

**Beyond Auxiliary:**  
**Uncovering the Complexity of Women's Contributions to the French Resistance during**  
**World War II**

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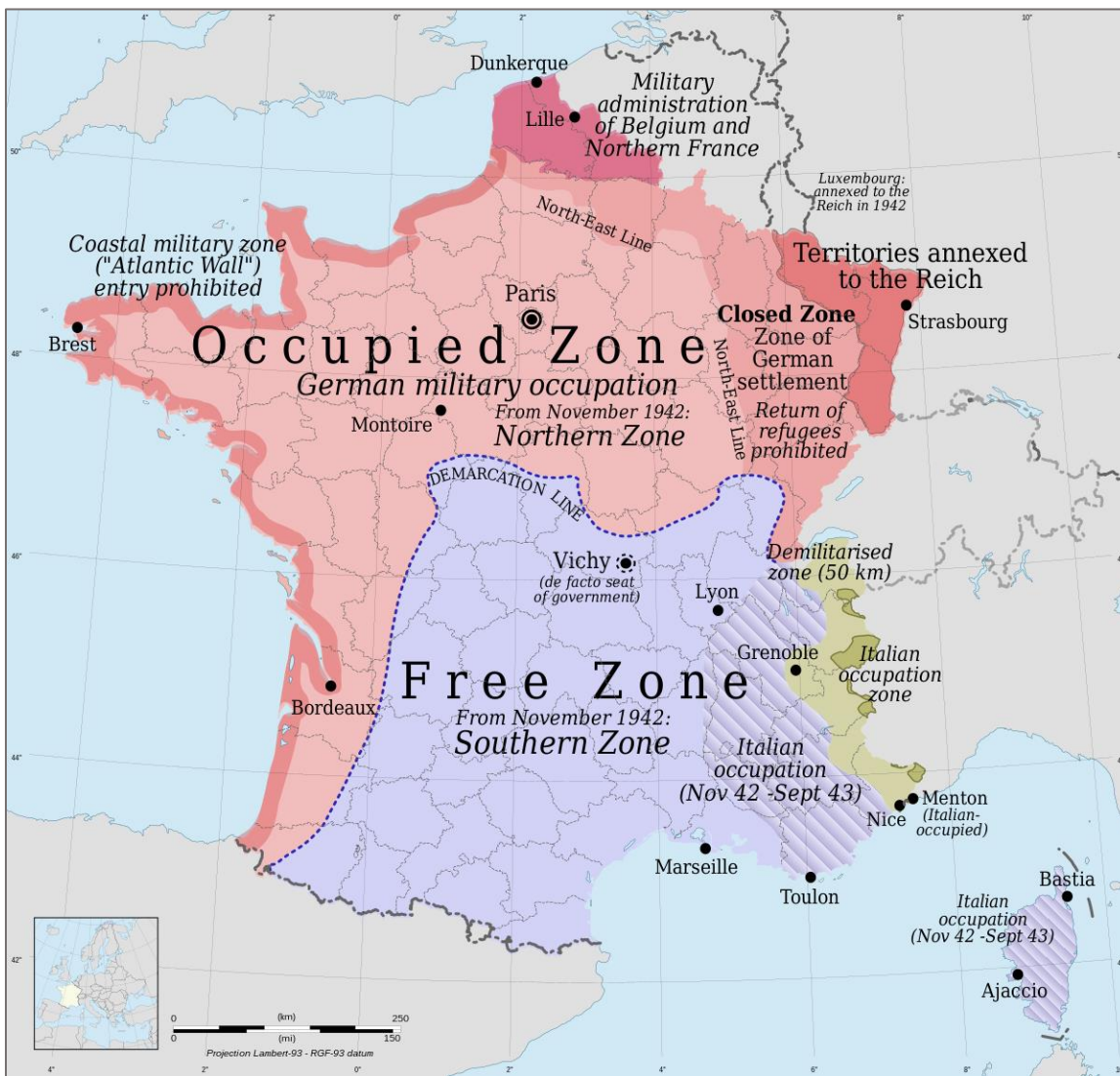
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### Map of France during World War II.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> "Occupation zones of France during the Second World War," Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:France\\_map\\_Lambert-93\\_with\\_regions\\_and\\_departments-occupation.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:France_map_Lambert-93_with_regions_and_departments-occupation.svg).

## Introduction

*“La période de la clandestinité a fait surgir de la masse des Français des personnalités singulièrement attachantes, elle a révélé des talents, transformé des caractères et suscité les vocations les plus variées.”<sup>2</sup>*

Bitter tears rolled down the cheeks of men and women throughout France as news of the armistice with Germany spread throughout the country in June of 1940. Under Hitler’s command, German troops had begun the invasion of France on May 10. After only six weeks of fighting, French troops were overwhelmed by the ferocity of the German advance; the country’s leaders saw no option but capitulation. On June 17, Marshal Philippe Pétain broadcast to the country that he had been put in charge of the government and was seeking peace terms; in a subsequent broadcast he blamed “too few children, too few arms, too few allies” for France’s defeat.<sup>3</sup> Envenomed by the memory of the Great War, defeat at the hands of German troops was a deep humiliation that cut at the hearts of French men and women.

Indeed, Hitler designed armistice negotiations to further humiliate the French. The French ambassadors were brought to the forest of Compiègne, the site where the armistice of 1918 had been signed. The setting, with “an unfamiliar Swastika flag” draped over “the familiar monument showing a German eagle prostrate under a French sword” emphasized France’s submission to Germany.<sup>4</sup> The French plenipotentiaries agreed to an unconditional surrender, handing over their arms and allowing the German occupation of more than half of France’s

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<sup>2</sup> Note de Jacqueline Bernard sur André Bollier, imprimeur du journal Combat, n.d., 72AJ/48, Dossier no. 5, Archives du Comité d’histoire de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, hereafter abbreviated CD2GM. Unless noted otherwise, all primary sources quoted in English are my translations. “The underground period brought out of the mass of the French people singularly charming personalities; she revealed talents, transformed characters, and sparked the most varied vocations.”

<sup>3</sup> Discours de Pétain, 20 juin 1940. “Discours de Pétain (1940-1941),” Clioweb, <http://clioweb.free.fr/textes/petain.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> “Armistice 1940: France Yields to Conquerors After 43 Days of Total War,” *Newsweek*, 1 July 1940, 12, <https://www.proquest.com/magazines/armistice-1940/docview/1882519606/se-2>.

territory.<sup>5</sup> For many, France fell into further shame when Pétain announced the beginning of his government's collaboration with Hitler in October of 1940.<sup>6</sup> Seeing Pétain "as a traitor sold to the Germans, and the Vichy government as a treachery" inoculated many with the desire to do something to preserve their country in the face of its political collaboration with Hitler.<sup>7</sup>

Resistance brewed from the first moments of occupation. General Charles de Gaulle, broadcasting from the BBC in London on June 18, 1940, urged his people to continue their resistance against the Germans: "Has the last word been said? Must hope disappear? Is defeat definitive? No! ... Whatever happens, the flame of French resistance must not be extinguished and will not be extinguished."<sup>8</sup> Gaullist narratives credit this appeal as the seed of the Resistance, but only a small portion of the French population would have been able to listen to his broadcast, and de Gaulle only appealed to specialists to join his fight in London.<sup>9</sup> Most resistance, instead, began on the individual scale and consisted of small acts which asserted that the French still retained power over their own country. Men and women hid Jewish friends, forged documents, and discussed the injustices they faced with each other. Individual acts coalesced into strategic and organized resistance in late 1941. As the Resistance historian Olivier Wieviorka states in his 2013 work detailing the history and historiography of the interior French Resistance, instead of engaging in military action against the German occupiers, these civilian movements "assigned

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<sup>5</sup> "Armistice 1940," *Newsweek*, 13.

<sup>6</sup> Discours de Pétain, 30 octobre 1940. "Discours de Pétain (1940-1941)," Clioweb, <http://clioweb.free.fr/textes/petain.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> Témoignage de Mme Bernardt, nee Baumann, recueilli par Mme Gaudette, 4 December 1945, 72AJ/38, Dossier no. 4, CD2GM Archives.

<sup>8</sup> "L'appel du 18 juin du général de Gaulle," Gouvernement, <https://www.gouvernement.fr/partage/8708-1-appel-du-18-juin-du-general-de-gaulle>.

<sup>9</sup> Olivier Wieviorka, *The French Resistance*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 29.

themselves the mission of preserving the identity of a France whose values were threatened, while at the same time protecting the population from the rigors of occupation.”<sup>10</sup>

Historians disagree on interpretations of the Resistance, but one thing unites them—language troubles the history of the Resistance. Gender plays an important role in French grammar; when describing a group of people, the gender of that group is by rule masculine, unless all the people in it are women. Women’s identities are often grammatically subsumed into men’s. When discussing members of the Resistance—*résistants*—so too do women’s contributions fall beneath the shadow of the broader, masculine conception of the Resistance. Few historians of the Resistance pay attention to *résistantes*. Most trace the trajectories of resistance movements through the *grands hommes* of the Resistance—the men who worked with Charles de Gaulle and headed resistance networks. Discussions of women’s contributions to the Resistance are often limited to a few meager sentences that discount their efforts; although his book spans nearly 500 pages, Wieviorka devotes only five of those to women in the Resistance. Feminist historians began pointing to women’s contributions in the 1970s and 80s, but these studies often conclude that, despite its presence in resistance movements, women’s resistance was ancillary and peripheral to men’s resistance. Studies of women in the Resistance either focus on the quasi-masculine efforts of a handful of women who engaged in armed combat against the Germans or emphasize the mundanity of their resistance.<sup>11</sup>

When women joined the Resistance, they generally fulfilled roles that were prescribed to them based on their gender. Wieviorka claims that the handful of women who did take on roles of leadership were exceptions—as a result, he spends little time discussing their contributions to

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<sup>10</sup> Wieviorka, *The French Resistance*, 56.

<sup>11</sup> See Paula Schwartz, “Partisanes and Gender Politics in Vichy France,” *French Historical Studies* 16, no. 1 (1989), Margaret Collins Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance: How Women Fought to Free France, 1940-1945*, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1995).

the Resistance.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, in her book *Sisters in the Resistance*, elucidating women's roles in the Resistance, Margaret Collins Weitz states that "women's contributions consisted of countless mundane, repetitive, everyday tasks—tasks that do not figure generally in traditional historical accounts."<sup>13</sup> These tasks were nonetheless important, and it is significant that they were performed by women, but Weitz does not delve much further into its significance beyond explaining what women were doing in the Resistance.<sup>14</sup>

Close examination of women's resistance stories offers us the opportunity to grasp the complexities of their involvement in the Resistance. In this study, I make use of testimonies collected by the *Comité d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale* (CD2GM) in an effort to record the experiences of all *résistants* and *résistantes* after France's liberation. Hundreds of women's testimonies exist, spanning all resistance networks and movements across France. This study focuses on one group: Combat, a movement in the unoccupied zone. One of the largest and most successful resistance networks, Combat represents the general functioning of organized resistance at a grand and deeply polished scale. Beyond this, women played a key role in Combat because of the vastness of its social services, which provided monetary aid to the families of prisoners of war.

In this thesis, I argue that women's contributions to the Resistance were far more complex than historians have so far concluded. Examining the *résistantes* of the Combat network through their own words reveals the extent to which their efforts shaped the trajectory of the Resistance. *Résistantes* shared in the construction and expansion of Resistance networks, became leaders within the Resistance, and submitted themselves to the same mortal dangers as the men

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<sup>12</sup> Wieviorka, *The French Resistance*, 407.

<sup>13</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, vii.

<sup>14</sup> Claire Andrieu, "Women in the French Resistance: Revisiting the Historical Record," *French Politics, Culture & Society* 18, no. 1 (2000): 14.



they worked alongside to preserve the spirit of their country. At the same time, the root of *résistantes*' devaluation lies in the narratives that they themselves produced about their experiences. Women's engagement in the Resistance was generally oppositional to the lives they led before and after the war, but their contributions were still deeply significant. Through the analysis of *résistantes*' experiences, this thesis aims to uncover the complexities of women's resistance, restoring *résistantes*' place in the historical record and emphasizing the indispensable nature of their contributions.

## Chapter One

### **“Formez Vos Bataillons”: How Women’s Social Networks Galvanized the French Resistance**

Resistance efforts in France varied widely, spread across the political spectrum and the spectrum of action. Many networks were birthed as an expression of political ideologies ranging from communist to far-right, and the resistance they performed ranged from dropping political tracts in mailboxes to out-and-out armed resistance against the Germans. However, the principal factor which brought together *résistants* to write counterpropaganda, gather intelligence, produce false documents, harbor those persecuted by the law, and later, conduct sabotage, prison breaks, and guerrilla combat against German occupiers, remains largely the same across all networks. Although resistance as a nation-wide phenomenon evades definition, the creation of all Resistance networks was a product of *résistants*’ mobilization of social connections. Resistance occurred through social action; maintaining contact between cells of people was essential to carry out resistance actions. Women excelled in this sphere; their social networks were largely responsible for the creation and expansion of resistance movements. Beyond serving as the foundation of the Resistance, women’s social networks played an important role in the execution of its goals; women leveraged their interpersonal connections to gain valuable intelligence. *Résistantes*’ social networks and engagement with other people upheld the functioning of the Resistance.

#### **Creating and Expanding Resistance Networks**

French men and women alike turned to their friends for support in the face of the German occupation of their country. Sharing anti-Hitler and anti-Pétain sentiments with trusted friends gave disillusioned French men and women hope that something could be done to combat

occupation and collaboration. Discussion opened the way to action. Two veterans, Maurice Ripoche and Roger Coquoin, turned to their military friends from World War I and recent fighting efforts to create a resistance network.<sup>15</sup> Past the purely male sphere of military acquaintance, women's personal relationships played a large part in the birth of resistance movements. In describing the creation of the *Libération* newspaper, Wieviorka notes that the founding members—Lucie and Raymond Aubrac, a married couple whose resistance story became popular after the war, and Jean Cavilles—were brought together through Lucie's acquaintance.<sup>16</sup> Bernadette Ratier created an intelligence network that was brought together by her and other women's friendships with likeminded people.<sup>17</sup> Henri Frenay, the founder of Combat, brought his friends together to begin the mission of resistance by assuring them that his network was already established. One of these friends was Bertie Albrecht, an accomplished social worker "who, he knew in advance, shared his feelings and would second him in this great adventure, because they knew each other well before the war."<sup>18</sup> Albrecht's social network, in turn, connected hundreds of women to Combat.

The principal task of most resistance networks, once founded, was gathering and distributing information. Wieviorka claims that the creation and distribution of newspapers during the early years of the Nazi occupation and Vichy regime was the largest contributing factor to the growth of the Resistance.<sup>19</sup> Such clandestine newspapers presented readers with

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<sup>15</sup> Wieviorka, *The French Resistance*, 68.

<sup>16</sup> Wieviorka, *The French Resistance*, 61.

<sup>17</sup> Témoignage de Mme Bernadette Ratier, alias Patricia, Dorothée, recueilli par Marie Granet, 29 September 1955, 72AJ/46, Dossier no. 4, CD2GM Archives. "C'est ainsi qu'une amie (autrichienne) de M. Alex Lazare (amie de Mme R) lui envoya M. René Sanson, avocat à la cour et Colette Lucas (actuellement Mme Sanson) ... Jean Bloch-Michel, René Sanson, Colette et quelques autres avaient créé un véritable réseau de renseignements dont le siège central était chez Mme R à la villa St. Anne."

<sup>18</sup> Témoignages d'Henri Frenay, recueillis par Jeanne Patrimonio, February-April 1948, 72AJ/46, Dossier no. 1, Pièce 2, CD2GM Archives.

<sup>19</sup> Wieviorka, *The French Resistance*, 64.

counterpropaganda and aimed to shape public opinion.<sup>20</sup> They not only disseminated censored information but also offered solid proof that organization against the Nazis and the Pétainists was occurring. Would-be *résistants* were able to gain entry to resistance efforts through these newspapers, which facilitated contacts and recruiting.

The idea that the Resistance's further construction was a result of clandestine newspapers suggests that entry into resistance networks was an isolated experience, propelled by individuals' contacts with their mail instead of personal contact with others. This, however, seems to be untrue of the average *résistant's* entrance to the Resistance. *Résistants'* testimonies collected by the *Comité d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale* (CD2GM) following the Liberation of France in 1944 show that, in reality, few members of the various Resistance networks attribute their recruitment to interest generated by reading clandestine newspapers. Those with no Resistance contacts at the beginning of the occupation tend to follow a common pattern—they would engage in acts of resistance as individuals, perhaps offering a safe house or their identity papers to persecuted friends, before being introduced to organized resistance after meeting an old friend.

Such was the case for Madame Flament, a widow working as Secretary General of the *Association d'Hygiène* in the fourth *arrondissement* of Paris who protected Jewish children from roundups after the German occupation. In addition, working with her son-in-law, she provided identity papers to “nearly 300 persons.”<sup>21</sup> Later, she became involved in the Bourgogne network, likely because of her familial and social relationships.<sup>22</sup> Jeanine Mayer, nineteen at the time of

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<sup>20</sup> Wieviorka, *The French Resistance*, 56.

<sup>21</sup> Témoignage de Madame Flament, recueilli par Odette Merlat, 26 November 1945, 72AJ/37, Dossier no. 5, CD2GM Archives.

<sup>22</sup> Her testimony notes that “Broussine,” a leader of the network (though his name and role is not specified in this document) was sent to her “by friends.” It is likely that these were contacts that she had cultivated through her work as Secretary General. Her son-in-law, as well, is described as an activity captain for the “FTT” (acronym not explained, but likely a resistance network) and most likely served as a contact for resistance efforts.

the occupation, helped to hide a friend who had been living in France as a refugee from Germany after the German invasion and, later, this friend's husband. She, too, was connected with organized resistance through familial relationships—her brother served as a contact for her work with Combat.<sup>23</sup>

The investigation of the CD2GM provides a unique perspective on individuals' involvement in the Resistance and allows us a clearer view of how these kinds of relationships—those that brought Madame Flament and Jeanine Mayer into contact with networks—nourished the Resistance. Immediately following the Liberation of France, interviewers gathered testimonies of *résistants* with the goal of interviewing “the most humble agents of Resistance, those who distributed tracts, liaison agents, radio operators, *maquisards*”—in short, of collecting the stories of every member of the Resistance they could contact.<sup>24</sup> As a result of this goal, the testimonies collected highlight the interpersonal connections that brought individuals into the Resistance. Interviewees discussed the people they worked with in the Resistance and the familial, social, and professional relationships they had that connected them to resistance work, providing investigators with addresses of their sustained contacts for further interviews. The memoirs and oral histories of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can tell us much about individuals' experiences and exploits, but they do not capture the same image of the Resistance's social structures that these testimonies provide us with.

Women's testimonies demonstrate the importance of interpersonal relationships in the growth of resistance movements. As with leaders' construction of these movements, recruitment

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<sup>23</sup> Témoignage de Jeanine Mayer, recueilli par Louis Lecorvaisier, 20 November 1946, 72AJ/48, Dossier no. 3, CD2GM Archives.

<sup>24</sup> Julian Jackson, “Archives, Memories, and Masks in Writing the History of the French Resistance: The Case of Daniel Cordier,” *French Historical Studies* 45, no. 1 (February 1, 2022): 121–57, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00161071-9434894>, 123.

was conducted in no small part through sharing anti-Nazi and anti-Pétain sentiments with trusted friends. In these conversations, they asked their friends, “Do you believe that we can get along with the Germans? Don’t you want to do something against them?”<sup>25</sup> Women’s friendships played an important role in the spread of recruitment for resistance efforts, as is demonstrated in the examination of the Combat network. For many women, familial and social ties connected them to the Resistance—and, in turn, allowed them to bring other women to join.

Most women joined because of their connections with other women. Madame Bernard helped to construct the social services of Combat because she had previously worked under Bertie Albrecht as a social worker.<sup>26</sup> Many women were called by friends to join the Resistance, often being put in contact with other women in the networks to join. Alice Sichel was offered a position working under Albrecht through “*une lettre d’une amie*.”<sup>27</sup> Colette Peck joined Combat in Lyon after a friend spoke to her about the importance of the social work women were doing in the movement.<sup>28</sup> Jeanne Bertrand, “in passing by chance in the street, recognized from afar a young elegant and fine woman with who she had had some social relations: Mme. Pila, the wife of an ambassador. She only thought about avoiding her, because at the moment her preoccupations were not at all social.”<sup>29</sup> It was this social relationship, however, that connected her to organized resistance; Mme. Pila asked her to harbor Maurice Bertin-Chevance, who was a leader of Combat in Provence.<sup>30</sup> Beyond that, Bertrand’s younger cousin Jacqueline provided a contact for the MUR (*Mouvements Unis de la Résistance*, the Unified Movements of the

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<sup>25</sup> Témoignage d’Alice Sichel, recueilli par Marie Granet, 17 November 1955, 72AJ/47, Dossier no. 1, CD2GM Archives.

<sup>26</sup> Témoignage de Mme Bernhardt.

<sup>27</sup> Témoignage d’Alice Sichel.

<sup>28</sup> Témoignage de Mme. Charles Henry-Amar.

<sup>29</sup> Témoignage de Jeanne Bertrand, recueilli par Jeanne Patrimonio, 19 June 1947, 72AJ/48, Dossier no. 4, CD2GM Archives.

<sup>30</sup> Témoignage de Jeanne Bertrand; Wieviorka, *The French Resistance*, 156.

Resistance) and her friendship with Jeanine Mayer gave her another contact with important figures in Combat.

Others were connected to the Resistance through their families. Many had brothers or male relatives who had fought against the German occupation, as was the case for Jeanine Mayer and Mme. Seligmann-Jullien, whose cousin asked her to distribute newspapers.<sup>31</sup> Mme. Jourda shared an anti-German and anti-Pétain sentiment with her family, and her brother introduced her to a leader in Combat.<sup>32</sup> Marie-Thérèse Tronchon's connection to Combat was through her sister, whose soon-to-be husband was a member.<sup>33</sup> Many women also took part in the Resistance as part of a family group, their activities joined with those of their male family members. Élisabeth Lesèvre, along with her husband and two sons, formed a resistance group to distribute counterpropaganda which was then subsumed into the Combat network.<sup>34</sup> Yvonne de Komornicka and her three teenage daughters created an evasion network to help prisoners of war escape; her continued efforts brought her in contact with Marcelle Bidault, who introduced her to Combat.<sup>35</sup>

Even when their first contact with the Resistance was made with a man, that, too, was often facilitated by women—in the case of Colette Braun-Weinbach, her first direct contact was with Henri Frenay, who “was sent to her by Jacqueline Bernard, who she had known in Paris and

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<sup>31</sup> Témoignage de Mme. Seligmann-Jullien, recueilli par Odette Merlat, 31 May 1946, 5 June 1946, 72AJ/48, Dossier no. 4, CD2GM Archives.

<sup>32</sup> Témoignage de Mme Jourda, recueilli par Louis Lecorvaisier, 8 January 1947, 72AJ/48, Dossier no. 4, CD2GM Archives.

<sup>33</sup> Témoignage de Marie-Thérèse Tronchon, recueilli par Odette Merlat, 25 April 1946, 20 May 1946, 72AJ/48, Dossier no. 4, CD2GM Archives.

<sup>34</sup> Témoignage d'Élisabeth (Lise) Lesèvre, recueilli par Marie Granet, 13 May 1955, 72AJ/48, Dossier no. 3, CD2GM Archives.

<sup>35</sup> Témoignage d'Yvonne de Komornicka, recueilli par Marie Granet, 12 November 1955, 72AJ/46, Dossier no. 3, CD2GM Archives.

with whom she was very connected.”<sup>36</sup> Women who had no contacts did not pursue information they may have seen in clandestine newspapers—instead, they turned to their local parish priests or to the NAP (the *Noyautage des Administrations Publiques*, or Infiltration of Public Administrations), who were able to connect them with “trustworthy people (often young girls) who were involved in the social service.”<sup>37</sup> In this way, most contact with resistance movements was mediated by women.

### **Gathering Intelligence**

Women’s social networks were important not only for the creation and expansion of resistance networks but also for furthering the goals of the Resistance and gathering intelligence. Historians describe women’s work in the Resistance as generally ancillary; they fail to recognize that, even in humble and supporting roles, women’s resistance was integral. In their variety of roles, *résistantes* leveraged their social networks to advance the cause of the Resistance. Many women worked as secretaries for male leaders and others were liaison agents. The task of the liaison agent was, “like all her female comrades, [doing] the dirty work, typing letters, fetching this and that, bringing back the mail, connecting one person with another, arranging meetings... and, when it became indispensable, doing the shopping with real or counterfeit tickets.”<sup>38</sup> Their gender was often used as a tool—women could pass more easily under the radar of German officers or Vichy police and were often tasked with transporting clandestine materials.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Témoignage de Mme Remy Dreyfus, née Colette Braun-Weinbach, recueilli par Marie Granet, 72AJ/47, Dossier no. 3, CD2GM Archives.

<sup>37</sup> Wieviorka, *The French Resistance*, xi; Témoignage de Mme Charles Henry-Amar.

<sup>38</sup> Francis-Louis Closon, qtd. in Wieviorka, *The French Resistance*, 408. Although the position of liaison agent was not exclusively feminine, it was a “beginner’s” position, as Henri Frenay, the founder of Combat, wanted each new member of his movement to go through an induction period where they would fulfill these tasks before being allowed the opportunity to move to another sector.

<sup>39</sup> Schwartz, “Partisanes and Gender Politics in Vichy France,” 132.



Within Combat, a significant portion of the women who worked with the movement worked within the social services. Their roles differed slightly from those of the liaison agents, covering four objectives:

- a) To aid families (mainly monetary aid)
- b) To send parcels to interned comrades and to get in contact with them (food and money were parachuted from England).
- c) To obtain maps of prisons.
- d) To plan escapes.<sup>40</sup>

In organizing to fulfill these functions, women working as social assistants escaped the ancillary functions to which they were otherwise assigned. Whatever their role, women leveraged their social networks and interpersonal skills as a part of their resistance activities, whether in establishing contact with political prisoners, passing intelligence through a group, or arranging contacts for recruitment.

Jeanne Sivadon, who had joined Combat because she had taught Bertie Albrecht, used the personal connections she had made through teaching to bolster the Resistance. Her work, training factory supervisors in Paris, meant that she “received numerous visits, be it from students, old students, parents of students, or manufacturers coming to ask her for supervisors. All conditions were excellent for the relationships necessary in a resistance network.”<sup>41</sup> Albrecht recognized the importance of Sivadon’s vast connections and approached her to direct a branch of Combat in the north zone.<sup>42</sup> Sivadon’s social network brought her coworkers Anne-Marie Boumier, Anne Noury, and Odile Kienlen, among others, into Combat. What’s more, her

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<sup>40</sup> Témoignage de Mme Bernhardt, née Baumann.

<sup>41</sup> Témoignage de Jeanne Sivadon, recueilli par Marie Granet, 18 April 1955, 72AJ/47, Dossier no. 3, CD2GM Archives.

<sup>42</sup> Henri Frenay credited Combat’s direction in the occupied zone to Robert Guédon, stating that Jeanne Sivadon and the women she worked with “support[ed] Guédon’s efforts as best they could.” Sivadon stated that Albrecht and Frenay came to her to ask if she “could lead [diriger] this movement in the north zone,” and that Guédon acted as the intermediary between her and Frenay. While Sivadon stated later in her testimony that Guédon became the leader of Combat Zone Nord, as their group was called, it is clear that she and her social connections were responsible for its creation and expansion. Témoignages d’Henri Frenay; Témoignage de Jeanne Sivadon.

connection with former students put her in contact with factory supervisors throughout Paris, including those who worked in German factories. Sivadon leveraged these relationships to gain precise information about German war machinery that was being made in France—intelligence that was invaluable to the Resistance and the broader war effort.<sup>43</sup>

Women who worked as social assistants, too, used their social networks and communication skills to gain intelligence that would support their tasks whenever they could. Such was the case for Pierrette Brochay, who noted her connection with a reserve officer of the Wehrmacht who worked in the Montluc prison in Lyon. One of her comrades, Melle. de Sainte Marie, knew him because of her work in the prison; she brought him to her home, where she introduced him to Pierrette, who “asked him, first, for news about the prisoners who were ‘cousins’ or friends... He understood quickly what it was all about, [saying] ‘You have a lot of cousins.’”<sup>44</sup> This reserve officer agreed to provide Pierrette with lists of prisoners, describing who had been killed in the prison and who had been deported, and to where; he also helped smuggle food to prisoners when Combat’s social assistants could not visit. Although he “did not like the Gestapo, was quite a Francophile, and, in any case, human,” putting such faith in a German officer could have been deadly.<sup>45</sup> This connection speaks to the fact that the social networks within the Resistance were networks of real intimacy, based on steadfast trust—trust that meant believing in a friend when she brought a man who was ostensibly the enemy into her home. What’s more, these social networks extended outwards, and *résistantes* used them to gain information that was exceedingly valuable to the functioning of the Resistance.

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<sup>43</sup> Témoignage de Jeanne Sivadon.

<sup>44</sup> Témoignage de Pierrette Brochay-Rossi, recueilli par Marie Granet, 29 September 1955, 72AJ/47, Dossier no. 1, CD2GM Archives.

<sup>45</sup> Témoignage de Pierrette Brochay-Rossi.

Careful examination of women's testimonies of their Resistance experience shows that at a time when women's movement in society was in large part limited to the private sphere and prescribed feminine occupations, *résistantes* were able to use the connections and friendships that they had developed within those limitations to build up the networks of the Resistance. Women's place in the Resistance was inscribed from its foundations—their role in creating and expanding Resistance networks equaled that of men because of their mobilization of social networks. Their connections with each other brought together a vast number of women who, despite constituting a small percentage of the Resistance, made valuable contributions to it. Women's social networks were integral to the Resistance's success and continuation, serving as a galvanizing force for resistance movements throughout France.

## Chapter Two

### **“Aux Armes, Citoyennes”: The Central Role of Women’s Work and Leadership in the French Resistance**

Women’s social connections were an undeniable factor in the creation and expansion of Resistance networks; what, then, was the scope of their contributions to the Resistance? Secondary literature frames women’s involvement in the Resistance along prescribed gender roles. Wieviorka suggests that although the women who endeavored to participate in the struggle against the Germans were in large part those who had “engaged in a strategy of emancipation” before the war, pursuing higher education and respected professions, they did not cross gender boundaries in their resistance.<sup>46</sup> Such women were employed in feminine work as social workers, secretaries, liaison agents, and delivery girls—work that is defined as ancillary, albeit crucial to, the central mission of the Resistance.<sup>47</sup> Historians—even those such as Weitz, who flags women’s contributions to the Resistance as inherently important—state clearly that women’s leadership was limited to a few exceptional cases.<sup>48</sup>

Although they tended to demur from self-aggrandizement in their postwar testimonies, women were steadfast and brave contributors to the Resistance. Closer attention to their stories reveals the extent to which they placed their lives on the line for their cause, walking the same path of mortal danger as their brothers-in-arms. This chapter defines how women’s work was not peripheral but, in fact, inherently central to the goal of the Resistance. Nine women’s testimonies are featured in this chapter, with information about eighteen women’s participation in the Combat network. Of those eighteen women, seventeen were arrested at least once over the

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<sup>46</sup> Wieviorka, *The French Resistance*, 405.

<sup>47</sup> Wieviorka, *The French Resistance*, 406.

<sup>48</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 287. Wieviorka, *The French Resistance*, 407.

course of the war. Likely all of them were interrogated and tortured for information about their comrades. Nine were deported to German concentration camps, and three were killed. To frame women's work as auxiliary to men's work is to misunderstand the ethos of resistance. It was not an "exceptional few women" who went above and beyond their commitment to the Resistance to equal the same level of patriotism that men acted upon. Rather, acts of heroism and bravery in the Resistance were common to nearly all *résistantes*, as they were with men.

### **Everyday Heroism and Leadership**

As previously discussed, many of the women involved in the Combat network contributed to the Resistance as social workers. Organized by Bertie Albrecht, the social service of Combat gave aid to arrested *résistants* and the families of prisoners of war and those deported by the Gestapo. Women with responsibilities as social assistants had to leverage skill, memory, strength, and discretion, all while avoiding suspicion from the police. They transported heavy suitcases of food from the countryside, keeping track of which transportation agents were members of the Resistance who could "inspect" their suitcases without leveraging taxes on goods brought into the city. They memorized receipts and addresses to avoid creating paper trails that would condemn others if they were arrested and searched.<sup>49</sup> They learned the lists of their imprisoned comrades and the addresses of their comrades' families by heart.<sup>50</sup>

These women ensured the ongoing welfare of imprisoned members of the Resistance; they were responsible for washing the *résistants'* laundry and organizing package deliveries to prisoners to provide them with material aid. This was a huge economic undertaking, as the cost

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<sup>49</sup> Témoignage de Marcelle Bidault, alias Élisabeth ou Agnès, recueilli par Marie Granet, 25 February 1947, 72AJ/46, Dossier no. 2, CD2GM Archives.

<sup>50</sup> Témoignage de Jacqueline Braun, recueillis par Marie Granet, 8 June 1956, 25 June 1956, 72AJ/46, Dossier no. 4, CD2GM Archives.

of one package reached as much as 1,000 francs during the war.<sup>51</sup> Women were responsible for organizing, distributing, and leveraging these funds, keeping lists of those in need. By 1943, Combat's social service was providing "between 100 and 200 packages per month" to prisoners and helping 30 to 40 families in a single *département* with aid of 1,000 to 4,000 francs per month.<sup>52</sup>

In supplying these packages, social assistants faced great risks. As a movement in the unoccupied Vichy France, members of Combat faced slightly less danger than members of similar Resistance networks in the occupied north for the first two years of resistance. This changed, however, when the Nazis occupied the southern zone in November 1942 and established the *Milice* (Militia), a secret police force that replaced the army and was loyal to Hitler.<sup>53</sup> Social assistants risked arrest at the hands of the *Milice* from their involvement in sourcing goods from the black market, which was necessary because inflation had augmented the market cost of foodstuffs so steeply. Marcelle Bidault, a leader of the social services, noted that she and other women had to travel to and from the countryside to source food "because the prices in Marseille were unaffordable (18 francs an egg, six to seven times the normal price)."<sup>54</sup> Beyond this, the delivery of these packages put women in danger of being identified as a member of the Resistance—that is to say, arrested, deported, or sentenced to death. Many of the social assistants were met with this fate: "immediate visits to [the prisoners'] families [were] often surveilled by the police or the Gestapo. Carrying packages to prison and to the post offices

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<sup>51</sup> Témoignage de Marcelle Bidault

<sup>52</sup> Témoignage de Jacqueline Braun.

<sup>53</sup> Crowdy, *French Resistance Fighter: France's Secret Army*, 5.

<sup>54</sup> Témoignage de Marcelle Bidault.

was risky: Denise Pierre-Paul Levy died deported to Germany, Geneviève Lannes was arrested by the *Milice* and tortured.”<sup>55</sup>

Even riskier, social assistants were charged with accommodating and hiding “young people [wanting to evade] the S.T.O [*Service du travail obligatoire*, or Compulsory Work Service, a draft enforced by the Germans] ... those pursued for acts of resistance, [and] British and American airmen, fallen in France,” either in their own homes or with trusted families.<sup>56</sup> In addition to hiding these men, social assistants arranged their passage to Spain. Beyond providing material aid for prisoners, social assistants planned and arranged escapes from prisons and hospitals for *résistants*. Dropping off packages of food also served as an opportunity for reconnaissance; during a short trip to a prison or hospital wing, a *résistante* would note as much as she could about its security and identify possible escape plans. In Toulouse, social assistants’ efforts over a period of two months culminated in a mission that saved seventeen political prisoners who had been detained in a hospital for recovery from their injuries before they were deported to Germany.<sup>57</sup>

The tasks that these social assistants carried out, however, were not dictated to them by male leaders; the hierarchy of leadership in Combat’s social services was almost entirely composed of women. The foundation of the social services had been built by a woman, Bertie Albrecht, who had worked directly with Henri Frenay to found Combat. Women comprised its leadership from the highest levels, organizing departments and overseeing the functioning of regional groups—as explained in Colette Peck’s testimony, “in each department there was a manager (generally a woman) who divided her department into sectors, each provided with its

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<sup>55</sup> Témoignages de Jacqueline Braun.

<sup>56</sup> Témoignages de Jacqueline Braun.

<sup>57</sup> Témoignages de Jacqueline Braun.

own manager.”<sup>58</sup> Colette Peck herself served as such for the Rhône, dividing the region into nine sectors, all but one overseen by a woman.<sup>59</sup> Marcelle Bidault, the regional director of Combat’s social services in Marseille, noted that of the six managers she recruited to lead the *départements* in her region, five were women.<sup>60</sup>

Women’s leadership was not limited to the social services. While opportunities to lead men in the *maquis* and the other sectors of the Resistance were generally limited to men, women still stepped up to lead when they were compelled to do so. Claude Gérard, after initially working in the Red Cross taking care of orphaned children, stated that “she wanted a more active post, where she could really fight against the Germans.”<sup>61</sup> She became, alongside André Velin, one of the directors for Combat’s clandestine journal, a position which was later taken over by Lucienne Guezennec. After her first arrest in 1942 and subsequent release, she changed her identity and began living underground, pursued by Nazi officials.<sup>62</sup> Despite the danger, the lifestyle she assumed provided her with other opportunities. In 1943, after the unification of three southern Resistance movements (*Combat*, *Franc-Tireur*, and *Libération*) as the *Mouvements Unis de Résistance* (United Resistance Movements, or MUR), Claude Gérard was put in charge of a department of their new combined paramilitary effort, the *Armée Secrète* (AS), in Dordogne.<sup>63</sup>

The AS was the amalgamation of all three groups’ previous *maquis* organizations. The *maquis*—paramilitary groups hidden in the thick wilderness of the French countryside,

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<sup>58</sup> Témoignage de Mme. Charles Henry-Amar, née Colette Peck, recueilli par Marie Granet, 12 March 1955, 11 June 1955, 72AJ/48, Dossier no. 1, CD2GM Archives.

<sup>59</sup> Témoignage de Mme. Charles Henry-Amar.

<sup>60</sup> Témoignage de Marcelle Bidault.

<sup>61</sup> Témoignage de Claude (Georgette) Gérard, recueilli par Marie Granet, 31 January 1950, 72AJ/46, Dossier no. 4, CD2GM Archives.

<sup>62</sup> Témoignage de Claude (Georgette) Gérard.

<sup>63</sup> Terry Crowley, *French Resistance Fighter: France’s Secret Army* (Osprey Publishing: Oxford, 2007), 16. Témoignage de Claude (Georgette) Gérard.



composed of men evading German forces—had been largely unorganized, functioning on a small scale. The AS made an effort to organize and mobilize them. In a 1943 training pamphlet, it described itself as an “*armée véritable*” whose “mission [was] to wage a guerilla war that would take a maximum intensity during the Allied troops’ landing.”<sup>64</sup> The main function of the AS was to recruit and train members in preparation for D-Day, and it had grown to nearly 250,000 members by October 1943.<sup>65</sup>

As a Resistance army ultimately led by Charles de Gaulle, the AS had a military hierarchy that demanded obedience to its leaders over “local political organs.”<sup>66</sup> Although she demurred from describing her role beyond the organizational level, as one of its regional leaders, Claude Gérard effectively took on the responsibility of a captain. Typically, a regional leader in the AS oversaw a cell of a hundred men, further subdivided into groups of six, each with its own leader.<sup>67</sup> Claude Gérard was responsible for the lives of all of the people who worked in her department, and she held the power to mobilize them for sabotage or combat at a moment’s notice.<sup>68</sup> In order to assume her place in this hierarchy, however, she had to do it under false pretenses; she admitted in her testimony that “to inspire confidence, she didn’t say that it was her, a woman, who organized the AS. She pretended to represent a masculine leader.”<sup>69</sup> Despite this, she was subject to the same dangers; when she was arrested by the Gestapo in May of 1944, she was charged as a regional leader of the maquis and sentenced to death for treason. The Allied invasion was the only thing that saved her life; just before her sentence was carried out, the French Forces of the Interior (FFI) liberated the prison where she was being kept.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Instruction n° 5 sur les missions et l’organisation de l’AS, June 1943, 72AJ/36, Dossier no. 2, CD2GM Archives.

<sup>65</sup> Crowdy, *French Resistance Fighter: France’s Secret Army*, 17.

<sup>66</sup> Instruction n° 5 sur les missions et l’organisation de l’AS.

<sup>67</sup> Crowdy, *French Resistance Fighter: France’s Secret Army*, 17.

<sup>68</sup> Instruction n° 5 sur les missions et l’organisation de l’AS.

<sup>69</sup> Témoignage de Claude (Georgette) Gérard.

<sup>70</sup> Témoignage de Claude (Georgette) Gérard.

## Risks and Dangers

Women were pillars of the Resistance in both their roles as leaders and in their actions as social assistants. Their contributions were central to the Resistance, and the dangers they faced were the same as those men faced. Resistance action was under constant surveillance by the Vichy regime police in collaboration with the Gestapo. Police monitored city streets closely—even loitering for a meeting with someone was cause for suspicion.<sup>71</sup> Each time a *résistante* performed one of her duties, she risked arrest—or worse—at their hands. *Résistants* were trained to be overly cautious and punctual; if they arrived at a meeting location at a prescribed time and did not see their contact, they were told to continue walking. It was likely that their contact had been arrested, and if they stopped, they would be implicated as well.<sup>72</sup> Even with diligence, their involvement in the Resistance involved them risking their lives—as was the case for Élisabeth Ingrand, a member of the directing committee of a group in the north zone connected to the south. The agent de liaison connecting her group with Combat had been a double agent, who passed information about the Resistance to the Nazis and led to the arrest and sentencing of seventeen men and six women, including Élisabeth.<sup>73</sup>

To avoid arrest, many women began living clandestinely following mounting danger—they changed their identities, left their families, and moved to different cities to escape police surveillance. After being arrested and released, Claude Gérard changed her identity; Marcelle Bidault moved from Marseille to Lyon; Colette Braun began working under various names. Changing one's identity might also involve changing appearances—Marcelle Bidault changed

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<sup>71</sup> Crowdy, *French Resistance Fighter: France's Secret Army*, 23.

<sup>72</sup> Crowdy, *French Resistance Fighter: France's Secret Army*, 23.

<sup>73</sup> Témoignages d'Élisabeth Ingrand, née Dussauze, recueillis par Marie Granet, 31 March 1949, 16 May 1955, 72AJ/46, Dossier no. 3, CD2GM Archives.

from brunette to blonde and began wearing different styles of clothes.<sup>74</sup> Assuming a different identity, however, presented its own dangers—*résistants* had to carry multiple forged documents, and if caught with more than one set of papers, they were automatically guilty.<sup>75</sup> In one instance, Colette Braun, after changing her identity and assuming the name Violette Boyer, was arrested on suspicion of harboring a fugitive named Colette Braun—that is to say, herself.<sup>76</sup>

Those who were arrested were tortured for more information on the Resistance—their gender had little effect on the efforts used to extract information from them. In her testimony, Lucienne Guezennec described a meeting between André Velin and a *résistante* who had been arrested but withheld all information despite the police's efforts.<sup>77</sup> Marcelle Bidault described her treatment alongside other women at the hands of the *Milice*: “they were interrogated and mistreated (beaten, whipped, etc...) Mademoiselle B. was absolutely covered with bruises and swelling, nearly unrecognizable.”<sup>78</sup> Claude Gérard recalled being interrogated for twelve hours straight during her first arrest.<sup>79</sup> Interrogation at the hands of the Germans included beatings, electric shocks, burning with blowtorches, lashings, and the *baignoire*—a bathtub filled with freezing water in which victims were held down until they almost drowned.<sup>80</sup>

After a month of torture, a *résistante* named Myriam David gave the Gestapo Yvette Bernard's address. When Yvette and her husband Jean-Guy were arrested in January 1944, she was seven and a half months pregnant. The torture she endured at the hands of the Gestapo killed the baby she was carrying; overcome by this loss, she cut her wrists with a razorblade but was

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<sup>74</sup> Témoignage de Marcelle Bidault.

<sup>75</sup> Crowdy, *French Resistance Fighter: France's Secret Army*, 24.

<sup>76</sup> Témoignage de Jacqueline Braun.

<sup>77</sup> Témoignage de Lucienne Guézennec, recueilli par Marie Granet, 10 June 1955, 72AJ/46, Dossier no. 2, CD2GM Archives.

<sup>78</sup> Témoignage de Marcelle Bidault.

<sup>79</sup> Témoignage de Claude (Georgette) Gérard.

<sup>80</sup> Crowdy, *French Resistance Fighter: France's Secret Army*, 27.

found the next morning and transferred to a hospital.<sup>81</sup> There, she delivered her stillborn child, and managed to escape after five days, but was arrested again a week later and sent to Auschwitz. The woman who collected Yvette Bernard's testimony noted that she was "a very young woman of 26 whose sad and serious look betray a long stay in Auschwitz and Ravensbrück and other Nazi prisons."<sup>82</sup> Yvette spent ten months in Auschwitz, four in Ravensbrück, and some time in other prisons—she survived to return to France a month after the Liberation, where she discovered that her husband had been killed in the gas chambers at Auschwitz in August 1944. Her story reflects everything that *résistantes* risked with their resistance—not only their own lives, but the lives of their families.

Such danger was not limited to after being arrested. Police conducted raids on Resistance hideouts whenever they became aware of one's location; for this reason, the location of meetinghouses and illegal radio transmitters varied, as repeated visitors raised police suspicion and location could be tracked through radio waves.<sup>83</sup> Moving radio equipment continuously was feasible; moving printing presses that weighed several tons was less so. *Résistants* who were involved in printing clandestine newspapers faced considerable danger if the locations of their printing workshops were betrayed. Combat's printer fell to such a fate on June 17, 1944, as Lucienne Guezennec, the sole survivor of this raid, described in her testimony:

Suddenly, through the skylight, a gray hat appeared, and a voice cried: "Police—surrender!" Lucienne, at first, did not realize the danger, believing it to be a joke from Dédé who might have come to bring some papers that afternoon. Velin, too, did not react, but Vacher and Jaillet had shocked expressions... Velin pushed the skylight—but, at the same moment, a burst of machine-gun fire felled Vacher—killed on the spot in the middle of the room. Velin always had an arm on him (a German long-barrel revolver, a very powerful weapon): he shot through the skylight and whispered to Lucienne: "Through the terraces." An order was cried

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<sup>81</sup> Témoignage de Mme Seligmann-Jullien.

<sup>82</sup> Témoignage de Madame Bernardt, née Baumann.

<sup>83</sup> Crowdy, *French Resistance Fighter: France's Secret Army*, 25.

to the *Miliciens* (Lucienne learned later that 200 *Miliciens* had occupied the streets and the roofs of the surrounding houses) = “Circle the block.” Lucienne looked at Vacher, whose clothes were starred with droplets of blood... Velin said, “He is dead.” and Jaillet: “I’m staying here, I’m unarmed.” Velin dragged Lucienne... into the next room; both of them crossed the court (where they were not touched by bullets) and went up on the terrace; Velin hoisted Lucienne up onto the wall and they fell backwards into a garden on the other side. Lucienne... got up and ran behind Velin. They pushed open the wood gate of the garden and crossed the street. But, in the middle of the street, a burst of machine-gun fire reached Velin, who fell... on the other sidewalk: he had 16 bullets in his body. He was, however, not killed on the spot. Lucienne, who had been shot in the legs without realizing, sat close to him. Revolver in hand, he said: “They won’t have me alive.” ... “Kill me, too,” [Lucienne said.] There were two bullets in the revolver: Velin shot one at Lucienne, the other at himself... he died saying “My God, forgive me...”<sup>84</sup>

This passage is one of the only moments among *résistantes*’ testimonies that is not opaque about the danger involved in Resistance. Despite taking a bullet to the chest, Lucienne survived. She was found by German troops, interrogated by the leader of the *Milice*, and detained in a hospital for recovery.<sup>85</sup> Over the next few weeks she received visits and packages from her comrades, including clothes for her escape, and secretly built up her strength to walk—on July 7, she dressed under her hospital gown, asked to use the restroom, and walked out of the hospital without being recognized by the *Milice*.<sup>86</sup>

Those who were not lucky enough to escape, however, faced worse fates. Nearly half of all arrests led to deportation to German concentration camps; many women in Combat languished for several months in Ravensbrück or Sarrebrück as political prisoners awaiting a death sentence for treason. Despite receiving the same sentence, *résistants* were often executed immediately after sentencing, while *résistantes* were sent to concentration camps, prolonging

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<sup>84</sup> Témoignage de Lucienne Guezennec, 16-17.

<sup>85</sup> Témoignage de Lucienne Guezennec.

<sup>86</sup> Témoignage de Lucienne Guezennec.

their suffering.<sup>87</sup> Even there, they continued their resistance; when the Germans put them to work making war materials, they refused, even though it meant being placed in dungeon cells and possibly “disappear[ing] forever.”<sup>88</sup> Resistance was as much an internal effort as an external effort—to avoid being driven insane during internment, Élisabeth Ingrand noted, one required a “rigorous mental discipline,” and she and other *résistantes* exercised their memories and did difficult mental calculations.<sup>89</sup>

Ultimately, women faced these dangers with determination. Weitz notes that *résistantes* were remembered, after the war, for this determination—when arrested, they did not often succumb to torture and divulge information, though their male counterparts did.<sup>90</sup> Even on trial for treason in Germany, Élisabeth Ingrand noted the passion for the cause which still ran through another *résistante*, Jeanne Sivadon, on the stand. She was “so sweet, so smiling,” as she was questioned; “having been asked by the President, ‘Why did you attack the Germans?’ she responded: ‘How could I have acted otherwise?’”<sup>91</sup>

Women did not participate in the Resistance on the periphery of action, but in the midst of it, just as their male comrades did. They formed the base of the Resistance with their leadership, not only promoting its growth but deciding in which direction the movement would grow. Women who worked as social assistants in Combat saved countless lives through their work, the survival of the entire movement resting on their shoulders. In doing so, they risked their lives and wellbeing in the same way as the men they worked alongside.

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<sup>87</sup> Témoignage d’Élisabeth Ingrand.

<sup>88</sup> Témoignage d’Élisabeth Ingrand.

<sup>89</sup> Témoignage d’Élisabeth Ingrand.

<sup>90</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 291.

<sup>91</sup> Témoignage d’Élisabeth Ingrand.

### Chapter Three

#### “Le Jour de Gloire est Arrivé”: Paternalistic Sentiments and the Minimization of Women’s Resistance in Post-War France

Women’s efforts in the Resistance in no small part helped to bring about the country’s liberation from the Germans. In the years leading up to the Allied invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944, their engagement and leadership in the Resistance had helped to create vast networks that mobilized against the Germans in conjunction with the Allies. Despite this, women’s contributions were systematically minimized after the war. France was still a nation that had been broken apart and humiliated by the Germans, and popular sentiment teemed with misogyny and paternalism. The country’s reconstruction provided an impetus for the erasure of women’s resistance, and *résistantes* themselves contributed to this effort.

#### Misogyny and Women’s Legal Status in Vichy France

At the outbreak of war, France was a heavily misogynistic country—while other powers such as Great Britain and the United States had extended suffrage to women in 1918 and 1920, respectively, France had yet to do so when Germany invaded. Prior to World War II, women’s liberties were nearly nonexistent. The Napoleonic Code, the basis of France’s laws, had relegated to married women the legal status of a minor—a married woman could not open a bank account, apply for a passport, or pursue a profession without her husband’s permission until 1938.<sup>92</sup> Their status as legal minors was only repealed in 1942 by the Vichy administration because of the absence of 800,000 husbands who had been taken as prisoners of war.<sup>93</sup>

Despite a subordinate legal status, women had pursued “emancipated” lives before the war. Many women who would later become *résistantes* were unmarried, highly educated, and

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<sup>92</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 51.

<sup>93</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 51.

employed in “emancipatory” professions as doctors, teachers, lawyers, nurses, and social workers.<sup>94</sup> Before the war, Claude Gérard had pursued a degree as an engineer “all while giving lessons in mathematics and science in private schools to live.”<sup>95</sup> Anne-Marie Boumier directed welfare services for the *Union des Industriels métallurgiques et minières* and was a technical delegate to the *École des Surintendantes d’usines*.<sup>96</sup> Marcelle Bidault was a nurse at a military hospital.<sup>97</sup> Wieviorka claims that participation in the Resistance was the outcome, rather than the root, of women’s pursuit of emancipation.<sup>98</sup>

Women’s pursuit of careers and education did little to change their legal position, however. After France’s defeat, the Vichy government instituted policies that firmly placed women’s roles as mothers and wives. Indeed, women were blamed for France’s fall to the Germans; Marshal Philippe Pétain accused them of having neglected their duty to their country because they had not adequately replenished France’s population after the heavy losses the country faced in World War I.<sup>99</sup> Pétain saw the country’s health as reliant on women’s adherence to traditional expectations. On a Mother’s Day speech in 1941, he urged women to embrace motherhood and affirmed women’s role in the domestic sphere:

The mother, mistress of a household, by her affection, her tact, her patience, confers her quietude and sweetness to everyday life... Mothers of France, your task is the most harsh, but also the most beautiful. You are, before the State, the dispensers of education; you alone know how to give everyone this taste for work, this sense of discipline, of modesty, of respect, which makes men healthy and a people strong.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Wieviorka, *The French Resistance*, 405.

<sup>95</sup> Témoignage de Claude (Georgette) Gerard.

<sup>96</sup> Témoignage d’Anne-Marie Boumier.

<sup>97</sup> Témoignage de Marcelle Bidault.

<sup>98</sup> Wieviorka, *The French Resistance*, 407.

<sup>99</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 38.

<sup>100</sup> “*Maîtresse du foyer, la mère, par son affection, par son tact, par sa patience, confère à la vie de chaque jour sa quiétude et sa douceur... Mères de notre pays de France, votre tâche est la plus rude, elle est aussi la plus belle. Vous êtes, avant l’État, les dispensatrices de l’éducation ; vous seules savez donner à tous ce goût du travail, ce sens de la discipline, de la modestie, du respect qui fait les hommes sains et les peuples forts.*” Philippe Pétain, “Un



What's more, contraception and abortion had been banned following World War I, and in 1942, the Vichy government proclaimed abortion as a crime against the state, punishable by death.<sup>101</sup>

### **Gendered Conceptions of Occupation and Liberation**

Misogyny was not limited to the Pétainist government. France's liberation brought with it a wave of violence against women who had committed "horizontal collaboration"—that is, women accused of having sexual relationships with the Nazi occupying forces. These women were forced to march through towns, groped and assaulted as they walked, sometimes naked, some carrying infants who had been fathered by Germans, with their hair shorn as a symbol of their shame.<sup>102</sup> Some *résistantes* protested against the mistreatment of these women—Lucienne Guezennec, who had served as an editor-in-chief for *Combat*'s clandestine newspaper, was put in a truck for her head to be shorn after she had denounced these actions, only saved from sharing the "horizontal collaborators'" fate when a friend recognized her and pulled her away.<sup>103</sup> She remarked in her testimony that "it is a shame that cowards and assaults have tarnished this day of Liberation."<sup>104</sup> Few, however, shared this opinion, and the "horizontal collaborators'" punishment was generally accepted by a population that could finally outwardly express its scorn for its occupiers after the liberation.<sup>105</sup>

These reprisals are made more significant by the way that popular sentiment about the occupation was shaped. Both men and women understood the occupation in sexual terms as a perversion of the country. French men had felt castrated and demasculinized by France's defeat

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long cri d'amour pour les mères de France, message du 25 mai 1941," in *Actes et Ecrits*, ed. Jacques Isorni (Paris: Flammarion, 1974).

<sup>101</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 45.

<sup>102</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 276.

<sup>103</sup> Témoignage de Lucienne Guezennec.

<sup>104</sup> "Il est dommage que des lâches et des attentats aient terni ce jour de la Libération..." Témoignage de Lucienne Guezennec.

<sup>105</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 277.

and the German occupation; many channeled this feeling into resistance.<sup>106</sup> Women, too, felt compelled to resist because of this sentiment; Lucienne Guezennec stated that “the invasion was like rape. To this day when I read about a rape trial, I am reminded of the Occupation. This was really a violation—violation of my country. It was impossible to remain passive.”<sup>107</sup> France was a woman whose army had failed to protect her from the Germans’ assault.

As a result, both men and women understood that the nation’s virility needed to be emphasized in the construction of a new post-Liberation France. It needed to set itself up in opposition to the Vichy regime, which was characterized by femininity because of its “submission” to the Germans through collaboration.<sup>108</sup> The everyday “collaboration” that patriotic French men saw on the streets—young, pretty French women on the arms of German soldiers instead of the French men to whom they belonged—came to symbolize the political collaboration of Pétain’s government. According to popular sentiment, Pétain and the Vichy regime did not act of their own accord during the occupation. Instead of protecting France, they took orders and submitted to Hitler and the German occupation forces.<sup>109</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, in his 1945 essay “What is a Collaborator?” stated that collaborators “agree to submit, they wait to be forced, to be taken,” and heavily aligned collaboration with homosexuality and femininity.<sup>110</sup>

General Charles de Gaulle sought to legitimize the Resistance—and, consequently, to masculinize his post-Liberation government, setting it apart from the Vichy regime—through military structure. As the Free French forces (the officially recognized French army, contrasting with the clandestine Resistance armies) moved through France, they absorbed Resistance

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<sup>106</sup> Crowdy, *French Resistance Fighter: France’s Secret Army*, 8.

<sup>107</sup> Lucienne Guezennec, qtd. in Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 2.

<sup>108</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 268.

<sup>109</sup> P.E. Diegeser, “Collaboration and Its Political Functions,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 116, Iss. 1 (February 2022): 208.

<sup>110</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, “What is a Collaborator?” qtd. in Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 268; Diegeser, “Collaboration and Its Political Functions,” 209.

networks into their ranks. Men were put in combat roles, using the training they had received through the *Armée Secrète*. Women, by necessity, were excluded. Clandestine organizations, having served their purpose under the German occupation, no longer needed to exist when the country was liberated. Women were dismissed from their Resistance work, while men were invited to take part in the reconstruction of the nation.<sup>111</sup>

De Gaulle led efforts to construct the image of the Resistance after the war, centering celebrations of the Resistance on military heroism, a field that did not apply to all *résistants* and certainly excluded all but “a few exceptional” *résistantes*. Out of over a thousand people to whom de Gaulle awarded the *Croix de la Liberation*, only six were women. As Valerie Deacon notes, this was because “Gaullist narratives had to narrow their representation of resistance when it came to women because most female resisters were not engaged in explicitly military contributions to war and it was the ‘soldierly’ efforts that Gaullists valued above all else.”<sup>112</sup> Military organization gave legitimacy to resistance movements but excluded the contributions that women had made during the war.

Stephanie Wodianka, in her examination of Resistance in European memory after the war, contends that there are two modes of memory that created the history of the Resistance. The first is mythical memory, which makes history narrative and brings the consumer of this memory closer to the subject remembering it; the second is historical memory, in which the remembering subject distances themselves from the object in order to legitimize it.<sup>113</sup> In the testimonies collected by the *Comité d’Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale*, women tend to use the

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<sup>111</sup> Kelly Jakes, “Songs of Our Fathers: Gender and Nationhood at the Liberation of France,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Fall 2017): 386.

<sup>112</sup> Valerie Deacon, “Fitting in to the French Resistance: Marie-Madeleine Fourcade and Georges Loustaunau-Lacau at the Intersection of Politics and Gender,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (April 2015): 268.

<sup>113</sup> Stephanie Wodianka, “Connecting Origin and Innocence: Myths of Resistance in European Memory Cultures after 1945,” in *Resistance: Subjects, Representations, Contexts*, ed. Martin Butler, Paul Mecheril, and Lea Brenningmeyer (Transcript Verlag, 2017), 155-56.

historic mode to tell their stories—instead of describing themselves as actors, they focus on the people they worked with and the events that took place around them. They describe the structures of the Resistance without making grand claims about their place within it, hesitating to describe their own leadership or impact. Men, on the other hand, use mythical memory to tell their stories, more often including humorous anecdotes and aggrandizing their contributions. This signals that *résistants* and *résistantes* were deeply aware of the histories that they were constructing through their testimonies. Both men and women understood the need to create a masculine narrative of Resistance in the postwar moment of reconstruction.

### **Women’s Limited Engagement in Postwar French Politics**

Ahead of the Allied invasion of France, de Gaulle’s provisional government outlined the laws it would institute during France’s reconstruction. Article 17 of the Ordinance of April 21, 1944, gave women in post-Liberation France the right to vote in one simple sentence: “Women are voters and eligible under the same conditions as men.”<sup>114</sup> Historians have often cited this as an “award” that French women had earned through their participation in the Resistance, but Weitz refutes this interpretation. She argues that the Gaullist myth of the ubiquity of Resistance had propelled this idea, but in reality it was part of France’s reconstruction as a new nation. Granting women the vote was necessary to put France’s new republic on the same level as other Allied nations.<sup>115</sup>

After the end of the war, French women did not exercise the political power they had gained. Although *résistantes* had played a part in France’s reconstruction—twelve of the 67 members of the French provisional government in Algiers were *résistantes*—women did not seek

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<sup>114</sup> “*Les femmes sont électrices et éligibles dans les mêmes conditions que les hommes.*” Comité français de la Libération nationale, “Ordonnance du 21 avril 1944 relative à l’organisation des pouvoirs publics en France après la Libération,” 21 April 1944, <https://mjp.univ-perp.fr/france/co1944-2.htm>.

<sup>115</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 303-5.

out political offices after the war.<sup>116</sup> After the first elections under the new government took place in 1946, women only held 5% of the positions in the National Assembly. This percentage did not increase until the end of the century.<sup>117</sup> Further, according to a survey of voting behavior in France conducted in 1955, women were more likely to abstain from voting and had more lukewarm opinions on politics than men. 17% of male electors and 24% of female electors abstained from voting in 1951, a 7-point difference.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, women were more likely than men to abstain from voting among all age groups, occupations, and levels of education.<sup>119</sup> Surprisingly, highly educated women were less likely to vote than women who had not been educated—36% of women who had completed higher education abstained from voting in the 1953 elections, whereas 19% of women who had only achieved an elementary level of education abstained.<sup>120</sup> The majority of women denied an interest in politics and interpreted their roles as electors as a duty instead of a right.<sup>121</sup> What's more, the women who did vote tended to vote conservatively.<sup>122</sup>

Women's resistance activities did not propel them to be active citizens after the war. For most, the war was an exceptional moment where they were called on to act by a sense of duty and outrage at the German occupation. Participation in the Resistance was nationalist, but generally apolitical. While some movements had been organized along political lines, most were a nationalist response to France's defeat and occupation. Lucienne Guezennec, who would

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<sup>116</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 303.

<sup>117</sup> Caroline Lambert, "French Women in Politics: The Long Road to Parity," *Brookings*, 1 May 2001, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/french-women-in-politics-the-long-road-to-parity/>.

<sup>118</sup> Jean Stoetzel, "Voting Behavior in France," *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (June 1955), 114.

<sup>119</sup> Stoetzel, "Voting Behavior in France," 115.

<sup>120</sup> Stoetzel, "Voting Behavior in France," 116.

<sup>121</sup> Stoetzel, "Voting Behavior in France," 119-120.

<sup>122</sup> Stoetzel, "Voting Behavior in France," 107.

become co-director of Combat's printed journal, stated that her "reaction to the Occupation was anti-German. Not ideological or whatever—out-and-out anti-German."<sup>123</sup>

Why, then, were women's contributions to the Resistance significant? If the *résistantes'* work was so critical to the Resistance, why did they not seek recognition? The significance lies in the fact that their resistance was not undergirded by any political goals other than challenging the occupation and the Vichy regime. Yvonne de Komornicka noted that, after the formation of the MUR, "political ambitions began to manifest, and, as a result, rivalries and jealousies which changed the moral climate of the Resistance."<sup>124</sup> While the *grands hommes* of the Resistance were influenced by the prospect of postwar political power, *résistantes'* contributions were a manifestation of the pure ethos of the Resistance. Because women generally did not seek political gains from their efforts, their work represented the nationalism that had sparked the Resistance at the outbreak of occupation.

Throughout the war, *résistantes* struggled, suffered, and died for liberation. The liberation they sought, however, was not gender liberation, but the liberation of their country. This achieved, they did not redirect their attention to the former—the collective trauma they had undergone as part of their struggle instead motivated them to take on traditional roles as wives and mothers. While the social service became an official organization after France's liberation, Colette Peck, who had managed 11 *départements* of the social service in Lyon, did not keep her position for long after the liberation. She "was very tired."<sup>125</sup> She left charge of the service to a Mademoiselle Raymonde Pron. Her testimony ends abruptly with her engagement to Charles Henry-Amar and a move away from Lyon, the city she had resisted in.<sup>126</sup> Her story reflects that

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<sup>123</sup> Lucienne Guezennec, qtd. in Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 2.

<sup>124</sup> Témoignage d'Yvonne de Komornicka.

<sup>125</sup> "Elle était très fatiguée." Témoignage de Mme Charles Henry-Amar.

<sup>126</sup> Témoignage de Mme Charles Henry-Amar.

of many other *résistantes*—women who, throughout the war, contributed their entire being to the Resistance, breaking past gender boundaries in doing so, but who retired afterwards to traditional roles as wives and mothers.

## Conclusion

After the war, de Gaulle repeatedly evoked an image of the Resistance as a nation-wide, unifying effort. Estimates of the percentage of *résistants* in France generally state that they may have only accounted for ten percent of the total population; figures for women's participation in the Resistance are even lower, estimating that women made up ten to fifteen percent of Resistance forces.<sup>127</sup> *Résistants* and *résistantes* clearly made up a minority of the French population during World War II. Nevertheless, women's efforts should not be minimized. The fact that women's efforts in the Resistance differed from men's and did not propel gender liberation in postwar France does not negate their ties to the legacy of the Resistance. Scholarship that defines *résistantes*' efforts as simply ancillary, emphasizes the mundanity of women's resistance, and narrows *résistantes*' leadership to "a few exceptional women" is, ultimately, reductive. So, too, is scholarship that discounts women's resistance due to their withdrawal into the private sphere after the war.

In French society, women were kept away from public life before the war and were un eager to engage with it after the war. It was not "a few exceptional" *résistantes* who made real and grand contributions to the Resistance; rather, *every résistante* played a crucial role. They founded and accelerated the growth of Resistance movements, gathered intelligence that shaped the Allied war efforts, saved lives by forging documents and planning prisoner escapes, and served as the administrative glue of the Resistance. All *résistantes*' efforts were made exceptional because the moment of the war was exceptional. When faced with France's defeat at the hands of German forces, women rallied against the Nazi occupiers just as men did. Although

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<sup>127</sup> Wiewiorka, *The French Resistance*, 403.



*résistantes* did not see resistance as political, their participation in it was a political and nationalistic act against fascism and dictatorship.

Although de Gaulle’s heroic myth of the Resistance has been challenged and largely debunked by historians, we can still see the lasting significance of the Resistance today. In the postwar years, the experience of resistance played an important role in the reshaping of the French government, and its memory is a significant part of France’s cultural patrimony. We see this in today’s protests—in the face of any perceived governmental injustice, France’s population is unafraid to express what they believe in. In March of this year, French president Emmanuel Macron used Article 49-3 of the Constitution to pass a pension reform bill increasing the age of retirement from 62 to 64 without the approval of the National Assembly. Protests against this sprang up immediately, stirring up over a million people to take part in hundreds of demonstrations throughout the country.

Women are at the forefront of today’s protests because they bear the brunt of its consequences, with lower wages and breaks in their careers for childcare meaning they must work longer than men for a full pension.<sup>128</sup> One group, *Les Rosies*, calls back to the imagery of World War II as they protest in Rosie the Riveter costumes. They emphasize the importance of rejecting pension reform for “[working] women, who toil and row.”<sup>129</sup> Organized action shapes everyday French life—every interruption of train service, every student’s strike, and every garbage bag piled on the streets of Paris is a direct reminder of the legacy of protest in France and the efforts of those men and women who participated in the Resistance.

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<sup>128</sup> Kim Willsher, “‘Working till we drop’: why women are on the front line of French pension protests,” *The Guardian*, 25 March 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/25/women-france-pension-protests>.

<sup>129</sup> “Réforme des retraites : “Nous on veut vivre!” Les Rosies mettent le feu sur les manifs.” *Journal l’Humanité*, 30 January 2023, video, 3:42, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zeCdeWcgTZY>.

This legacy belongs to *résistantes* as much as it does to the male Resistance heroes they worked alongside. Paying attention to women's stories from their firsthand testimonies allows us a clearer view of the complexities of their resistance. At the same time as the Vichy government under Philippe Pétain defined women as child-bearers, *résistantes* challenged governmental authority and asserted their rights to their country. As their contributions were ignored and pushed aside by male Resistance leaders, *résistantes* constructed and led the social services of the Resistance, an integral sector. Their return to family life and the private sphere after France's liberation does not reduce what they accomplished during the war. *Résistantes'* exceptional transgression of these norms, indeed, shows how important the Resistance was. Despite spending their lives surrounded by traditional gender norms and adhering to them in every other context, women's resistance went beyond auxiliary and played a significant and vital role in the Resistance's fight against occupation and tyranny.

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