

distributed and the Marseillaise rang out.

Two agents armed with revolvers tried to arrest me. A German officer drew fire on the crowd. I jumped to the ground and ran, pursued by a police agent...

Prepared by an earlier experience on the Rue de Buci, a solid guard of Francs-Tireurs Partisans moved in to protect Lise Ricole, who escaped and hid in the home of a friend. She was later arrested and gave birth to a child while in prison.¹⁰²

In Rouen, on August 15, 1942, Annette P. pleaded with Catholic women as they left the Church of Saint-Paul to oppose the relève. She too was arrested.¹⁰³

With the initiation of the program of forced labor, much broader sections of the population were affected, with gradual development of the first mass refusal. The peasantry of France, prior to the initiation of the STO, had been more accepting of Vichy attentism, since they had food--"the most precious commodity," were living more comfortably, relatively speaking, and even, in some cases, thriving on the black market. When their sons, too, were called upon to leave for Germany, they became more supportive of the Resistance. On the question of deportation, the Church took a clear anti-Nazi line. According to a statement made by the Archbishops of France after their meeting on April 7-8, 1943, the STO did not constitute an "obligation to conscience"; it was not

¹⁰²Bertrand, pp. 64-65; Noguères, Bk II, p. 568.

¹⁰³Bertrand, p. 65.

a sin to dodge the compulsory labor service.¹⁰⁴

The trade-union organizations began to speak out, encouraging workers to resist. An article in the Mouvement Ouvrier Francais, an underground newspaper of the C.G.T., mentions that the law of July 15, 1943, "la nouvelle mesure abominable," gives unlimited powers to departmental prefects and gives no guarantees: "and what limits, from 15 to 65 years of age. But outside of that, nothing....Not even for women, who are conscripted like men."¹⁰⁵

Front National describes the manhunt in Paris and the spontaneous popular reaction.

...In Paris, the movie houses and cafés are invaded by the police, commuters coming out of the Metro are apprehended...If their papers do not show that they belong to a "protected" category...then it means deportation.

But popular initiative is already reacting...We have seen women spontaneously alerting the customers in the neighborhood cafés when the police were making a raid...¹⁰⁶

At Montlucon, on January 6, 1943, five thousand people assembled at the railroad station to block the train that was about to leave with three hundred drafted workers. A special appeal had been made to women, and whole families showed up. When the armed gardes-mobiles lined up, they were greeted by a hailstorm of pebbles. During this time, the drafted workers

¹⁰⁴Werth, p. 63.

¹⁰⁵Mouvement Ouvrier Francais, August 1943.

¹⁰⁶Front National, No. 4, March 30, 1944.

escaped from the train and scattered. The locomotive was uncoupled and, when it finally got in motion, it was separated from the rest of the cars. Of the three hundred drafted workers, two hundred seventy succeeded in escaping and avoiding the draft. When the Wehrmacht arrived, the crowd had disappeared.

The incident was repeated at Romans, at Saint-Junien, and at La Mure where two thousand women were involved.¹⁰⁷

One example of an appeal to women appeared in La Marseillaise, Région Provençale, headlined "Women of Marseilles, --Alert."

The slave-traders Sauckel-Laval-Pétain want to tear away your sons and husbands to throw them into the meshes of the German war machine. More than ever, Hitler needs arms....

Women of Marseilles, while the Allies are pushing towards the final assault of the Hitlerian fortress, do you want your loved ones exposed to daily bombings in the German factories? Do you want them to turn out the munitions destined to destroy our cities and towns?...

Women of Marseilles, encourage your sons and husbands to refuse to answer the calls addressed to them. You can arouse them to participate in the daily combat against the Occupant and their French supporters by joining the local groups of the F.T.P.F....let them join their comrades in the Maquis.

The article closes with a reminder of the example of three well-known Resistance women: Danielle Casanova, Marie-Louise Fleury, and Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷Bertrand, pp. 65-66; Franc-Tireur, January 20, 1943, quoted in Liebling, p. 212.

¹⁰⁸La Marseillaise, Région Provençale, January 20, 1944.

One of the important activities set up by the United Movements of the Resistance was a forged paper service to enable the STO "deserters" to dodge the endless controls imposed by the German occupation authorities. There are many humorous anecdotes in connection with the false identity cards. Jacqueline Bernard tells one that involves a village postmistress, a woman who gave her lodging while she was on the move. The woman suffered from a palsy which resulted in a trembling of her hand. One day a young STO réfractaire came into the post-office to send a telegram, and handed his identity card to the postmistress. The two of them stood looking at each other, the young man's hand shaking from nervousness, the woman's hand shaking from the malady. Finally, she said, "This is a very bad identity card. I think I can get you a better one."¹⁰⁹

For those workers in the "protected" category, whose jobs were considered useful to the Occupation, there remained the possibility of resistance through strikes, slowdowns and sabotage. In the North, the Germans had a difficult time with sabotage. "The owners of French heavy industry had gone to work for them quite happily, but the products were proving to be distressingly unreliable."¹¹⁰ In December 1943, women workers struck the aviation plants at Gutner, at Avion, and at Saint-Ouen.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹Jacqueline Bernard, Personal visit, 23 December 1975.

¹¹⁰Liebling, p. 189.

¹¹¹Duclos, p. 226.

On May 15, 1941, France was shaken by a strike of more than 100,000 miners of the North, which took place in spite of harsh repressive measures, mass arrests and a movement of Nazi soldiers into the region. Although clearly tied in with the food shortages and other grievances, because of its size and the severe curtailment of coal shipments to Germany, this strike took on the character of a mass uprising against the Occupation. Women wrote the leaflets, picketed the mines, and played a supportive role in that strike. Many of them were condemned to forced labor.

¹¹²L'Union Comités Populaire de la Région Parisienne,
June 1941, No. 2; Chatel, pp. 136-137.

CHAPTER VI

FOLKLORE OF RUTABAGA: THE COMMITTEES OF HOUSEWIVES

May 31, 1943 was designated as Mother's Day by Petain. On that day, a leaflet framed in the tricolor circulated in the town of Lens: "Mothers. Demand a bread supplement for Mother's Day. No lying speeches. No decorations. We want bread!"¹¹³

Mother's Day seemed to be a mockery of the suffering that was going on in French households. French caloric intake is estimated to have descended "as low as 1,500 calories a day where there was access to black market supplies and even lower for city populations where there was not."¹¹⁴

The food rations permitted the French under the Occupation were as follows:¹¹⁵

		<u>approximately</u>
Bread:	250 grams a day	9 oz.
Meat:	180 grams a week	6½ oz.
Sugar:	500 grams a month	18 oz.
Cheese:	40 grams a week	1.7 oz.

Among the recollections of the French people for that period are the long lines of housewives with their string bags, waiting for the daily release of provisions. Aron gives a vivid

¹¹³Bertrand, p. 59.

¹¹⁴Paxton, p. 360.

¹¹⁵Aron, p. 175.

description of the emotional content of that experience:

For French housewives, the best part of the day was spent standing in the food lines. They began to develop in the summer of 1940. In the course of the winter, in the cold, the lines became longer. To understand the fatigue and despair of people during that time, you had to be part of that monotony ...And everywhere you listened to identical stories, those stories produced by the popular subconscious to hide its fears and nourish its hopes--the folklore of rutabaga.¹¹⁶

Even before the protests and demonstrations, small groups of militant women in Paris engaged in a form of passive resistance. They entered the black market restaurants that continued to post their usual menus for the benefit of the Germans and collaborators, and attempted to embarrass the clients. The active protests began slowly. As early as 1940, the women of Beziers, in the Languedoc, forced the Food Control to put a truckload of potatoes on sale.¹¹⁷ In Montpellier, women stood outside the home of the prefect at the hour when he was at the dinner table.¹¹⁸ A writer in the underground press reported with some satisfaction having seen forty women of St. Servais in Brittany "chasing two overzealous food controllers."¹¹⁹ Frequently women were arrested; sometimes authorities held them just long enough to intimidate them by interrogation. After the 1941 demonstration on the

¹¹⁶Aron, p. 175.

¹¹⁷Bertrand, p. 49; ¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 45.

¹¹⁸La Terre, January 1944, No. 68.

rue Daguerre in Paris, where more than a thousand women helped themselves to foodstocks intended for the Occupation, Germaine Lelievre was arrested and deported to Ravensbruck.¹²⁰

In Paris, on January 18, 1941, housewives stood outside the offices of the Secretary of State in charge of food supplies. At Montreuil, a group of women organized a baby-carriage parade in front of city hall to demand supplementary rations of bread. Demonstrations followed in Drancy, Creteil, Noisy-le-Sec and Cachan. In the middle of winter, two hundred women demonstrated in Clichy. At Pas-de-Calais, the number swelled to seven hundred. At Rouen, there were fifteen hundred.¹²¹

Similar actions took place in the South. In Marseilles, five hundred women assembled before the empty bakeries. At Limoges, two hundred market-gardeners succeeded in convincing the authorities to remove a restriction on the sale of milk and vegetables. At Sète, near Montpellier, where thousands of women demanding bread were hosed with jets of water from fire engines, trade unionists showed their solidarity by conducting a forty-eight hour strike. Also, in the South of France, women organized a march on Vichy, beginning on November 11, 1942. On April 9, 1943, five thousand women, some pushing baby carriages, conducted a demonstration in Marseilles that went on for several days, followed by others in Toulon and

¹²⁰Amicale, p. 35; Bertrand, p. 39.

¹²¹Bertrand, pp. 49-50.

Antibes.¹²²

Roger Bourderon recalls that on certain days in the market at Carcassone, in the Aude region of Languedoc, they sold only carrot leaves. For this, the women had to line up behind ropes and barriers waiting for a bell to ring, the signal that allowed them to make their "pitiful purchases," while the German soldiers took snapshots of them. People were travelling by bicycle further and further out of their own region, in search of potatoes and meat.¹²³

From 1942 on, he says, the demonstrations against the food shortages began to take place. Most of the time, these demonstrations were limited to the food problem, but they began to take on a political character. The first that he recalls was a demonstration of five hundred women from Ales in February 1942, who paraded under the window of the sub-prefect shouting "We want bread." After a while, they began to cry "Down with Pétain!"¹²⁴

One of the first acts of open defiance in the North was the affair of the rue de Buci, in the heart of the Latin quarter in Paris. Women were lined up in front of a super-market, awaiting a distribution of canned sardines, something they had not seen for almost two years. The super-market was well-stocked and the Germans had no problem getting service

¹²²Bertrand, pp. 50-51.

¹²³Bourderon, p. 33; ¹²⁴Ibid., p. 34-35.

there. The woman who was to give the signal for the beginning of the demonstration by singing the Marseillaise lost her nerve. "It was a bad neighborhood--full of Vichy police and Germans." Madeleine Marzin decided to enter the store with some other women militantes, opened a case of canned sardines, and threw the cans to the women waiting in line. She was arrested and condemned to death. "The rue de Buci episode," said the authorities, "was the signal for the beginning of the revolution, and we were a band of pétroleuses." Since Marzin was one of the first women to be condemned to death, Vichy still had some reservations about carrying out the death sentence. After imprisonment at Fresnes, she awaited deportation with a group of comrades. The morning of their departure from Montparnasse station happened to coincide with the Dieppe landing of August 1942. Taking advantage of the crowd and confusion in the station, she managed to slip out of the train window and escape, hiding first in a shed where oil was stored and then in a nearby church.¹²⁵

It should be added that when militant women of the Comités Feminins placed their leaflets in the baskets of women waiting for their ration of bread, especially during the early period of the Occupation, the response was often minimal. Not only did they encounter apathy, but sometimes they heard the echoes of Vichy propaganda. "It's all because

¹²⁵ Chatel, pp. 45-54; Noguères, Book II pp. 430, 568.

of the paid vacations. The French people were too happy, governed by a band of incapables. Look at the Germans, how correct, polite and well-organized they are." And sometimes, Madeleine Marzin remembers, a woman would tug at her sleeve and whisper, "Be careful, Madame, you don't know who you are talking to. That woman is my neighbor. German soldiers come to her house."¹²⁶

But the food shortages with their endless queuing should not be seen in isolation. As food supplies diminished, there was a stepping up of the Service de Travail Obligatoire. And after November 1942, when the South of France was also occupied, the dissatisfaction mounted. Bourderon describes the change: "The oppression seemed more direct with the presence of the foreign uniform...A few months after the arrival of the Germans...the application of the S.T.O. strengthened the movement of refusal."¹²⁷

By May 1944, in the city of Marseilles, the spirit of refusal was so strong that when an announcement was made that the bread ration had been cut, a demonstration of women set off a general strike. Front National described the events of May 24th to 27th. On the 25th of May, women grouped in all the neighborhoods and began their march to the Préfecture shouting "À bas la milice, à bas les affameurs. Du pain,

¹²⁶Chatel, p. 39.

¹²⁷Bourderon, p. 35.

du pain!" All along their route, women sent delegates into factories, shops and offices, where machines were shut off and workers joined the parade. Before the Préfecture, the first barrier was forced. A delegation of women went up to the Prefect's office to leave their statement of grievances. Around 4:00 p.m., the Germans arrived in armored cars, leveling their machine guns, but not daring to draw fire, and unable to disperse the crowd which now had become several tens of thousands. French sailors and firemen struggled with German sailors who tried to hose the crowd. But the women slashed the hoses with pocket knives, and the German sailors were forced to give up. On May 26th, work stoppages took place in all the plants, in the Todt yards, at the aviation field, and trains did not move out of Marseilles.¹²⁸

Sheila Rowbotham, writing about the bread riots of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, commented that "it is really from women's relationship to consumption that the experience of collective action emerges."¹²⁹ To some extent, this was true of the French women who joined with their neighbors to protest the food shortages under the Occupation. There was a continuity in the group actions of these women that enabled them to get to know each other and built their solidarity. But their actions went beyond the bread and

¹²⁸Front National, June 1944.

¹²⁹Sheila Rowbotham, Women, Resistance and Revolution (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p. 102.

butter issues. Going down "in the streets" and confronting officials, in the face of the French Milice and the armed Occupation, was movement into the larger community of refusal. Concern with subsistence is part of the foyer role, and expected of women; open defiance is not.

Edith Thomas, a novelist and newspaper writer, was one of the contributors to Les Lettres Françaises during the Resistance. In the preface to The Women Incendiaries, she made a historical connection between the women of the Paris Commune and the women's committees of the Resistance.

What allows me, perhaps, to understand the women of the Commune is that during the Resistance, I took part in the coordinating committee of the Union des Femmes Françaises, edited their tracts, and helped them to plan the women's demonstrations against the Vichy government and the Nazi occupation; the barricades of 1944 replied to the barricades of 1871. 130

¹³⁰Edith Thomas, The Women Incendiaries (New York: George Braziller, 1966), p. xiv.

CHAPTER VII

CAMOUFLAGE

Women had a good cover for Resistance activity. People rarely take them seriously. And especially if a woman played one of the roles that fits some stereotype of feminine behavior, she could often "pass" simply because she was a woman. The haughty and elegantly dressed lady was less likely to be searched; the pretty young girl could pose as the girl friend of a prisoner; the bad-tempered elderly lady might discourage an inquisitor.

The gallantry of the courtly love tradition is still alive in France, and in the early period of the Occupation the German soldiers tried to show that they too could be gallant. Women used this tradition to divert the possible suspicions of the Gestapo and the French police. They could play other roles too. They could flirt like a woman of the streets. Or they could play the foyer roles: a housewife on her bicycle carrying a basket of vegetables for her family; a maman pushing her baby carriage with little ones tagging along. There may have been tracts hidden under the turnips, or explosives under the mattress in the baby carriage. Even that most ancient of roles, woman as forager and gatherer, was useful. At the Line of Demarcation, women gathered

lucerne grass for their rabbits on either side of the barbed wire. This is one of the ways that messages were transmitted.¹³¹

This is what is known as turning femininity on its head. Many of the Resistance women have at least one story to tell that involved using "typical female behavior" as a camouflage to deceive the oppressor.

On her way to a Resistance meeting one night, Renée Mirande-Laval was carrying a small flashlight so that she could see her way in the blackout, when a police agent grabbed her by the arm and held the flashlight on her. "Oh, be nice," she appealed to him, "It's not mine--someone lent it to me." Frightened as she was of the possibility of an interrogation, she chatted amiably, improvised a story about a visit to her aging father, and appealed to his gallantry. "Look, if you were really nice, you would walk me to the Metro, and then I wouldn't need the flashlight." Gallantly, he took her arm and accompanied her right to the entrance of the Metro, where she thanked him politely and went her way.¹³²

Probably the most useful prop in the Resistance was the baby carriage. Women used it to transport leaflets, newspapers and explosives. Among the numerous episodes involving this form of camouflage is one involving an English

¹³¹Bertrand, p. 40.

¹³²Chatel, p. 95.

intelligence agent, who had parachuted into France and was working closely with the Resistance in the Lyon area. For the moment, he was using the apartment of a local schoolteacher to send his radio messages to London, but it was necessary to change locations frequently, since Vichy and the Germans had equipment to trace the location of clandestine radios. When it became apparent that the apartment was being closely watched, it was impossible to smuggle out the valise containing the radio. The schoolteacher brought her sister with baby and baby carriage to the apartment. And later on that day, the Gestapo, machine guns in hand, made way for a very domestic looking couple, calmly pushing a baby in baby carriage, in which the radio was hidden.¹³³

For the Libération movement, the job of distributing the newspaper was usually entrusted to women. One of the women, a Madame Gonnot, would pack some two thousand papers under her clothing, with the most obvious articles some pieces of lingerie. When the curiosity of the police led them to open her "ravishing pigskin valise," they "never went beyond the silk brassiere or the filmy chemise."¹³⁴

One day in March 1943, Paulette was about to enter an apartment building in Lyon to remove the mail from the boîte-aux-lettres used by the Secret Army of the Southern Zone. She observed a black Citroen parked outside, and in that

¹³³ Aubrac, pp.70-71; ¹³⁴Ibid., p. 50.

time of gas restriction, became suspicious. She unhooked her garter and stepped into the entry, pretending to be fastening her hose. Sure enough, two men were stationed in the stairway, ready to apprehend anybody who approached the mailbox. She left immediately and returned with a male co-worker. The two of them, then, holding hands like lovers, strolled back and forth in front of the building, discreetly warning comrades on their way to deposit mail. Shortly thereafter, a motorcyclist arrived and smashed the box with a hammer, and left before the two inspectors had a chance to catch him. From then on, Resistants knew the box was out of service.¹³⁵

Probably the most dramatic ruse was carried off by Lucie Aubrac. She managed the escape of her husband Raymond, one of the leaders of the Libération movement, who was arrested in the big coup where the Gestapo took Jean Moulin and several other Resistance leaders. At that time, Lucie was obviously pregnant. Armed with false identity papers, she marched into Gestapo headquarters and declared that her honor was at stake. Aubrac, she said, was the father of her unborn child; she hadn't known about his Resistance activity, and didn't give a damn about the Resistance. All she wanted was to see him. The Gestapo captain agreed to send her to the prison with a priest. Since her objective was to get her husband out of jail, she convinced the captain to bring Raymond to headquarters on the pretext that she might be able

¹³⁵ Aubrac, pp. 52-53.

to get some information from him. During their confrontation, she managed to let Aubrac know that the truck that would carry him back to prison would be attacked. On the return trip, four cars followed closely behind; one of them shot by on the driver's side, and a carefully aimed bullet at the driver sent the truck out of control. Aubrac and twelve other prisoners scattered into the night.¹³⁶

Even the role of the shrew turned out to be an effective deception. There was a Madame Feston in Paris who manufactured false papers. When her group was arrested, the Gestapo decided to let her go. Each time she was interrogated, she kept up such a flow of impudent sarcasm that the Gestapo and the Special Police, "bored with her intemperate language," gave her up for an inoffensive and crazy old lady.¹³⁷

Suzanne Letondeur, in the North, not far from Rouen, aided young S.T.O. réfractaires who engaged in railroad sabotage. She was a capable woman who ran a farm in the absence of the owner, but when the Gestapo came looking for the young men, she acted the role of an ignorant farm servant.¹³⁸

¹³⁶Marie Wilhelm, For the Glory of France. The Story of the French Resistance (New York: Julian Messner, 1968), pp. 152-153.

¹³⁷d'Astier, p. 113.

¹³⁸Chatel, p. 175.

Who would suspect the nuns of St. Martins of Tours of being liaison agents in the Resistance movement? Or the three pious spinster ladies of hiding arms in their chateau?

CHAPTER VIII

WOMEN AND THE RESISTANCE PRESS

In July 1940, Agnes Humbert, one among the thousands who had left Paris during the exodus, pondered her alternatives. She could stay in the provinces, she could ask friends in the United States to help her find a job as an art historian or museum curator, or she could return to Paris. On the Fourteenth of July, after listening to the BBC broadcast, she wrote in her journal: "This morning, they informed us that in Paris the German posters are being torn down as fast as they are put up. Parisians are already resisting... I have decided to return to Paris."¹³⁹ Two weeks later, at the Musée de l'Homme, she looked for Jean Cassou:

Abruptly, I told him what was on my mind...that I would go mad...if I didn't do something to react. Cassou confided that he shared my symptoms. The only remedy was for a group of us to get together, about ten of us, to report the news, to edit and distribute bulletins, to give resumé of the French radio broadcasts from London. We had no illusions about the effectiveness of our action, but it would be worth it if we succeeded in restoring our mental health...Cassou accepted my idea...Ten minutes later, he found us a place to meet, the offices of the publishers, Emile-Paul.¹⁴⁰

In the back-room of Emile-Paul, Frères, the editorial committee

¹³⁹Humbert, p. 20.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 24-25.

planned the policy of their clandestine newspaper, and in September 1940, with a "borrowed" mimeograph machine, they turned out their first bulletin. "It was corrosive, witty, and brief." Résistance was one of the first of the underground papers to appear in the Northern zone, where the free press no longer existed. Considerable ingenuity was used in distributing the bulletins. They were conveniently forgotten in the Metro, in the post-office, on department store counters, in public toilets, in telephone booths, everywhere that "hungry eyes could read them."

On January 28, 1941, Humbert wrote in her journal:

...I must think of some way to earn a living. The job dismissals brought about by the Vichy government are très agréable insofar as they leave us with free time to work for Resistance, but they also leave us the problem of feeding ourselves. When it comes to finding twenty sous to buy postage to put the newspapers in the mail, we are always short nineteen.¹⁴¹

Like most of the underground newspapers, Résistance circulated like chain letters. Each issue concluded with a plea not to destroy and an invitation to reproduce.

Among the first of the underground papers to appear in the Southern zone, COMBAT was the voice of the movement of the same name. It began with a little mimeographed information bulletin put out by Bertie Albrecht and Henri Frenay late in 1940, which contained "war news, the behavior of German troops, early signs of resistance, the situation in annexed

¹⁴¹Humbert, pp. 53-54.

Alsace-Lorraine, the pillage of France by Germany..." Bulletin No. 1 was typed, with eighteen copies: "It wasn't much, but it gave us a great deal of pleasure."¹⁴²

During Frenay's absence, Bertie Albrecht took over the editing and distribution. Once, he found her waiting at the Lyon station with a precious new recruit, Jacqueline Bernard, who, "without hesitation," had agreed to help expedite the paper. "How could I have known that Bertie had just brought us the woman who, up to the time of her arrest by the Gestapo in the spring of 1944, would be the moving force of our entire underground press?"¹⁴³ When the mimeograph began to break down, Bertie found a young artisan and his wife who agreed to print the paper.

After November 1942, when the Parisian newspapers, re-located at Lyon, were forced to discontinue, sympathetic printers sometimes allowed the Resistance movements to use their plants. By 1943 and 1944, almost all of the major Resistance papers were printed and each of the movements had its own press. In the event that one of the presses was discovered, solidarity was the rule.

As early as 1940, the wives of the prisoners-of-war began to distribute their paper the Trait d'Union. Early in 1941, the women's underground press began to circulate throughout France. By giving information on the activities

¹⁴²Frenay, p. 64;

¹⁴³Ibid., pp. 106-107.

of the women's committees, they encouraged other women to join the collective protests of food shortages. They drew women into the movement against the Service de Travail Obligatoire, and later fostered support for the maquis and the partisans.

Usually one or two-page mimeographed papers, they involved considerable improvisation. In one case, the "office" was the cellar of a winery. "I remember going there every night to do the typing," wrote Camille A. "I sat on a wine barrel, with the typewriter on another barrel."¹⁴⁴ Since it was difficult and dangerous to travel any distance with large quantities of the papers, most were limited to local and regional distribution. There were editions of the Voix des Femmes from several arrondissements in Paris, and from Bourgogne, Normandy and the Marne. Among others, there was Femmes, Les Mères de France, and Les Femmes à l'Action.

The organized Resistance movements had special women's newspapers. For the United Movements of the Resistance, it was Les Femmes Patriotes; for Francs-Tireurs, it was Les Mairaines. An issue of Les Mairaines of the North and Pas-de-Calais made a vigorous appeal to women to either help or join the partisan fighters:

...collecting food and medicine; finding places of refuge; recovering arms; acting as liaison...as

¹⁴⁴Bertrand, p. 60.

couriers...They can enlist the réfractaires in the struggle; they can recruit doctors, pharmacists, social service workers and nurses, and organize health committees. Let them learn to dress wounds, heal the sick and wounded; and let them fight side by side with the partisans of the Resistance.¹⁴⁵

The lay-out of La Madelon of the Francs-Tireurs Partisans emphasized women's dual role. The newspaper was divided into two columns, one addressed to women combattantes, those who were partisans, and one addressed to the marraines, or godmothers of the partisans. The second group took on the names of "companies": 1848, Alsace-Lorraine, Jeunesse Héroïque, Commune de Paris.¹⁴⁶ Frequently, the writers made historical connections. One of the editions of Commune de Paris, for example, announced that their newspaper, formerly named after the Socialist patriot Jean Jaurès, would henceforth be called the Commune de Paris, recalling the courage of the Parisians who refused to submit to the German occupation when they were sold out by Thiers in 1871.¹⁴⁷

The Cri d'Alarme was the underground newspaper for the Paris region of Femmes Françaises. For its national edition, stencils were brought to the provinces, where they were mimeographed locally, thus eliminating the transportation problem.

¹⁴⁵ Les Marraines, Nouvelle Série No. 3,, quoted in Evelyne Sullerot, La Presse Féminine (Paris: Armand Colin, second edition, 1966), p. 64.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 64-65.

¹⁴⁷Commune de Paris, No. 3, February 1944.

Probably the most remarkable fact about the history of the underground women's press is that even in prison, women continued to get out a newspaper. At the prison of La Roquette, beginning in July 1943, women prisoners wrote and circulated, regularly each month, La Patriote Enchaînée. The newspaper was handwritten, but so well done that it looked as though it had been printed. At the other end of France, women imprisoned in Marseilles published Le Trait d'Union des Baumettes. Using all kinds of ingenuity, they managed to get these handwritten newspapers out of the prisons.¹⁴⁸

Aside from these newspapers which were entirely the work of women, other Resistance newspapers often included articles of special interest to women. La Nouvelle Républicaine had a regular column, signed with the pseudonym "Valentine," which was sometimes an editorial addressed to a particular professional group (Teachers, Resist!) and sometimes a significant news item. In February 1944, Valentine reported the departure from Compiègne of a convoy composed entirely of women destined for a concentration camp: "six hundred women who sang the Marseillaise as they walked through the town." On March 31, 1944, she reported that the Consultative Assembly at Algiers had voted unanimously to give French women the right to vote. L'Université Libre gave information on

¹⁴⁸Sullerot, p. 65.

the Resistance of women teachers and university professors. L'Humanité special women's edition of January 1944 reported the strikes of women aircraft workers as well as the numerous bread demonstrations.

Some of the women invented the phrase "une vraie presse du coeur," (a press that really came from the heart). giving a positive twist to the expression "presse du coeur" which is generally applied to the sentimental, true-romance women's magazines of the commercial press. In passing, it is interesting to note what happened to the commercial "presse du coeur" under the Occupation.

With censorship problems compounded by paper shortages, most of the commercial press disappeared. One that survived, Marie-Claire, was published from Lyon, reduced in size, right up to July 1944. Its survival policy was accommodation. It suggested interesting ways to fix rutabagas and pointed out that women could unravel their old bedspreads and reknit the yarn to make underwear. It also descended to some "sad compromises," and Evelyne Sullerot, leafing through a collection of the editions published during that period, was offended to the point of resentment and disgust. She commented on the magazine's veneer of elegance and the snobism of its staff.¹⁴⁹

Femmes d'Aujourd'hui published all through the Occupation and on one important issue, at least, they managed to

¹⁴⁹Sullerot, p. 63.

hold their ground. When the German censor insisted that the magazine publish calls for the obligatory work service in Germany, the editorial staff temporized, and finally managed to avoid printing the calls. They ran into trouble, however, with one of their most innocent features. The publication of an innocuous letter from a reader asking for a recipe, but signed with the amusing pseudonym "à bientôt Tommy" (see you soon, Tommy), aroused the suspicions of the censors who accused the magazine of printing secret messages. The women on the editorial staff explained courteously that if indeed the magazine carried secret messages, they were certainly not hidden in these naive signatures. Finally, Femmes d'Aujourd'hui decided that the issue wasn't worth the trouble, and the little pseudonyms "charged with hope" were discontinued. The magazine continued to publish right up to the time of the Liberation, when its "dossier" was approved by the Liberation Committee, entitling the magazine to paper allocations.¹⁵⁰

One of the underground papers, Femmes Françaises, reported an act of passive resistance on July 14, 1944. According to the writer, that national holiday appeared to be just a grey and melancholy morning. Then florists began to display blue flowers--lupin and delphinium--white sweet-peas

¹⁵⁰Sullerot, p. 63.

and lilies-of-the-valley--and roses. In a hat shop, three striking hats caught the eye. To each, a little tricolor bouquet of feathers had been added. From a window, a blue workshirt hung drying next to a red handkerchief and a white dishrag. And all up and down the street, young girls had chosen their dresses and skirts to pick up these colors, so that the Boulevards and the Champs Elysees seemed suddenly to bloom with blue, white and red, like the unfurling of a flag. This was Paris on July 14, 1944, the day that all patriotic demonstrations had been strictly forbidden.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹Bertrand, p. 143.

CHAPTER IX

RAVENSBRÜCK

From the prisons of Fresnes, Romaineville, La Santé, Lille, Drancy, Belfort, Lyon and others, women were deported to the all-women concentration camp Ravensbrück. Among the occupied countries, France, together with Poland and the Soviet Union, had the highest number of women deportees. Germaine Tillion, working from numbers of identifiable women in separate convoys, arrived at an approximate figure of 7,000.

"...but the total number of Frenchwomen who passed through Ravensbrück was obviously greater: 8,000? 9,000? Perhaps 10,000."¹⁵²

A group of French women who survived the ordeal got together twenty years later to collaborate on a work--a collective testimony of a collective combat. With the passing of time--twenty years that had enabled them to distance themselves from their anger and despair--they set out to extract what was essential from their experience.

They said that Ravensbrück was a symbol--a symbol of a system of destruction. Beyond that, it was a symbol of resistance carried out through their solidarity.¹⁵³

¹⁵²Tillion, p. 61.

¹⁵³Amicale, p. 13.

They point out that their resistance activity did not, and obviously could not take the same forms as it did when they were part of the Resistance movement in France. There was no structured Resistance in the sense that the actions of the different clandestine groups were coordinated. "Whatever activity was carried out was on the basis of personal contacts, more or less systematic, among a limited number of women who trusted each other."¹⁵³ Their objectives were as follows:

to organize mutual aid in cooperation with other national groups,

to maintain morale and confidence in victory by collecting and circulating information to break their isolation,

to slip little grains of sand into the gears of the German war machine,

to see to it that some of their comrades returned to tell the story,

to keep their intellectual faculties alert, and even to learn something from the experience that would be useful if they should have the luck to survive.¹⁵⁴

In their program of mutual aid, they attempted, wherever possible, to place political women in key places: in the kitchen, in the clothing stores, in the shoe shop, in the infirmary, as work force leaders. Very few French women were given these privileged positions, but a rapport developed between the political deportees that was international. It enabled the women to get little food supplements for the sick, occasionally

¹⁵³Amicale, pp. 247-248.

¹⁵⁴Ibid.

medicine and medical care. Whenever there was an awareness of a decision to exterminate sick prisoners, warnings went out to stay away from the infirmary. On rare occasions, it was possible to smuggle in a forbidden object: a Bible, a dictionary, a collection of poems, an underground brochure.¹⁵⁵

Some of the French women who had been at Auschwitz before being shipped to Ravensbruck attempted to give their comrades the benefit of the lessons learned from their previous experience. This was the case, for example, with Martha Desrumaux and Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier. When Martha Desrumaux arrived at Ravensbruck in March 1942, she immediately became aware of the solidarity among political women. In the course of an interrogation where she refused to give information, her finger was amputated. When she regained consciousness, she found herself in bed, cared for by a woman in white. "Thank you, Madame," she murmured, and the woman replied, "Not Madame--comrade." The Czechoslovakian Communist women, she learned, had identified themselves as nurses. Later Martha Desrumaux made the comment: "That woman was no more a nurse than I was the Pope."¹⁵⁶

Through her initial contact with political women, Martha was able to offer support to other deportees when they arrived. She warned them not to declare themselves sick. She made them aware of the resistance women of other nationalities

¹⁵⁵ Amicale, p. 249.

¹⁵⁶ Chatel, p. 151.

which helped to build a network for passing on information. The women who were in rapport with Martha and Marie-Claude strived to keep a census of the women of each block and the most urgent needs of the block. The process of keeping the census was a continual one, given the frequent changes, but it was considered important in order to make sure that the women did not become isolated.¹⁵⁷

After one of the French women had been beaten to death in a "reign of terror," a group of twenty women, led by Germaine Tillion, went to the Commandant to protest. This was the first instance of a delegation of women asking to meet with him. "He was polite...and promised to remonstrate with his overzealous subalterns." The guilty S. S. man was given a change in duty, but the women-protesters were condemned to a day without food, and their food ration was cut three Sundays in a row. "But on those three Sundays, they ate better than ever, for the whole camp responded in solidarity."¹⁵⁸

Part of the Nazi system was the annihilation of all thought and reflection. The women were not allowed anything to read, nor writing material. Theoretically, even talking was prohibited. Nevertheless, the women organized religious and intellectual communities; even a series of lectures when the Polish room chief pretended not to notice. Jacqueline Dufournier, who assumed responsibility for this clandestine

¹⁵⁷Amicale, pp. 250-252.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., p. 256.

"recreation," describes the range of expertise for the lecture series. "Among us, there were journalists, college professors, students, doctors, factory workers, business women. We even had a lion tamer." Thus the women gave accounts of their travel experiences, philosophical essays, descriptions of folklore, analyses of Shakespeare's plays, a visit to the capitals of the world, a study of ancient Chinese civilization, as well as a presentation on raising rabbits and one on lion-taming.¹⁵⁹

To break their isolation, they exploited their limited sources of information. One source was within the camp itself, from contacts who worked in the garden and in the infirmary. Information gleaned in this way was passed on at night after the siren had announced "silence in the camp." Then a voice would be heard. Sometimes it was Anise Girard, sometimes Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier, who gave the report. "Listen, Mesdames, here is the communiqué for today." These clandestine news commentators played an important role in maintaining the morale of their comrades.¹⁶⁰

Although newspapers were forbidden, women who read German translated the Völkischer Beobachter, the organ of the Nazi party, which was delivered to the camp. By reading between the lines, they could make some deductions about the latest military losses of the Nazis. To obtain the paper,

¹⁵⁹Amicale, p. 265.

¹⁶⁰Olga Wormser and Henri Michel, Tragédie de la Déportation (Paris: Hachette, 1955), p. 279.

a strategy was worked out, a collaboration between French and Russian women. At Siemens, the camp factory, "as soon as the sound of the old jalopy was heard," Simone, alerted by the Russian women would come outside. The Russian women, on one side of the truck, would begin to unload the packages and cases, but in such a disorderly fashion that the Germans would be completely preoccupied. On the other side of the truck, Simone would have time for a brief exchange with the French prisoner-of-war who made the delivery, and in the confusion she could hide the newspaper he gave her.¹⁶¹

In block 15, block 21 and 32, were were able to get the newspaper and translate it out loud. But whenever we couldn't get the cooperation of the blockowa or the stubowa, the situation was more difficult. And as the German military situation got worse, the copies of the newspaper were harder to find. Jacqueline says she spent eight days hunting down a copy of the Völkischer before she could put her hands on one. ¹⁶²

The reading and interpretation of the news was a process in their camp routine. The first step was to read it out loud, without comment. Later, during the day, in the soup lines, while queuing for their ersatz coffee and in the interminable "calls," the questions and speculations would follow. "... and while the SS were counting off on one side, conversation would flow freely on the other side...",¹⁶³

There was an awareness and interest in the study that Germaine Tillion was making of the concentration camp itself.

¹⁶¹ Amicale, p. 274; ¹⁶²Ibid., p. 275; ¹⁶³Ibid.

One of our companions, a sociologist, took advantage, if one could use that expression, of her presence in the camp to study the system of the concentration camp. Aided by comrades who worked in the camp's administration, she made a very detailed documentation of the considerable profits that accrued to the SS from the work done by the prisoners. Thus, beyond the apparent absurdity of the system, she discovered its economic and financial aspects...Thanks to her, we--the victims of this "infernal machine"--were able to look at it intellectually, and this gave us more courage. 164

Faced with the requirement that they work either in the camp itself, or in factories producing for the German war machine, the women had to work out their problem of resistance. "Ravensbrück was a lucrative industrial enterprise which waited until the last minute to liquidate its workforce." In the camp itself, there was an economically independent manufacturing town, run by an individual who paid 3½ to 4 marks a day for each woman prisoner rented to him by the camp. Next to the camp, the Siemens factory paid 4½ marks per worker, and sometimes as high as 7 marks for skilled workers or for those whose production rate was relatively high. In addition, factories all over Germany could requisition women workers for a fixed price; the Ravensbruck prisoners counted fifty-five of these factories, whose administrative direction was under Ravensbrück.165

There were two forms of resistance: open refusal or participation in a group decision to slow down and sabotage

164Amicale, p. 268.

165Tillion, pp. 65-70.

production. In some exceptional cases, open refusal was followed by reassignment to camp duties. More often, those who refused were given the most loathsome duties or punishment so severe that it led to death. For those assigned to the armament factories, refusal meant certain death.

For some, the opposition was easier than for others. "They had recently come out of the maquis, or they had maintained their morale in prison." Others, on the contrary, had suffered from long inactivity in prison, or had been traumatized by the chaos of the camp; they looked upon work as a structured activity, "a remedy for their distress." It was only later that they reacted and "detested this production of arms that was destined to kill their own people."¹⁶⁶

At one plant, the management tried favoring individual workers with food supplements in order to increase production. Usually, the bribes were refused. Once, the food was accepted but shared equally among all, right under the eyes of the S.S. At the Limmer-Hanover factory, after several weeks of apprenticeship, the management offered to pay a bonus and open a canteen in the camp block if production was increased. For the starving women, the offer was tempting. That night, after discussion, they realized they had to refuse. Those who spoke German explained to the foremen that as Frenchwomen, forced to work for the enemy, they could not accept payment. Two weeks later, however, tickets were distributed.

¹⁶⁶Amicale, pp. 282-283.

Three women who refused were struck and thrown to the ground. On the following Sunday, when the canteen was opened, the women pretended to be asleep. They were dragged out of their rooms and forced to look at the contents. But two hours later, they knew they had won. "The tubes of toothpaste, the herring and other delicacies went back in the boxes..."¹⁶⁷

We had discovered another source of strength: our unity. Beginning with that day, we were no longer 264 women, we were a group...In the most terrible moments of our captivity, even as we struggled to survive, we still knew how to resist...in that mêlée of frightening looking creatures, weakened by years of suffering and fear, we knew how to remain women.¹⁶⁸

Many of the women dreamed of an open and complete refusal, a collective decision which would be of some duration. But given the situation at the camp, and sensing hesitation on the part of some of their companions, they realized that this was an impossibility. They did agree on a declaration of principle which recalled the Geneva Convention: having been arrested for their Resistance activity, they continued to refuse to serve the Reich. They would therefore limit their production to one jacket a day. This compromise that all agreed on was presented to the Commandant of the camp. His response was that in Germany those who did not work did not eat. The following day, however, when the distribution of work was made, they received only one jacket, and they held to this limit right up to their last days at camp. According to

¹⁶⁷Amicale, p. 279.

¹⁶⁸Stephanie Kuder, "De l'Université aux camps de concentration," pp. 391-394, quoted in Amicale, p. 280.

their character, their point of view, and the individual circumstances, they chose one or the other of the two forms of opposition: total refusal or joining in the group decision to lower production. Individual refusal was the route taken by a number of the prisoners and maintained in spite of the danger.¹⁶⁹

When the women met again, twenty years later, they again noted the diversity in their backgrounds and social milieux. "Once again, women of different persuasions... united as they were at Ravensbrück, met together to accomplish this work: this fact is a testimony, as much as the work itself."¹⁷⁰

Their collaboration might in itself be considered a chapter in history.

¹⁶⁹Amicale, pp. 282-285.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., p. 14.

CHAPTER X

SOCIAL CRISIS AS A FORCE FOR CHANGE

The organized movements of the Resistance saw themselves as not only combative, but also constructive. Even during the period of the Occupation, confident of their eventual liberation, they had begun to study their problems and formulate solutions. Given the role played by women in the Resistance movements in a country where women had not yet been granted the vote, one would expect that this contradiction in itself might engender some thought about the future role of women in the political process. There is some evidence that this was happening. When Corsica was liberated in September 1943, an edition of Front National proclaimed the election of the new Municipal Councils, underscoring the fact that "on each one of these councils, a woman was seated."¹⁷¹

Some aware person, writing for Libérer et Fédérer had apparently been giving considerable thought to the question. In the January 1944 edition of that newspaper, an article appeared which took a clear-cut feminist position. It opened with a declaration: "The first revolutionary act of liberated France will be, without doubt, women's access to political life." Throughout the Third Republic, the writer

¹⁷¹"L'Exemple Corse," Front National, October 1943.

said, the parties of the Left as well as the Right had basically been in agreement (ils sont restés d'accord) on keeping women out of politics. "Paradoxically, certain parties which take a stand in their written programs for political equality for women, the Socialist party for one, oppose it in practice, taking all possible steps to prevent this equality from becoming a reality."

The considerable role played by women in the Resistance has effectively broken down the old prejudices. In showing that they know how to struggle and are willing to die for their beliefs as well as men, and better than many men, women have convinced the most sceptical--of their ability to participate in political life.¹⁷²

While the situation of Resistance women, and of French women in general during the years 1940-1944, seems to me to be unique, when compared with that of American and British women during the same time period, nevertheless I have looked for useful comparisons dealing with the effect of social crisis on women's roles. Even some of the differences offer a point of departure. There are two points of view I will consider on the effects of war-time crises on women's roles.

Jean Lipmen-Blumen, an American sociologist, offers a crisis framework for analyzing role change "as a system response to crisis." Using World War II to test her conceptual framework, she selects women's participation in the labor force as one illustration of role change, or "role dedifferentiation."

¹⁷²Libérer et Fédérer, January 1944

Her argument is that "the more severe, prolonged and pervasive the crisis, the greater the permanent residue of role changes." In World War II, patriotism provided a rationale for women to enter industry in previously forbidden roles. In the post-crisis period, immediately following World War II, while women were generally replaced by men in non-traditional categories, they made slight gains which did not recede to pre-crisis levels.¹⁷³

In France, as we have seen, Vichy policy not only discouraged women from engaging in remunerative work, but in some cases resulted in actual job dismissals. In the case of those women who worked in aircraft plants and other industries producing for Germany, the situation was not at all comparable. Patriotism would more likely lead to strikes and slowdowns rather than an emphasis on "delivering the goods."

A second point of view is that war-time crises serve to sharpen pre-existing patterns in regard to women's roles. This is the model offered by Maurine Weiner Greenwald's study of the effects of World War I on women's work roles. Her conclusion is that the crisis "laid bare pre-war structural developments in the organization of men's and women's work, prevailing social ideas about women's proper work roles..."¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³Jean Lipman-Blumen. "A Crisis Framework Applied to Macrosociological Family Changes: Marriage, Divorce and Occupational Trends Associated with World War II," Journal of Marriage and the Family, November 1975, p. 891, 900 and "Role de-differentiation as a system response to crisis: occupational and political roles of women." Sociological Inquiry 43(2), pp. 124-126.

¹⁷⁴Maurine Weiner Greenwald, "Women Workers and World War I: The American Railroad Industry, A Case Study,"

As additional evidence to support her hypothesis, Lipmen-Blumen also introduces data to illustrate the increased participation of women in the political process in England, America and France in the post-crisis period. Political equality was, indeed, a concern of women in France. Since a detailed analysis is available of French women's situation vis-a-vis the political process, both pre-crisis and post-crisis, I will summarize this information in order to evaluate the effect of the crisis on women's political roles. A study has been made by Mattei Dogan and Jacques Narbonne, two French social scientists. Two women social scientists, Andr ee Michel and Genevi ve Texier respond. The dialog is fruitful.

The history of parliamentary debates in the period between the two World Wars supports the assertions of the writer of the article in Lib erer et F d erer. While the vote was granted to American and English women soon after World War I, proposals to enfranchise French women never got past the traditionally hostile Senate. There were eight debates in the Chamber of Deputies and three in the Senate on the question of women's suffrage. The most important were the debates of May 8, 15 and 20, 1919 in the Chamber, and those of November 7, 14 and 21, 1922 and March 3, 1932 in the Senate. The most notable of the Senate debates took place on March 3, 1932, at a time when feminist organizations and some members of the

Chamber of Deputies had sharpened their campaign. That debate was actually a digression in a discussion of a proposal to admit women to the Municipal Councils as notaries and attorneys, but it led to Senatorial polemics on the broader question of political rights for women. All the tired and sterile arguments that had led to the defeat of every previous proposal were repeated. The main arguments are summarized by Dogan and Narbonne in an attempt to recreate the "psychological climate" which surrounded every attempt to deal with the issue of equal rights. In brief, the arguments were as follows: 1) fear of the power of the clergy on women; 2) disparities between women's access to political life and their "mission" in the family, with a glorification of that mission; 3) woman's unsuitability "by nature" to political life, an argument linked with the notion of "the eternal feminine"; 4) lack of political maturity and indifference to politics.¹⁷⁵

With the advent of the Popular Front, women again were disappointed. Ironically, in 1936, three women were named as Under-Secretaries of State in the cabinet of Socialist Leon Blum, at a time when women still did not have the right to vote. The three women were Irene Joliot-Curie, Recherche scientifique, Suzanne Lacore, Protection d'enfance, and

¹⁷⁵Mattei Dogan and Jacques Narbonne, "Les Françaises Face à la Politique," Cahiers de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, No. 72 (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1955), pp. 10-14.

Cecile Brunschvieg, l'Éducation Nationale.¹⁷⁶

Propositions advanced by the Communists in 1936 in favor of woman's suffrage were rejected when the Socialists joined with the Radical senators to defeat the propositions, out of "fear of the power of the priest on women."¹⁷⁷ In 1937, the the Senate once again refused to give women the vote.

Women were finally granted the symbolic droit de cité by an ordinance of the Provisional Government of the French Republic in April 1944. In April 1945, women voted for the first time in elections for the Municipal Councils and on October 21, 1945, they participated in a legislative election. On July 30, 1946, the first woman presided at a Parliamentary Assembly, and at the National Assembly of November 1946, the first following the war, there were 39 women out of 618 deputies.

Feminists had begun their active campaign in 1870. In view of the seventy-five years that had elapsed, the summarizing comment of Dogan and Narbonne is worth quoting. "The measure which benefited women was not preceded by a referendum, nor by parliamentary debate, nor by pressure from women's organizations, nor even by discussion in the press. It was granted spontaneously by the men."¹⁷⁸

This measure was adopted in the special psychological climate of the Resistance. It is worth noting

¹⁷⁶ Jacques Chastenot, Déclin de la Troisième 1931-1938 (Paris: Hachette, 1962), pp. 151-152.

¹⁷⁷ Michel and Texier, Book II, pp. 104-105.

¹⁷⁸ Dogan and Narbonne, p. 14.

that, very often, important measures are passed at times of great historical crises. Such events engender a disposition to change institutions.

In taking this step, they followed the example of the majority of the western countries and, besides, paid a debt of recognition to women whose role in the Resistance is well known.¹⁷⁹

Further, the cast of characters had changed. The die-hard anti-feminist Senators had been replaced by the new cadres that came into leadership following the war.¹⁸⁰

In the 1946 elections, immediately after the Liberation, women were recruited as candidates to fill the seats left vacant by former parliamentarians, some of whom had been Vichy collaborators. Of the 2,801 candidates, there was a total of 382 women, of whom 313 were the candidates of four of the parties (Communist, Socialist, M.R.P., and R.G.R.) By 1951, the total number of women candidates for these four parties had dwindled to 191.

The table shows the breakdown of candidates in the legislative elections of November 1946.

	<u>Communist</u>	<u>Socialist</u>	<u>R.G.R.</u>	<u>M.R.P.</u>	<u>Moderate</u>	<u>Not Classed</u>	<u>Total</u>
Total candidates	544	537	554	543	482	141	2,801
Men	437	469	487	472	437	117	2,419
Women	107	68	67	71	45	24	382
% of Women	19.7	12.7	12.1	13.1	9.3		13.6

Of the parties listed above, the Communist Party had the greater percentage of women on their list of candidates. Dogan and Narbonne suggest several reasons for the differences. In their view, the M.R.P., the Catholic left party, put

¹⁷⁹Dogan and Narbonne, p. 14; ¹⁸⁰Ibid.

greater emphasis on the role of "la femme au foyer," while the Communists put the emphasis on woman as "above all a worker, with all the political consequences that this implied." The second reason that they offer is that of "qualified candidates." The Communist Party was strongest in urban centers where it is possible to find politically "advanced" women, while the M.R.P., the R.G.R., and groups of the Right drew their strength from the rural areas. Third, the Communist Party had a heavy debt of recognition to pay to the widows of Resistants who were shot under the Occupation, or who died during deportation.¹⁸¹

By 1951, the total number of women candidates for the legislature for the four parties (Communist, Socialist, M.R.P., R.G.R.) had decreased from 313 to 191. The decrease is explained by the threat to the Communist Party of the electoral law of 1951 and by general concern with the thrust of the R.P.F., DeGaulle's Rassemblement du peuple francais. At that time, the Communist Party called for "tested" militants, with more experience than the women who had recently entered political life. Women were eliminated, according to Dogan and Narbonne, not by reason of their sex, but because of their limited political experience. Secondly, the memory of the Resistance was less vivid. "The debts of recognition were forgotten and the names of the victims, at that distance, no longer had the same prestige."¹⁸²

¹⁸¹Dogan and Narbonne, pp. 148-149; ¹⁸²Ibid., 149-150.

While Dogan and Narbonne believe that the argument to experience is "understandable," French feminists interpret the caution of the leadership of the Left as unwillingness to take women's political role seriously. "C'est en forgeant qu'on devient forgeron." (You become a blacksmith at the anvil.)¹⁸³

Women who sat on the policy-making committees of the Communist Party, the Socialist Party and the M.R.P. were, for the most part, "the former militants whose political careers predate the enfranchisement of women." At the Communist Party Congress of 1953, women complained that they were not sufficiently recognized in "les organismes de direction." Dogan and Narbonne dismiss this complaint: if more women joined the parties, they would increase their chances of being chosen.¹⁸⁴ Michel and Texier respond that women have deserted the parties because the parties have deserted women, at least on specific issues of vital concern to women. For example, in 1956, with a majority of the Left in the Assembly, at the time of the Algerian crisis, measures in favor of divorce by mutual consent and birth control were eliminated. Furthermore, the Communist Party conducted a violent campaign against birth control, denouncing it as a "Malthusian enterprise of the bourgeoisie."¹⁸⁵ "Short-sighted political opportunism...such has always been the attitude of the French

¹⁸³Michel and Texier, Book I, p. 191.

¹⁸⁴Dogan and Narbonne, pp. 143-144.

¹⁸⁵Michel and Texier, Book II, p. 106.

Left in regard to the problems of women."¹⁸⁶

Evidence that women did not maintain the small gains they made immediately after the war is offered by Phillip M. Williams. "The few women, usually Communist or MRP, dwindled from thirty-two deputies in 1945 to nineteen in 1956, and from twenty-two senators in 1946 to nine in 1958." Under the Fourth Republic, in his view, the Socialists seemed to share the Radicals' traditional antipathy to women in politics.

...they were not particularly hospitable to those they did recruit. In 1951 only 12% of the SFIO members were women; there were only a hundred among the 1,800 members of federal committees and never more than one out of thirty-one on the executive (at one time even the women's committee had a male chairman)...¹⁸⁷

Michel and Texier call attention to the abstract language used by the Communist Party, without reference to "concrete grievances adequately meeting the needs of the women of today." The form and language, they say, has hardly varied since the "beaux jours" of the Front Populaire. Further, "the concessions made to the family, by tactic, and through nostalgia for tripartism," handicap the Party with French feminists.¹⁸⁸

The evidence does not show that the crisis had a significant effect on women's roles. In turning again to the two models considered earlier, there is more support for the

¹⁸⁶Michel and Texier, Book I, p. 178.

¹⁸⁷Phillip M. Williams, Crisis and Compromise, Politics in the Fourth Republic (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, Anchor Books edition, 1966), p. 102.

¹⁸⁸ Michel and Texier, Book II, p. 114.

second model. The social crisis laid bare the structures already present, and sharpened pre-existing attitudes and values.

Paxton shows that much of Vichy's family program was a continuation of policies introduced in 1939 by Radical leader Daladier. "Traditionalists at Vichy were delighted to carry these lines of policy forward."

Vichy family policy rested on much franker organicist social theory, however, than Daladier's essentially pragmatic Family Code. Expanding Frederic Le Play's nineteenth-century arguments that the Revolution of 1789 had begun the decline of the French family by equal inheritance and overemphasis upon the individual, Vichy family theorists blamed the Third Republic for an antifamily climate of high divorce, legalized prostitution, alcoholism, and rampant individual license.¹⁸⁹

Both Paxton and Werth show that Vichy family policy carried over to the Fourth Republic:

In the main, France was tending to model itself on the Third Republic, with Vichy as a solemn, partly tragic and partly absurd interlude, though not one that had left no trace at all. Vichy ways of thinking were not dead, and there were traces of it even in de Gaulle's own almost innate regard for the Travail--Famille--Patrie tryptich...¹⁹⁰

The evidence does not show that the crisis situation directly affected the economic and political structure in ways that would change women's roles. The slight amount of leverage that American women may have gained through entry into non-traditional occupational categories was not a possibility in France, where production was geared to the needs of the Occupant. Women's suffrage could hardly be

¹⁸⁹Paxton, p. 166.

¹⁹⁰Werth, p. 290.

chalked up as a significant gain; it was an idea whose time was long past due.

The Resistance movement itself may be seen as a sub-structure, a clandestine world, with an enlarged field of action for women, where extensive adaptability and improvisation by women coexisted with traditional attitudes. Indeed, some historians and Resistance leaders, even as they eulogized women for the role they played, were still locked into the old mythology and language. Jean Cassou went back to the nineteenth century to find his phraseology: "Their role has a natural quality, their action...a fact of nature. Woman, in these conditions, reveals her simple reality... Michelet and the men of 1848 were right--in viewing her as the source and root of the people."¹⁹¹ Louis Saurel referred to the Resistance years as one of those periods in history when women forget "their natural timidity."¹⁹² A Communist Party spokesman credited women with taking part in patriotic action "in defense of their foyers."¹⁹³ And Alban Vistel, praising the women of the Service Social, glorified "la femme eternelle." He, too, uses the messenger image, but as a static rather than a dynamic image:

¹⁹¹Chatel, p. 9.

¹⁹²Saurel, p. 3.

¹⁹³Duclos, p. 225.

...our women companions were messengers of fraternity [italics mine] right to the prisons; in a tortured universe...they bore witness to human tenderness. Their motives did not differ from those of men who entered the combat, but woman is not made for violence and hate. From the dawn of humanity, she has been the mediator, the bearer of the future, the consoler,--our daughters of the Service Social accomplished their eternal vocation. 194

In a very concrete sense, as my research shows, women were messengers in the French Resistance, one of the many roles they played. However, the message that their performance delivered has not yet been received. Social change requires more enduring forces than a crisis situation, most important a social movement in which women confront their own situation and the attitudes of their own men.

194Vistel, p. 259.

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