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## Female Collaborators and Resisters in Vichy France: Individual Memory, Collective Image

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Female Collaborators and Resisters in Vichy France: Individual Memory,  
Collective Image

By

Katherine Thurlow

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in History  
in the College of Arts and Humanities  
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at the University of Central Florida  
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## **Abstract**

Women in Vichy and Nazi Occupied France often found themselves facing situations in which their societal gender roles greatly influenced not only the choices that they made but also how their actions were perceived within society. Many women acted as either collaborators, resisters, or both to maintain their livelihood. How they were perceived was based in large part by how they fit into their prescribed social roles, in particular that of the self-sacrificing mother. Women who participated on both sides were often following their social expectations and obligations. Following the decline of Vichy and the end of the Occupation, however, there was an immense shift in perception that determined what a good mother was. During the Vichy regime, collaboration with both the regime was highly encouraged and expected. Thus, women collaborating during the Vichy regime were praised, only to be condemned after the occupation. Women who resisted Vichy and the Nazis were scorned, only to be glorified after. It is clear that women in both of these categories had similar motivations, but a drastic shift in public opinion made these women appear in a different light. There were only slight differences that separated many of the women who were judged based on how they adhered to their female roles within society, whether that society be under Vichy or after its decline, often without considering the difficult situations that women lived in.

## **Acknowledgments**

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## Introduction

“On June 17, to everyone’s dismay, Marshal Pétain told France he had asked Germany for an armistice.... On the radio in his trembling old voice he said: ‘I think with solicitude, with tenderness, of those millions of refugees hurrying along our roads. We must stop the massacre, we must halt the fighting. We have asked the enemy his conditions for an armistice... between soldiers, with honor.’ The Marseillaise followed, in a speeded-up tempo, even more bellicose than usual. I watched Beatrice seated on a step, disbelief on her face, then horror. Surrender!”

-Claire Chevrillon<sup>1</sup>

This excerpt from an entry found in Claire Chevrillon’s memoirs depicts the shock that some of the French society faced with the announcement of the armistice of June 1940 that led to collaboration with the Germans and a National Revolution led by the Vichy regime. However, while the horror that she and her sister felt was not theirs alone, many French also felt a sense of comfort with the knowledge the war was over. Robert Paxton, the foremost scholar of Vichy France, has argued that there was “no mistaking the joy and relief which came flooding after the anguish” of the announcement, and that “without waiting for the actual negotiations, soldiers and civilians simply made peace themselves.”<sup>2</sup> Especially after all of the hardships of the First World War, the French were glad that the war was over. Thus, in many ways, this new reality of “collaboration” with the Nazis, and the formation of Vichy France, was a relief. Collaboration in 1940, for many, meant accepting a new reality that involved working with the victorious Nazis to revitalize France and to claim its place in the new German led world. As Julian Jackson has argued, “it is striking how much Vichy’s National Revolution owed to the rhetoric of the Great

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<sup>1</sup> Claire Chevrillon, *Code Name Christiane Clouet : A Woman in the French Resistance* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1995) 13.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972) 8.

War: the exultation of national unity, the celebration of the Soldier-Peasant and the nurturing Mother, the cult of the military leader, and the suspicion of the politician.”<sup>3</sup> Although in the postwar there were many who declared that Vichy collaborated with the Nazis against their will, scholarly work has shown that Vichy leaders sought out collaboration with Nazi Germany. Paxton, who laid out this argument in 1972, stated that “collaboration was not a German demand to which some Frenchmen acceded” but was actually an idea proposed by the French that Hitler had initially rejected.<sup>4</sup> The Pétain regime pushed for a “genuine working together” that would eventually allow the French to take part in “full partnership in the new European order” and prevent another humiliating loss to the Germans.<sup>5</sup> Many thought that it was inevitable that the Germans would win, especially considering the past losses that the French suffered to Germany. Thus, there was a very clear effort on the part of the French to participate willingly with Germany as opposed to being forced to do so. Even though the Vichy regime was ready to work with the Germans and went out of their way to procure this partnership, this by no means meant that the all of the French embraced working with the Germans. While some parts of the population genuinely felt inclined to side with the Germans, others were upset enough to fight against the Vichy and its policies, and many others just found themselves trying to survive.

Building on the conservative rhetoric of the Great War and the growing importance of pronatalist movements in France, women played a particularly important role. They became the symbol of the French nation, portrayed in both the image of Joan of Arc and the nursing mother. Their roles as self-sacrificing mothers became imperative to Vichy’s vision of remaking the

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<sup>3</sup> Julian Jackson. *France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 26.

<sup>4</sup> Paxton. *Vichy France*, 51.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

nation. Using the mythical idealized housewife and *femme au foyer*, Vichy wanted to revitalize the nation through mothers. This tied in well with the Nazi ideology as well, which glorified the mother.<sup>6</sup> The Vichy regime encouraged women to follow their supposed natural destiny as procreators. Women had an expectation to find husbands and have children and thus reinvigorate the French nation that appeared to be failing, especially after the perceived decline of the nation. After the French defeat in 1870, France lost territory, population, and much pride, and after the First World War they endured a devastating loss of men. As Joshua Cole notes, the connection between the female and the glory of the nation as a whole is a concept that is apparent since at least the eighteenth century, in which the importance of the population size played a large role in the perceived national power.<sup>7</sup> Mothers played an imperative role as a means by which the population could grow, and a growing emphasis on pronatalism after the First World War and through the 1930s was particularly important.

The vision of the woman as a mother coexisted with stereotypes about women's sexuality. Such conflicting images of women within society were by no means a new phenomenon, and became almost a crisis in terms of the construction of society itself as Mary Louise Roberts argued in her path breaking book, *Civilization without Sexes*. She argued that this conflict manifested itself in the interwar era between the motherly figure and the "modern woman." It symbolized the difficulties the French had when coming to terms with new real and perceived realities of gender following World War One.<sup>8</sup> She addresses that the "modern

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<sup>6</sup> Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986)

<sup>7</sup> Joshua Cole, *The Power of Large Numbers: Population, Politics, and Gender in Nineteenth Century France*. (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2000) 1.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) 4.

woman” was “scandalous in her dress and manner” and could be drawn from the prewar “new woman” who “had embodied a modernist ideal of womanhood, and represent[ed] economic and sexual freedom.”<sup>9</sup> Roberts argues that these women were perceived to be inherently unfeminine and often were overly sexualized. This concept of women continued on throughout the thirties into the time of the Vichy regime. These independent “modern women” had to find a way to mesh into a society in which women were still supposed to be mothers as their duty to the state. Expecting women to play the loyal and loving housewife held potentially shattering realities for the men who returned home to find that women had found a new role entirely during the war.<sup>10</sup> This in turn created a sense of loss for men trying to come to terms with their own masculinity, which was particularly destructive when it became so important to prop men up. By focusing on the role that women had to play and their failures, it shifted the focus away from the problems that men had in trying to reconstruct France.

Women then were good mothers or bad modern women, categories that echoed through the interwar period and through the Vichy era. Society viewed women’s actions in terms of societal expectations about ideal gendered behavior. This thesis explores how, during Vichy and after the Second World War, the roles of women emphasized the moral struggles that encompassed those of France as a whole. In the same way that soldiers had to sacrifice to France with their blood, women sacrificed to better the nation through birth.<sup>11</sup> During the Nazi occupation and the Vichy regime, women found themselves in positions which required they did whatever they could in order to provide for their families. They had to play upon both the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 90.

idealized image promoted by Vichy, as well as the stereotypes of more provocative women. Many women used these images to resist, collaborate, or in some instances both, to help them procure their goals. Of course, these images were not new in the 1940s, and women were not forcing themselves into a new model within society. Many of these ideals had been engrained within Western society and many of the women themselves.

In this paper, I will examine women who acted as both collaborators and resisters during the Vichy regime and the German Occupation, to better understand both the similarities and differences that their two seemingly distinct categories have implied. I build on the groundbreaking work of Robert Paxton, who completely debunked the myth that Vichy was forced to collaborate with the Nazis and instead proved that Vichy's agenda had its roots at home. He argues that Vichy had two projects: promoting a National Revolution and protecting the empire, which provided a completely new framework for historians of the era to work within.<sup>12</sup> All scholarship since, including women's history, has spawned from this Paxtonian argument. Particularly important to this piece are the works written by Francine Muel Dreyfus and Miranda Pollard, both of which were influenced by Joan Scott's call for gender history. Francine Muel-Dreyfus examines how women became a part of the "eternal feminine" that brought to light how women's "natural" place was inherently unequal within society in her work *Vichy and the Eternal Feminine*.<sup>13</sup> Pollard's work, *Reign of Virtue*, complements Muel-Dreyfus's book by analyzing women within the Vichy regime and their important role in the private sphere, arguing

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Paxton. *Vichy France*

<sup>13</sup> Francine Muel-Dreyfus, *Vichy and the Eternal Feminine: a Contribution to a Political Sociology of Gender* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001) 11

that women played an indispensable role within the Vichy ideology.<sup>14</sup> These works provide much of the larger historical context I use to evaluate how women's roles in society influenced how and why they became involved in resistance or collaboration.

My goal is to blur the seemingly distinct line between those women considered to be resisters and those deemed collaborators. I am by no means attempting to diminish the work of those women who sacrificed their lives to fight against Vichy and the Nazis, nor to somehow justify the work of the women who were directly involved in terrible crimes committed by Vichy and the Nazis. Instead, I hope to be able to illuminate how many women who were involved in both post-war categories were exceedingly similar in terms of their motivations and their actions, and how many women even moved transiently between the two groups. A majority of these women participated in collaboration and resistance via the female roles that society had established for them and expected of them.

Throughout the Occupation, but particularly by 1944, women were placed within these two titles of collaborator and resister with an increasing fury by the French people and later the government, as if echoing the interwar era's fears of women's acts expressing society's ills. Both the *collaboratrices* and *résistantes* sacrificed much to procure survival, love, and family, and they both found ways to use their expected female roles within society to help their cause. The *résistantes*, who became greatly admired and placed on a pedestal, were able to claim a glory that was only to be matched with a terrible humiliation faced by those deemed *collaboratrice*. The *femmes tondues* who had their heads shaved in punishment for collaboration

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<sup>14</sup> Miranda Pollard, *Reign of Virtue: Mobilizing Gender in Vichy France*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998)

appeared to bear no resemblance to the heroic mothers of the Resistance. The aftermath of the war left two distinct categories of women, stripping them of their own individual stories and placing them within a larger, mythical construct of the good resister and the evil collaborator.

Although I will use these two categories in my chapters and throughout my analysis, I nonetheless use them to be more able to unpack, complicate, and ultimately show the blurred line between the two groups. While continuing to separate these women into these groups continues to perpetuate that problem, it cannot be ignored that the French society placed women into these two groups. I do not wish to perpetuate this stereotype of the good and the bad; instead, I will use similar categories to describe the motivations and actions of both the groups to provide a more nuanced analysis. While keeping these categories in mind, it is also necessary to realize that women could be placed in either group or even both groups based on small details. Thus, without the backing of a group a resistance worker flirting with a German could be seen as collaborating. Those labeled collaborators could have also been considered resisters depending on the situation. I try to keep in mind that these women faced impossible situations. They were acting within a “grey zone” as Primo Levi has so famously coined the term, and to judge an individual on such circumstances is impractical by itself.<sup>15</sup>

My thesis is organized into three chapters, addressing the roles of women within the Vichy and occupied areas of France and then both collaborators and resisters. The first chapter will address the roles of women within society. Both the Nazis that occupied parts of France and the Vichy regime that controlled the rest reinforced the idea of the woman as a procreator and a mother who had to sacrifice and keep her family alive and strong. The idealized woman was a

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<sup>15</sup> Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Summit Books, 1988).

modest, frugal mother and housewife who stayed home and cared for her children. This image had to shift slightly to incorporate the working mother who became a necessary part of the Vichy and occupied policy in France. She became just as important as the *femme au foyer*, as she sacrificed just as much to keep her children alive. This chapter also addresses the stereotypical image of the promiscuous woman that many men still held at this time despite not being the “ideal” women within the context of the Nazis and Vichy. This image clashed starkly with the propaganda aimed towards motherhood, as it correlated with the inability to sacrifice and be the mother that France so desperately needed, yet at the same time this image of women was still prevalent and not masked by society.

The second chapter addresses the complex idea of collaboration. Vichy praised collaboration; it was much encouraged through numerous streams of powerful propaganda the bombarded the French. The Vichy government portrayed collaboration as the idea of working together to strengthen France. Therefore, not only did many French feel it was not necessary to resist because they were convinced the Germans would win anyways, but also because the regime made it anti-French to do so. As André Gide stated in September of 1940, “to come to terms with yesterday’s enemy is not cowardice but wisdom, as well as accepting what is inevitable.” Here the famous French writer reminds us how French people had to come to terms with the new occupation in order to maintain peace and a sense of normalcy.<sup>16</sup> Thus people went along with the new policies of the regime, doing what they could to continue with their lives as best they could. This chapter examines how women collaborated in order to survive and in order

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<sup>16</sup> Gerhard Hirschfeld, “Collaboration in Nazi-Occupied France: Some Introductory Remarks” in *Collaboration in France: Politics and Culture during the Nazi Occupation, 1940-1944* ed. Gerhard Hirschfeld and Patrick Marsh (Oxford: Berg, 1989) 7.

to pursue their relationships both with their families and male partners- two notions that the regime encouraged. It also examines how women could use feminine images - whether the idealized mother and housewife or the stereotypical promiscuous woman - to reach their goals. Some women even played on both of these images at once, while others could easily switch between them to benefit them the most. Despite the danger involved in this, many women found that they had little choice if they wanted to survive.

The final chapter examines the resisters. I define resistance as women involved in resistance groups, as well as those who resisted on an individual level. Similar to those who collaborated, those who resisted also did so along for survival and loving relationships, as well as ideology and loyalty. These women also found ways to use the images that society had of them in order to increase their efficiency and ability in taking part in the resistance. This was also exceedingly dangerous, and many women put their lives on the line to participate.

Women used their gender to participate in both sides just as much as society used their gender expectations to judge them, making it exceedingly difficult to separate how they were perceived from their gender identity. While these women all attempted to live within their societies during an exceedingly difficult time, many of them adhered to the social norms as much as possible. Beginning in 1944, many were viewed in an immensely different light. Although the lines often blurred between collaboration and resistance, extremely consequential decisions occurred by placing women in distinct groups. In some instances, perception established the difference between who was collaborating and who was resisting. A young resistance member who was flirting with a German to escape being searched may have been seen by some as collaborating. Without the connections to an organization to confirm her resistance activities,

after the Occupation she could have been scorned for collaborating when that was not her intent. Women even had to go between the two sides in many cases to accomplish their goals. In the end, I suggest that making the moral implications of collaboration with or resistance of Vichy and the Nazis increasingly intertwined with the acts of women, the ways in which women carried out their lives ultimately came back to judge them in ways that reflected concerns about French society as a whole.

## Chapter 1

### *Images and Realities of Women in France*

“I watched while the coupons were clipped from my rations book, and never parted with one too many. I wandered through the streets rummaging... for unrationed food stuffs, a sort of treasure hunt, and I thoroughly enjoyed it.”

-Simone de Beauvoir

This chapter focuses on the images and realities of women in France during the Vichy era. In this chapter, the images of women that the Vichy regime and the Nazis portrayed will be contrasted to the realities that women faced. First the implications of the interwar period will be analyzed, to demonstrate the growing concern of gender that continued into the Vichy era. Then, the image of the mother under this regime as a self-sacrificing procreator will be examined. To contrast this, the realities of women will then be analyzed. There will be a particular emphasis on the struggles women faced attempting to keep their families alive, as well as how women were affected by the lack of men in France.

### Images of Women in France

#### **Interwar Years**

The perceived crisis of gender had become something of an obsession within France for several decades preceding the Vichy rule. Mary Louise Roberts argues that after the First World War, “by debating issues of gender identity the French came to terms with a postwar world that threatened to become unrecognizable to them.”<sup>17</sup> Following the First World War, Roberts

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<sup>17</sup> Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes*, 7.

emphasizes that societal anxieties placed women within two categories: the mother and the “modern woman.”<sup>18</sup> The image of the mother proved to be particularly important during the interwar years, and would continue with a fury into the Vichy regime. As Roberts notes, the image of the mother was not new within France, but was “old, multilayered, and complex in meaning.”<sup>19</sup> This became tied into an intense desire for nationalism after the Great War, which required a mass repopulation of France after the drastic loss of men. Mothers were key to this idea, which Joshua Cole argues was a sense of power for France itself. He states that “as the family became an object of both intensified philanthropic activity and legislative reform, women increasingly found their contribution to society measured by their success or failure as mothers.”<sup>20</sup> The role of mothers was not only imperative to rebuild France demographically, but also it was hoped to restore a societal ideal. After the return of men from war, there was a worry about them losing their masculinity, especially in the light of the “modern woman.” The image of motherhood for women was not only expected, but more importantly, it was hoped for, which would give even more power to the illusions that women could create to resist and collaborate during Vichy. Motherhood gave them much needed protection.

The “modern woman” posed the problematic counter to the mother during the interwar years. As Roberts argues, the “modern woman” was essentially an overly sexualized image of a woman that at the same time was almost completely stripped of her sex. She was “a ‘being’ without a waist, without hips, and without breasts, she symbolized a civilization without

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>20</sup> Cole, *The Power of Large Numbers*, 15.

churches, without palaces, without sexes.”<sup>21</sup> Interestingly enough, Roberts also points to the link between the fear of infidelity and the “modern woman”, referencing many literary works such as Henri Barbusse’s *Le Feu* written in 1916. At one point, a soldier was able “to sneak through enemy lines to return to see his wife in occupied territory.... His happiness at being able to know her condition turned to shock and dismay when he discovered her in the company of a German soldier: ‘She was smiling. She was contented. She had the look of being well off, by the side of the *boche* officer.’”<sup>22</sup> The fears that the modern woman posed during the war and the interwar years correspond particularly well to the fears of female collaboration during the aftermath of Vichy. Women who were thought to have had relations with the Germans were placed in a similarly threatening light and were increasingly correlated with a sense of national disgrace and betrayal.

Right after the war, republicanism was particularly strong within France with Poincaré and Clemenceau’s leadership. However, the Maurrasian movement that dominated the 1920s steered many away from these republican ideals. By the 1930s, there was an obvious struggle between the left and right that eventually led to the implementation of the right-winged Vichy government. By 1932, the left had returned to power under Herriot, although it only lasted for an unstable two year period.<sup>23</sup> By 1934, there were many riots and problems within the regime, in part perpetuated by the Depression, and the right was able to reclaim authority. Yet by 1936 the Radicals came together with the Communists take control with the Popular Front. This regime focused on the working class, as well as other social reforms that the officials felt desperately

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<sup>21</sup> Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes*, 20.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>23</sup> Gordon Wright, *France in Modern Times: From the Enlightenment to the Present. Fifth Edition.* (New York: W. W. & Norton Company, 1995) 355.

needed attention.<sup>24</sup> Yet as power switched from the communists to the radicals, interest in collaboration was lost. Two years later, the Popular Front had essentially disintegrated, and was replaced with a more moderate right in 1938. By 1940, France had become increasingly unstable, and Vichy was ready to begin its rule as the last government of the Third Republic in an attempt to fix the shambles of France that followed the interwar years.

Family values were very stressed throughout the interwar period, as there was a dire need of the French nation to rebuild their population and create a strong French society. After the First World War France faced devastating population losses and a massive de-masculinization of the French male society. By returning to the importance of the family, the men could once again retain their masculine status, but only if traditional family values were practiced and enforced. An emphasis on family continued through the Vichy years. The roles of women as mothers, wives, and caregivers corresponded to that family focus, straying away from the work environment which many women were a part of. In fact, the hardening of gender differences, especially in terms of the economic world (which of course fueled the home makeup) came with much hostility towards women in the 1930s. Women were seen as contributing to the problem of unemployment by essentially taking the jobs of men.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, women in many ways were blamed for the perceived fall of the French nation; not only were they taking away the ability of men to be the sufficient, manly breadwinners for their families by being involved in the workforce, but they were also often blamed for the failure of France in the first world war by not sacrificing nor producing enough. As Pétain declared, there had been “too few children, too few

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 367

<sup>25</sup> Pollard, *Reign of Virtue*, 13.

arms, too few Allies.”<sup>26</sup> To correct this, women had to be placed at the center of the home and the effort of establishing a better French nation, and not be distracted by the outside world of men. The paternalistic ideals of the late 1930s and the Third Republic continued into the period of Vichy and the Occupation, using past family based codes to enforce laws that actually promoted mothers staying at home and out of the work force.<sup>27</sup> The addition to the Family Code in 1938 with the return of a moderate right group gave favor to “families with three or more children when the mother remained at home.”<sup>28</sup> After this shift to the right, Vichy expanded on these policies, drawing away from the more leftist policies of some of the earlier groups in power.

Under Vichy rule as well as under the influence of the Nazis and their ideology, these female images were much more enforced and applied within society. This is not only the case on a political level, but also in daily life. The regimes focused on a return to a mythical glorified nation through a National Revolution, which required a return to more “natural” gender roles. And as society began to become increasingly shaped on this, the effects of war and the collaboration with the Nazis and Vichy began to take a toll on the country, making women even more susceptible to these roles, if only to survive.

## **Motherhood**

Motherhood was a particularly important role for women within the political and social aspects of the Vichy’s attempt to return to a more glorified France. An instrumental part of this

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<sup>26</sup> Margaret Collins Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance: How Women Fought to Free France, 1940-1945*. (New York: J. Wiley, 1995) 44.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>28</sup> Pollard, *Reign of Virtue*, 153.

National Revolution required the gender divisions that encouraged motherhood to rebuild and repopulate France after the devastating loss of men during the First World War. Women were not only supposed to be mothers, however; they were especially encouraged to become the ideal *femme au foyer*. In order to be a successful mother in it was not possible to only commit to the job part time; it had to be a full time job and a top priority. As Miranda Pollard argues, “the foyer was constructed as a place to which women could be ‘returned’ and where they ideally belonged.”<sup>29</sup> Vichy rewarded mothers of these larger families were rewarded, through things such as supplementary rations, medals, and notice in newspapers. Vichy also favored fathers of these families who were given favorable priority within the workplace, while single men who had no one to support were often penalized.<sup>30</sup> By promising rewards to mothers and fathers of large families, Vichy was better able to enforce its goals. People were more likely to go along with the regime if they were offered incentives, especially for families which had been glorified to some degree throughout the interwar years. Historian Helene Eck even argues that Vichy “glorifie[d] motherhood as the only possible destiny for women”, which established a state in which doing something else was frowned upon and seen as going against the interest of the nation.<sup>31</sup> Yet, during the 1940s, it was practically impossible to be a *femme au foyer*. To survive women had to work, especially with many French men in POW camps, unemployed, or forced to work in Germany.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>30</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 46.

<sup>31</sup> Helene Eck, « Les Françaises sous Vichy- Femmes du Désastre, Citoyennes par le Désastre ? » in *Histoire des Femmes en Occident* ed. Georges Duby, Michelle Perot, Françoise Thebaud (Paris : Plon, 2002) 189.  
« le régime glorifie la maternité comme seule destinée possible des femmes »

Mothers were glorified and celebrated by the whole of the country and recognized on a national, public level even though their work was done in a private space. Originally founded in 1920 as a part of the pro-natalism movement, Mother's Day became a part of the Vichy propaganda machine and was celebrated with a new fervor and importance in the public sphere. As mothers were imperative for literally rebuilding the nation with babies, they were also important as moral centers. Pétain wrote of mothers that "Mothers of France, our native land, yours is the most difficult task, but also the most gratifying. You are- even before the state- the true educators. You alone know how to inspire in all that inclination for work, that sense of discipline, that modesty, that respect, that give men character and make nations strong."<sup>32</sup> By making the task of motherhood to restore French society and make it strong again, motherhood became a glorified national duty that all women were expected to partake in.

### **Realities for Women in France**

Motherhood glorified women through Vichy's ideal feminine image. Due to war, however, women found it nearly impossible to adhere to the ideal society had in mind for them. Ironically enough, the situations caused by the regime attempting to enforce these divided gender roles made it fairly impossible for most of the women in the country to follow, thus allowing them to become an easy target for the blame after the war. On Mother's Day in 1941, Maréchal Pétain addressed the mothers in France, explaining his own appreciation for the role that mothers played within his regime: "Mothers of France, hear this long cry of love that rises toward you. Mothers of our dead, mothers of our cities who give your lives to save your children from

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<sup>32</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 46.

hunger; mothers of the countryside who, alone on the farm, bring in the harvest, praiseworthy mothers and suffering mothers, I extend to you today all the appreciation of France.”<sup>33</sup> These words are very telling of the situation which mothers faced during this time; they were expected to sacrifice everything for their children, and for France itself, in order to ensure its growth and survival. However, as is already apparent in this speech, mothers could not be the glorified *femmes au foyers* that the regime had originally hoped to put into place to foster traditional family values and gender roles. Women had to increasingly find ways to survive as food became scarce, and with a significant decrease in the number of men present as they were captured in 1940 as POWs or later forced to work in Germany, women had to deal with daily struggles on their own. They had to sacrifice everything, sometimes even their lives, in order to keep their children alive. While this sacrifice was clearly in line with the feminine ideal, women often were unable to live up to the glorified sacrifice of staying at the home.

### **Reality: Survival & Motherhood**

Hunger became a problem as early as the winter of 1940, especially as rationing became more intense, and feeding one’s family rested solely on the mother as many men were in Germany as prisoners or as forced laborers. Women therefore could not adhere to the prescribed image of the *femme au foyer*, as they had to leave the home to secure ways to provide for their families. Historian Richard Vinen recounts how in December of 1940 Liliane Schroeder waited in line “for twenty minutes to buy some Brussel sprouts and then for another half an hour to buy a piece of black pudding.”<sup>34</sup> Many would wait in line for hours only to find there was nothing

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<sup>33</sup> Pollard, *Reign of Virtue*, 48.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Vinen, *The Unfree French: Life under the Occupation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) 217.

left, which was particularly demoralizing in the bitterly cold winters during the first years of the occupation. As Caroline Moorehead notes, by the winter of 1941 “everything seemed to be rationed, even milk for children.”<sup>35</sup> With rationing in place, the food available to women was already very little; according to Sarah Fishman, “by the winter of 1942-1943, official rations dropped below 1200 calories per day” with bread rations ranging from 275-350 grams per day and meat rations in January of 1942 reaching only 120-180 grams per week.<sup>36</sup> Just as rations became scarcer, around 1942-1944, men were also sent over to Germany more frequently as part of a forced labor system, meaning that on top of the difficulty in normally obtaining food was the added struggle of women supporting families on their own.<sup>37</sup>

Memoirs of many women complained about the difficulty of getting food; Claire Chevrillon recounted how most products had to be rationed as much of what France actually produced was shipped to Germany. Not only were many goods sent to Germany as part of the armistice or used to feed those who stayed in France, but agricultural production in France was disrupted when prisoners of war were taken in 1940. About 450,000 of the two million men imprisoned in Germany in 1940 were farmers, and for a time France feared a famine.<sup>38</sup> Although some were able to supplement rations with extra food (if they lived in the country and had their own farm or had family who had a farm) most women, especially those within cities, struggled to feed their families. Rations could not even be counted on; Chevrillon writes that “a ration ticket didn’t mean there was food to be bought. Often you’d spend a half-hour in line only to hear,

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<sup>35</sup> Caroline Moorehead, *A Train in Winter: An Extraordinary Story of Women, Friendship, and Resistance in Occupied France*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011) 80.

<sup>36</sup> Sarah Fishman, “The Messiness of Everyday Life under the Occupation” in *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History, selected papers of the annual meeting* Vol. 30 (2002) 66-67.

<sup>37</sup> Vinen, *The Unfree French*, 247.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

‘Finished! There’s nothing left!’ And then the line would break up in silence.”<sup>39</sup> This posed many difficulties for women who had children to support and no way to support them. The inability of women to help their family survive was very trying, and put a strain upon mothers as a whole.

Motherhood became an important aspect of the Vichy regime that was strongly encouraged. Pétain made the family the foundation of rebuilding France. He wrote in 1940 that “the family is the essential unit; it is the foundation of the social structure; one must build upon it. If it gives way, all is lost; while it holds, everything is saved.”<sup>40</sup> The government offered many incentives to help families thrive. Mothers of larger families were able to obtain extra rations and special treatment in food lines as well as medals and photos in the newspapers. Fathers of large families were given preference in the job market.<sup>41</sup> Thus, women were given many reasons to become mothers and to go along with Vichy. In some cases adhering to this image meant more means to survive, as they were sometimes given extra rations. Yet at the same time many women could still barely keep their children alive. In 1942, *Femmes de Provence*, one of the resistance papers, clearly illustrated this issue, criticizing the Mother’s Day celebrations by remarking that “the criminal government of Pétain-Laval, responsible for our miseries, announce with their usual cynicism that on Mother’s Day three hundred thousand special teas will be offered in the southern zone, when millions of children go hungry every day.”<sup>42</sup> Pointing this out was extremely dangerous, as it revealed that Vichy focused more on an appearance of the glorified mother than actually helping families. By focusing on the

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<sup>39</sup> Chevrillon, *Codename Christiane Clouet*, 23.

<sup>40</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 46.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Pollard, *Reign of Virtue*, 134-135.

celebrations of mothers in this public light, the regime avoided addressing the more important issues that prevented these women from being able to be these mothers. Since the regime could continue to promote that successful mothers, it was much easier to produce the image of the successful mother and thus avoid addressing the failures of the regime and continue to praise the collaboration with the Germans. Communists also made a clear commentary on how the government disillusioned the public image of a mother, by “caricaturing the government’s *Fête des Mères* poster (of the joyous mother lifting up her child) with one of its own in which a mother holds up her starving child, crying out for help.”<sup>43</sup> By turning this iconic image on its head, Communists exposed Vichy’s reality. Instead of the successful mother, everything that encompassed motherhood and the revitalization of France was decomposing. When mothers could not even perform their most simple yet important role of caring for their children, women began to look towards other alternatives in order to survive, and thus it is no wonder why women began to turn to both resistance and collaboration efforts in order to maintain their families.

Collaboration was not only encouraged by Vichy as a means of helping France, but it also appealed to many women attempting to keep their families alive, as it often meant more access to products and food. By working with Vichy one could easier attain rations, and those who knew high ranking members within the Vichy government were often able to live a comparatively luxurious lifestyle. Corinne Luchaire was able to reap the rewards of being the daughter of a high-ranking collaborationist within the Vichy regime, and although she did not always go along with the ideology of the regime she gladly benefitted from her position.<sup>44</sup> It was also generally

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Corinne Luchaire, *Ma Drôle de Vie* (Deterna, 2000).

the case that the Germans had more access to necessary goods as well as luxury items, and it was not unheard of for women to look towards these men in order to find some kind of sustenance. One woman, for example, recalled “a German officer named Hubert who used to visit the dentist’s wife in a white convertible, bringing her all sorts of delicacies” that she would not have had access to otherwise.<sup>45</sup> These goods allowed her to live a much better quality of life simply as a result of her relationship. Those involved in the Resistance also noted the appealing lifestyle that the Germans had. During an assassination mission of a German officer, the *résistante* named Claude remembered the extravagance of the meal because of how rare it was to have enough to eat.<sup>46</sup> The appeal of the lifestyle led by those who were in charge made collaboration very appealing, as it was a way in which these women could sustain themselves and their children, thus fulfilling their most important duty as a mother.

The Resistance movement quickly picked up on the problems that mothers were facing, and they did make an effort to recruiting these struggling women into the movement itself. By addressing the needs of women, those involved in the resistance were able to expose the treacheries of the regime. For example, Agnes Humbert recounted how one woman named Colette would “prowl the local markets, slipping leaflets into the shopping baskets of passing housewives. These tracts explain[ed] how the shortages of food and other goods are not caused- as the Germans would have us believe- by the British blockade, but are in fact the consequence of their own systematic plundering of our national reserves.”<sup>47</sup> By wandering the markets,

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<sup>45</sup> Robert Gildea. *Marianne in Chains: Daily Life in the Heart of France during the German Occupation* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002) 51.

<sup>46</sup> Paula Schwartz, “Partisanes and Gender Politics in Vichy France.” *French Historical Studies* 16, no. 1 (1989) 130.

<sup>47</sup> Agnes Humbert, *Resistance: A Woman’s Journal of Struggle and Defiance in Occupied France*. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2008) 38.

women were able to resist out in plain sight under the cover of being a woman. By playing upon the idea that the Germans and the Vichy regime itself was the source of the hardships mothers were facing, the resistance movement created a way in which these women could fight against the injustices they faced. This was also particularly appealing because oftentimes working with organized parts of the Resistance movement provided more access to food and goods, as the networks would work together to ensure that the members were taken care of whenever possible. It also tended to provide access to the black market, allowing women to gain more access to food or to ration cards. In many cases, as women were forced into difficult positions in which they could not uphold their roles as mothers, they turned to collaboration or resistance to help them.

### **Reality: Lack of Men**

During the early 1940s, many French men were taken to Germany, leading to a severe lack of men. As Claire Chevrillon notes in her memoirs, the French POW camps were essentially a zone which the armistice had created, encompassing “1.8 million men behind barbed wire.”<sup>48</sup> Her sister’s husband was even captured as a prisoner of war, and she writes of the worry that her sister as well as the rest of her family had to deal with as a result of that. Having their husbands far away and in oftentimes terrible conditions caused much strife for women left alone in France. Helene Eck notes that “in 1940 the Germans took 1,600,000 men prisoner. More than half of the captives were husbands, one fourth were fathers.”<sup>49</sup> Richard Vinen notes that of these prisoners taken captive in 1940, “over a million did not return home

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<sup>48</sup> Chevrillon, *Codename Christiane Clouet*, 26.

<sup>49</sup> Helene Eck, « Les Françaises sous Vichy- Femmes du Désastre, Citoyennes par le Désastre ? » in *Histoire des Femmes en Occident* ed. Georges Duby, Michelle Perot, Françoise Thebaud (Paris : Plon, 2002) 195.  
« En 1940 les Allemands ont fait prisonniers 1,600,000 hommes. Plus de la moitié des captifs sont mariés, un quart pères de famille. »

until the summer of 1945.”<sup>50</sup> As the heads of households disappeared, women had no choice but to step up and take over, even though this contrasted greatly with the goal of the regime to place women back in the home. It became increasingly difficult to fulfill the role of the mother without having men around. Especially for young women who had not yet had children, their ability to fulfill their place within society as mothers was increasingly slim. As Robert Gildea argues, “life was hard for all women, not least for the wives of POWs. In the first place, how were women whose husbands were in camps supposed to have legitimate children?”<sup>51</sup> Some women did not even receive any news of their imprisoned husbands for over a year, which also led to much demoralization.<sup>52</sup>

By 1942-1943, many men were being forced to participate in forced labor programs in Germany. In the summer of 1942, the *relève* program traded in three French workers who “volunteered” for a released prisoner of war. In reality, many who went were coerced, and Vinen argues that during this time disillusionment with Vichy grew as it became obvious that the regime was having a negative effect on the population.<sup>53</sup> By September, a French law made it possible for “workers to be drafted into employment in the in national interest.”<sup>54</sup> The French began to constitute much of labor force, which was particularly important to the Germans as they needed more of their own men to fight. Collaboration began to obviously pull apart at the family structure. Women could not stay at home when the breadwinner was away, and women could not fulfill their roles as mothers when they had no one to have babies with. This made it very

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<sup>50</sup> Vinen, *The Unfree French*, 15.

<sup>51</sup> Gildea, *Marianne in Chains*, 79.

<sup>52</sup> Vinen, *The Unfree French*, 15.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

difficult to obtain the idealized family that the regime supported as a link to recreate a stronger nation.

The propaganda geared towards motherhood and collaboration provided an appealing alternative to the otherwise desperate situation. Vichy made it appear that women were not struggling and mothers were prevailing. This in turn indicated that France itself was prospering, even if that was not the case. And, coincidentally enough, the prospect of collaboration with the Germans meant an influx of men who would create the possibility of more mothers. This was particularly true in the cities of the occupied zone that had the most Germans present, especially along the Atlantic coast, and became more widespread when the Germans sent troops into the formerly unoccupied zone in late 1942.<sup>55</sup> Although this may not have always been realistic, it helped to maintain the goal of Vichy to restore France, and likely offered a source of hope for many who found themselves longing to return to that comfortable lifestyle. This also served as a source of criticism for those who saw how the government was promoting the very concept of comfort that it outright denied to most everyone.

Women faced many difficulties living on their own. Not only did they have to find ways to survive, but they had to deal with numerous other daily struggles and problems. In her memoirs, Agnes Humbert wrote of one young war widow who had gone “out to buy milk for the baby when she was picked up and brought [to prison]. She pleaded with them, told them that she had left her baby all alone in the house, screamed and begged, but all to no avail. So now here she is, powerless, helpless, and locked in a cell.”<sup>56</sup> Alone, she was unable to deal with many of

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>56</sup> Humbert, *Resistance*, 65.

the harsh realities of the time. To keep her child from starving, she had to abandon her motherly duties and in the process lost her child when she was arrested. This is just one heartbreaking instance in which single mothers faced many horrors of being alone. It became no wonder that many women in these circumstances also looked towards some form of collaboration or resistance.

Collaboration became appealing, both for those who had connections with the Vichy government and those in the occupied zones in which women were in frequent contact with the Germans. Collaboration with Vichy was immensely important as it was essential to the National Revolution. To not go along with the regime proved to be immensely dangerous. Public opinion was monitored almost obsessively to attempt to root out disapproval. Acts as small as coughing during the wrong part of a movie could end up in arrest; to more openly go against the regime could end in something much worse.<sup>57</sup> Many Germans in particular were able to provide French women with some sort of stability that they were lacking without their husbands, but in many instances relationships were established as well. In a society that was so focused on family, it seems strange to think that young women would not be attracted to the only men available to them, especially if it was the only way in which they could attain the image which they were constantly encouraged to undertake.

Resistance was also appealing, although more organized forms did not exist until 1942 (except for the communist groups). Through the resistance, in particular organized groups, women were able to establish ties reminiscent of family. These connections enabled women to

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<sup>57</sup> Vinen, *The Unfree French*, 93.

have others to help them take care of their children, and also to gain access to necessary goods that would have been nearly impossible otherwise.

## **Chapter 2**

### ***Les Collaboratrices***

This chapter examines women who were categorized as collaborators with Vichy and the Germans. It will first define the concept of collaboration, which mainly involved relationships with Vichy and the Germans. These women had many motivations to collaborate, particularly survival and relationships. Survival became much more plausible when one worked with the regime, or had connections to a German who had more access to goods. Relationships were also important, whether these involved family connections or loving relationships with Vichy members or the Germans. Keeping these motivations in mind, women were able to use their images within society to collaborate and justify their actions. Women played on the image of mothers and wives, as well as stereotypes of more promiscuous women. The way in which these women were treated in the end of the occupation and after the liberation demonstrates how French society judged them based on their societal expectations for women, without considering that they may have been attempting to uphold these roles.

### **Collaboration**

#### **What is Collaboration?**

If one is to evaluate how women participated as collaborators, it is first necessary to define what “collaboration” is. Several historians have examined the concept of collaboration during Vichy and the Nazi Occupation. Gerhard Hirschfeld even states that “the modern concept of collaboration was born on 24 October 1940 at a memorable meeting between the German Führer Adolf Hitler and Maréchal Philippe Pétain” in which the two men decided that their

countries would work together.<sup>58</sup> Thus, collaboration was beneficial to both parties; by helping the Nazis, Vichy felt they would be helping France as well. Pétain felt that “collaboration was a way of securing improvements in the condition of daily life in France” through a National Revolution and thus the Vichy regime highly encouraged collaboration.<sup>59</sup> Hirschfeld argues that collaboration “has been understood to describe the political and ideological co-operation between Nazi occupiers and Fascist or semi-Fascist factions among the native population.”<sup>60</sup> However, to use this term only in regard to an ideological collaboration between the Nazis and those who sympathized with their beliefs would not necessarily hold true to the reasons women were actually accused of collaboration. It would also be incorrect to have the concept of collaboration occur only on a political, government level, as that would ignore that individuals who were acting on personal convictions were also accused of collaboration. Although these personal actions had political ties, they were not directly involved within the political structures of the Vichy regime.

For the terms of this paper, collaboration will be defined as any form of relationship with the Nazis or Vichy. It does not have to involve any sort of political or ideological motivation tied strictly to a party or organized group, nor must it require the person to consider themselves to be a collaborator. These were the terms by which the French people accused women of being collaborators after the war, based on those who they knew and communicated with.

Collaboration, therefore, shall hold the same connotation in this paper. It does not have to

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<sup>58</sup> Gerhard Hirschfeld, “Collaboration in Nazi-Occupied France: Some Introductory Remarks” in *Collaboration in France: Politics and Culture during the Nazi Occupation, 1940-1944* ed. Gerhard Hirschfeld and Patrick Marsh (Oxford: Berg, 1989) 2.

<sup>59</sup> Jackson, *The Dark Years*, 174.

<sup>60</sup> Hirschfeld, “Collaboration in Nazi-Occupied France”, 3.

involve any sort of group; in many cases the acts deemed to be collaboration occurred on a personal, individual level.

### **Motivations**

During the early part of the German occupation of France and the establishment of the Vichy government, the French encouraged collaboration as a part of everyday life. There was an overwhelming sense of dispiritedness, loss, and even hopelessness that led to daily, small acts of collaboration. Vichy tried to build upon a sense of unity and an end of the strife that accompanied the war to reinforce rebuilding France through the ideals of Vichy. This implied that collaboration was necessary as part of daily life. Simply complying with the policies of the regime were an important aspect of survival. Any sense of opposition to Vichy had disastrous results. The public was monitored through various methods, including listening in on phone calls and intercepting mail. Although this was justified by declaring it was a way to judge public opinion, in reality it was often used to expose dissenters.<sup>61</sup> There was also overwhelming social pressure to be a good citizen and abide by the new laws.

Also, as the French began to feel the struggles that accompanied war and the occupation itself, survival became a huge motivator as well. Oftentimes, the motivations of collaborators had no connections with a desire to further the Vichy regime or a National Revolution. Instead, these motivations were very personal choices that affected individuals' livelihoods and abilities to survive. During the end of the Occupation years, as more resentment towards Vichy and the Germans grew, and particularly after the war and the Occupation, women were named as

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<sup>61</sup> Vinen, *The Unfree French*, 86.

collaborators for working for Germans, whether they worked in a café, a shop, or did domestic work. Some women were accused “who simply had the misfortune to belong to an ethnic minority associated with the Axis powers or for being a wife of a collaborator.”<sup>62</sup> In these instances, women were categorized as collaborators because of something associated with their gender. For many women this resulted from the jobs they had to take to support their families as mothers. Marriage to a collaborator could also be grounds for this accusation, as marriage often involved a loss of identity for women that bound them to their husbands even in political beliefs.. There were of course always those who had a genuine sympathy and belief in the cause of Vichy and the occupiers, but for the most part these women did not betray France in a manner which was intentional, despite the accusations after the war of them doing just that.

## **Survival**

Throughout the war, women had to go to great lengths that sometimes involved working with Vichy and the German occupiers, even if it was in a very indirect way in order to survive. During the earlier years of Vichy and the German occupation, collaboration was widespread and encouraged within society. Propaganda consistently tied the success of the National Revolution with collaboration, not only with the German occupiers but also with the Vichy regime and its policies. Working with Vichy made survival easier in numerous respects. There was a lot of pressure to abide by Vichy’s policies, and the regime took several measures to ensure that the French population were being compliant. Vichy officials consistently tried to find those with certain political positions, especially those who directly opposed Vichy’s. “Experts” were hired

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<sup>62</sup> Alison M Moore, “History, Memory and Trauma in Photography of the *Tondues*: Visuality of the Vichy Past through the Silent Image of Women” in *Gender and History* vol. 17 no. 3 (2005) 667

to provide officials with information on political opinion, and letters and phone calls were intercepted.<sup>63</sup> Almost anything could be considered to be opposing the regime, which led to paranoia within the community. In 1941, for example, Liliane Schroder's mother powdered her nose in a cinema while watching a newsreel, and was then threatened with arrest.<sup>64</sup> Sometimes neighbors even threatened to denounce each other if they showed anti-Vichy or anti-German opinion. For example, one woman who was criticized by some of her neighbors for her relationships with Germans threatened to denounce them for their insults.<sup>65</sup> This sense of power changed dramatically after the liberation, when the same individuals who were at risk of being denounced for their anti-German sentiment were then able to accuse that woman of collaboration. The *milice*, which was run by the French and later assisted by the Germans, was particularly brutal with those who they found collaborating against Vichy. They became a formidable force in the years leading up to the liberation, and helped to wipe out large groups of resistance members. The *milice* created courts to try resistance workers and had them killed by firing squads.<sup>66</sup> The fear that accompanied the *milice* and the Vichy regime led many to collaborate to avoid detrimental results.

Collaborating with Vichy provided many incentives that helped people survive. Food rations, for example, could not be obtained without being in good standing with the regime. By going along with the goals of the National Revolution, in particular for those who had families, many were rewarded well with food. Mothers with larger families were able to obtain more rations and received better treatment in food queues, and fathers of these larger families were

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<sup>63</sup> Vinen, *The Unfree French*, 86.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

given better job opportunities.<sup>67</sup> Children got special rations that included milk, and pregnant and nursing mothers were given special rations as well.<sup>68</sup> This demonstrates the benefits women had simply by adhering to the goal Vichy had to have more mothers.

After the war, those who most obviously profited from the occupation were often considered to be collaborators, as they utilized the situation to their gain somehow, including those who worked with the Germans in terms of their businesses.<sup>69</sup> Without this extra money, and with everyday necessities immensely difficult to obtain, it would have been impossible for many of them to survive and feed their families without extra help, sometimes in the form of collaboration. Many French worked in government jobs for Vichy or took jobs with the Germans. Working with the Germans was particularly prevalent in occupied areas of France, and these jobs continued to grow as Germany occupied more of France. The job market reflected the benefits of working for Vichy or the Germans. Both Vichy and the Germans hired many women in low paying positions that were considered to be more feminine, in spite of the rhetoric surrounding the *femme au foyer*, which encouraged women to stay out of the workforce to stay at home. These jobs were often domestic or in an office setting and led to relationships with the Germans which were often assumed by French society to be sexual.<sup>70</sup> This occurred even more frequently once the whole of France was occupied in the end of 1942, and there was more opportunity for women to come into contact with Germans on a daily basis. Women were able to take on jobs that were often related to their expected roles as mothers within society, using the skills they had as a result to their advantage. Those who worked with the Germans also

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<sup>67</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 46.

<sup>68</sup> Vinen, *The Unfree French*, 222.

<sup>69</sup> Fabrice Virgili, *Shorn Women : Gender and Punishment in Liberation France* (Oxford: Berg, 2002) 12.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

had more sustainable income, as the Germans were able to offer them higher salaries than the French could. This enabled women working for the Germans to better help their families. For instance, in the Indre a domestic worker for the Germans made about 2,200 francs per month, which was “more than a senior officer in the police force after eight years of service.”<sup>71</sup> In a world in which survival became key, collaboration with the Germans and Vichy was the only way in which to gain the necessary income to survive. In Brittany, some women who cooked for Germans were even able to go to the head of the food queues, which also gave them a better chance of survival.<sup>72</sup> While this is not to say that there were not women who genuinely wanted to support the Germans, many of those accused were merely trying to survive, even if that meant falling back on the occupiers and their situation in order to do so. Women were supposed to be self-sacrificing mothers, so they were encouraged to do anything possible to keep their families alive, even if this meant working with a group that took over their country. Being a good mother according to Vichy’s standards included collaboration. After the end of the Vichy regime, however, collaboration was usually perceived as the opposite of being a good mother.

In many instances women also used the German soldiers as a means of survival via romantic or sexual relationships. This not only allowed women to continue to pursue their roles of mothers in spite of the severe lack of French men, but it also allowed women to procure a stable connection to necessities to keep their families alive. As historian Robert Gildea notes, many French women were interested in the German soldiers, as they “were surrounded by the aura of victory [and] had the benefit of an artificially strong currency that enabled them to offer

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Vinen, 217.

French women stockings, jewelry, and drinks” among other things that were more necessary to survival.<sup>73</sup> One woman recounted seeing one young German officer who would visit the dentist’s wife and bring her various delicacies, including game.<sup>74</sup> This provided some with an opportunity to live a much more comfortable life than would have otherwise been possible, although the scorn with which the woman recounts this event highlights that infidelity was not acceptable even though collaboration was encouraged. In spite of their message of collaboration, Vichy was careful to keep women from being unfaithful to their husbands, especially those whose husbands were POWs. The French authorities often investigated women who were thought to be cheating on their husbands, and even became intermediaries after the war.<sup>75</sup> After all, Vichy wanted to strengthen France, not abolish its family structure. Regardless of the intent to have a better life, at the same time it completely contradicted the roles that women were supposed to have- this woman was no longer seen as loyal to her husband. As the German soldiers’ currency was also worth more in their occupied regime, the Germans were granted access to the goods that were could not be acquired by most women because they simply had no way to make enough money to even consider buying them.

In some instances, women were literally forced to become collaborators in order to survive by the Germans or Vichy officials. One of the high ranking German officers, Klaus Barbie, captured and tortured Lise Lesevre, a revered resistance worker. In her memoirs describing her captivity, she writes of one former resistance worker named Lucienne Bois, who had been condemned to death. Instead, she became a tool for Barbie to get more information

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<sup>73</sup> Robert Gildea *Marianne in Chains: Daily Life in the Heart of France during the German Occupation* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002) 50.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>75</sup> Vinen, *The Unfree French*, 298.

from the French, the only way in which she was able to save her own life. Bois told Lesevre right away that “you are surprised to find me here. What I do I do for the French. You will know that after. And I will have a great need of you to support me... You can be a witness in my favor, if I have difficulties.”<sup>76</sup> She continued to try to get information out of Lesevre by promising to help her husband and son, who were also imprisoned. Lesevre then realized, however, that Bois appeared to work for Barbie and planned to torture her husband and son more with this information. In this case, Bois was likely in a situation in which in order to not be killed she had to go directly against her fellow French resisters. Although it was not determined by Lesevre whether or not Bois was working as a double agent, this poses the problem that many women faced in the blurred lines between resistance and collaboration. In Lesevre’s eyes, Bois had become a collaborator who helped torture resistance members. Bois, however, felt she was trying to do the best she could to save herself and continue to work for the resistance as best she could. The fact that she needed Lesevre to act as a possible witness to her deeds shows how perception of how women were acting dictated how easily someone could be placed in either category, thus possibly condemning them if they had no support. This presents a gray zone. As Primo Levi reminds us, it is impossible to judge the actions of those who committed these atrocities in order to survive.<sup>77</sup>

Mathilde Lily-Carré also found herself in a similar situation. After deciding to join a resistance organization, a Gestapo officer named Bleicher caught and arrested her. He told her

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<sup>76</sup> Lise Lesevre, *Face à Barbie : Souvenirs-Cauchemars de Montluc à Ravensbrück* (Paris : Les Nouvelles Editions du Pavillion, 1987) 69.

« Vous avez l’air surprise de me trouver ici. Ce que je fais je le fais pour les Français. Vous le saurez après. Et j’aurai grand besoin de vous pour me soutenir.... Vous pourrez témoigner en ma faveur, si j’ai des difficultés. »

<sup>77</sup> Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Summit Books, 1988).

that she was “too intelligent and interesting to remain in prison” and thus went on to use her to catch various other resistance members. Bleicher forced Lily-Carré to allow him to accompany her to meeting with other resistance workers, where he would immediately arrest her comrades. He told her that the only way to “save [her] own skin” was to cooperate; otherwise she would be “shot immediately without trial.”<sup>78</sup> In both Bois and Lily-Carré’s situations, they performed the role of as double agents, perhaps because of their image within society made them less likely suspects. They were not seen as suspicious because they were women and thus were more of a help to the Germans and the Vichy government. There seemed to be much less at stake when considering a meeting with a female liaison than a male, as the self-sacrificing image of women in addition to their deemed inferiority made them much less of a threat and made the meeting as a whole appear to be less suspicious. Bois also made a convincing case of trying to help save another woman’s son and husband, which fit well into female roles. It fit within women’s gender expectations to not be suspected of any kind of collaboration or resistance, so using women made the most sense.

## **Relationships**

Personal relationships motivated women to take part in any kind of collaboration. Not all of these relationships were sexual; some of them also consisted of friends made before any conflict or of family ties that they had before the war. Due to the increasing prewar importance of women as mothers, however, this meant that after the war there was a severe fear of French women having relationships with the Germans. These relationships were often instantly

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<sup>78</sup> Mathilde Lily-Carré, *I Was the Cat* (London: Horowitz, 1967) 107-108.

assumed to be sexual, and thus a threat to the family. During the Occupation, women were encouraged to collaborate with the Germans, however married women were supposed to remain loyal to their French husbands. As Robert Gildea argues, “to have sex was a challenge to the French family, community, and country, but the rules that applied at the Liberation, when ‘horizontal collaboration’ was punished by head shaving and possibly prosecution for intelligence with the enemy, were not necessarily the same under the Occupation, when single women were encountering up against Germans in their employment and in social situations.”<sup>79</sup> These relationships were encouraged by Vichy and were fairly common, although towards the end of the occupation they did begin to receive more scorn. After the war women who had relationships with the Germans in any manner were suspected of having sexual relations with them, which was perceived as betraying their country through a form of sexual collaboration. This was a post-Occupation fear and construct that condemned many women to humiliating punishments when the image of them changed as the ties to Vichy and the Germans began to strain.

Despite the perception that many women who collaborated were involved in sexual relationships with Germans, in actuality many relationships that tied women to Vichy or the Germans were based on friendships and family ties. In any case, relationships indeed played a large role in influencing how women reacted to the regime during the occupation, which makes sense considering how women were much defined based on relationships. Women were often described based on their ties to their husbands, fathers, or children within society instead of

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<sup>79</sup> Robert Gildea *Marianne in Chains: Daily Life in the Heart of France during the German Occupation* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002) 51.

being of their own independent person. This provided several implications for women involved with the Germans at all. If they already had a husband, who was likely to be in a POW camp or in Germany for forced labor, any relationships that developed between a woman and a German was often highly criticized. This disapproval also occurred after the First World War. Even with collaboration in place as a positive concept under Vichy, any sense of threatening the French family and loyalty was problematic. There were some blurred areas between collaboration and resistance that occurred even in relationships that women had with Germans even when their husbands were imprisoned in Germany. One woman conceived her third child after her husband had been taken as a prisoner, but then she was able to send him the birth certificate so he could request to return home as he was the “father” of a large family.<sup>80</sup> This demonstrates how women played on both roles, simultaneously resisting and collaborating to maintain their lifestyle.

The “modern woman” that Roberts stresses posed just as much of a threat to the family after the First World War as those who had relationships with Germans during the Second World War would have.<sup>81</sup> And yet, in a society in which it was expected that there was a male head of the household, even in spite of unrealistic conditions because of the war, finding a relationship with a German could be the only way to survive. At the same time, women who had husbands or close male relatives that were high-ranking Vichy officials were also deemed collaborators, whether or not they chose to participate, as their identity was often tied to that of their husbands. As Fabrice Virgili argues, “alongside the husband who belonged to the *milice*, who was an agent for the Gestapo or worked for the Germans, we find the image of a collaborationist couple joined

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<sup>80</sup> Vinen, *The Unfree French*, 299.

<sup>81</sup> Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) 28.

as much in crime as in marriage.”<sup>82</sup> For women, their ties to their husbands often meant a sentence for themselves if they were later deemed collaborators. During the occupation, these women held places of prestige within society, but after they were regarded in an extremely negative light. Although they sometimes did work with their husbands, some women simply had to misfortune to be associated with them through marriage, which in many ways made up much of their identity. Thus, not only were relationships cause to actually get involved in collaboration, but they were also means on which to be accused, even if they were not actually involved.

After Corinne Luchaire was accused of collaboration she was sentenced to “several years of national indignity” that stripped her of her rights as a French citizen for the relationships that she had throughout the war years.<sup>83</sup> Her father, Jean Luchaire, was charged as a major collaborator and sentenced to death, as he was the editor of a major collaborationist paper and held a fairly high position within the Vichy regime. It is interesting that such an important and powerful role that was so praised during collaboration was instantly condemned after the war. He was the editor of *Les Nouveaux Temps*, a pro-Vichy paper that released much propaganda of pro-collaborationist sentiment. As a result he knew many of the high-ranking individuals within the Vichy government as well as the Nazi government. Corinne also had several relationships with various important Germans (not in the sexual sense, but in the sense that she became friends with them and attended events with them) through the connections her father had. She was good friends with Otto Abetz, who was a German ambassador in Paris, and between her connections

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<sup>82</sup> Virgili, *Shorn Women*, 30.

<sup>83</sup> Corinne Luchaire, *Ma Drôle de Vie* (Deterna, 2000) 198.

with her father and her career as an actress, she came in contact with other Nazis, even Goering and von Ribbentrop at one point. Luchaire does not, however, appear to be in favor of the German occupation, although she did have friendly relationships with many Germans she had known for years through her father. She wrote in her memoirs that she did not go out of her way to be with the Germans, and in many instances she only talked to them because they were acquaintances from before the occupation.

Luchaire followed her father almost blindly, with the adoration and trust that a daughter was supposed to have for her father. This led to her accusation of being a collaborator as well. She notes that “something in me, at that moment, told me that it was grave... that Papa risked a lot. And then I chased away this idea, thinking that my father could not do anything bad, that he had much more experience than me in these things.”<sup>84</sup> In this case, familial ties that were so important, especially under Vichy which reinforced family values and male dominance, led to Luchaire following her father without considering the consequences. The concept of the male head of the household knowing best, especially as a father figure, made her follow her father in a way that would lead to her perceived collaboration with Vichy and the Germans. It also enabled her to use her position as a female as an excuse to fend against accusations of collaboration if she had been involved after the war.

Romantic relationships were also an important aspect of collaboration. Since the regime so stressed becoming a wife and having children, men and women felt the need to establish relationships, even if it meant doing so with the occupiers. Again, this was encouraged by

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 107.

« Quelque chose en moi, sur l’instant, me dit que c’était grave... que Papa risquait beaucoup. Et puis je chassai cette idée, pensant que mon père ne pouvait mal faire, qu’il avait beaucoup plus que moi l’expérience de ces choses »

Vichy, not only in terms of collaboration but also because of their pro-natalist viewpoints. However, the actual approval of these relationships varied. Married women were almost exclusively prohibited from such relationships, as it directly went against the National Revolution that sought to strengthen the French family. There was also an attempt by Vichy to protect the more “respectable” girls of higher class from the Germans, although they made no such attempts for those of lower classes.<sup>85</sup> The attitude towards the Germans also changed; as early as November of 1943 a French woman had her head shaved in Brittany for her relationship with a German.<sup>86</sup> Although there was an established collaboration between the two countries which meant that the government itself would be promoting these relationships, at the same time there was a sense among many that the Germans had become the enemy, especially after the Occupation when so many women were punished for these relationships. When so many of the French men were out of the country as POWs or forced to work in Germany, there was definitely an appeal to the German soldiers that were occupying the area. Germans were often the sole source of young men that French women encountered, especially as France became more occupied by the Germans. The Germans also had a very victorious aura that surrounded them, and one woman even remarked that “they were the best looking men I have ever seen.”<sup>87</sup> They were well fed, fit, and had a sense of power that permeated French society. In some instances loving relationships also led to Nazi sympathy. In one case, a young woman became the mistress of a German soldier and then went on to join a collaboration group so that she could stay close to him. She noted that “love has no barriers” and “after having subsequently been the

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<sup>85</sup> Vinen, *The Unfree French*, 180.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>87</sup> Gildea *Marianne in Chains*, 50.

mistress of two German officers, she fell into the arms of the General Commissioner of the PPF and on this occasion, so that nothing could be between her and the one she loved, she joined the Party.’<sup>88</sup> This is something that occurred on both the collaborationist and the resistance side; some women followed those whom they loved in their political beliefs as well, joining groups to follow them and remain with them.

As the occupation continued and by the end of 1942 encompassed all of France, women were even more exposed to the Germans and had more relationships with them. In many instances there were loving relationships that developed that had no political impact.<sup>89</sup> One German soldier wrote to a French woman

My dearest Jeanne, first of all we got orders that we were going to leave during last night, but we are still here today. But we will leave tonight. I can't forget you and the hours we spent together. Jeanne, violent fighting awaits us, but I will have the happiness of God, who was not wished that we should once be separated... and so I am leaving you with my heart full of your face and very distressed. A thousand, thousand kisses.<sup>90</sup>

In this letter written before his departure, we see the loving relationship between these two; just as any lover would write to a loved one before leaving to war, he wrote of how he would miss her and how he hoped they will be reunited. There is nothing to suggest any concept of the two being enemies, or that their countries were fighting one another as was the concept in the postwar. Instead this letter displays a sincere, loving relationship that had no other motives to it. This relationship was likely to be applauded by the government and many within the society, as the Germans were working with the French during this time even if they were

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<sup>88</sup> Virgili, *Shorn Women*, 29.

<sup>89</sup> Gildea *Marianne in Chains*, 51.

<sup>90</sup> Virgili, *Shorn Women*, 27.

occupying their country. These people were living in the same area and forced to deal with similar situations, and it is not surprising that romantic feelings developed between them, especially as such relationships established a sense of hope and normalcy in times in which such feelings were hard to come by.

### **Using the Female Image to Collaborate**

Women who collaborated in various ways used their femininity, both the idealized mother that the Nazis and Vichy promoted and the contrasting stereotype of the promiscuous woman. This not only helped them reach their goals but also helped them justify their actions. They played upon their perceived position within society as dependent, less intellectual, and less politicized members of society in addition to their roles as mothers and more sexualized beings to use collaboration to find ways to survive. These women used their female status to justify participation and avoid blame in various acts that provided food to their families and made them appealing to those who they needed to collaborate with. Although not always the case, those who fit within Vichy's feminine image were most easily able to collaborate, as were those who played up their sexuality. German soldiers were more likely to be attracted to those who had such feminine airs and thus would be more willing to help them attain necessities.

### **Mothers and Wives**

The image of mother and wife assisted women in collaborating and justifying their actions. As the image of a mother was so important in the interwar years, providing a sense of stability and hopefulness, women who became involved in relationships with Vichy and the Germans and were able to obtain necessary items. They could justify this by seeking a male

head of household to keep their families alive. After all, in a regime in which motherhood was the first priority, women could focus on that image and thus project the need for assistance in that light. German officers were able to bring their lovers “bag[s] that [were] heavily laden and certainly full of food” that they may otherwise be unable to procure.<sup>91</sup> Any sort of collaboration that involved loving relationships could also be written off as merely searching for the relationships that they were required to have by social standards. These reasons were not political, but instead emotional and connected to the ideal woman that Vichy wanted to promote and a more general female stereotype. However, the two different worlds which existed during the Vichy regime and after the Liberation completely turned this on its head; while collaboration was given a positive encouragement during the Vichy regime, after the war it was completely condemned.

There were loving relationships that pointed towards marriage and thus provided a way in which women could use their femininity to collaborate. Marie Louise Coiscault developed a very close relationship with one German officer whom she met in her parents’ bar. After the war she had written to him and his family so that they could be married. Instead she was caught and taken to court, where she was accused of having relations with multiple Germans, although this had clearly not been the case. Any way in which the postwar society could blame women for the inherent weakness seen in collaboration was a way to avoid blaming the regime itself. Since Coiscault had collaborated with one German it was feared (and often assumed) that she would have had the same relationships with others, even though she did not. She was still accused of

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 35.

collaboration and “deprived of her civic rights for five years.”<sup>92</sup> While she was not able to avoid collaboration charges, she was able to use her desire to marry as a way to use her femininity to collaborate.

Again, there was little other future for women at this time than to marry and have a family; how could one expect women to merely stop their lives to wait for the men to come back from their POW camps, or various German industries? While there was particular contempt for those women who had these relations with Germans who were already married, especially those married to POWs, towards the end of the occupation there was an overwhelming resentment of all women who had these relations regardless of their marital status. During Vichy, having these relationships was encouraged. Women were expected to have children, and the Germans even opened up a nursery to raise the children that were conceived by French mothers and German fathers as they were deemed racially superior. However, while women during the occupation may have claimed that their babies had German fathers to gain extra power and prestige, many women gave birth after the occupation and denied this association.<sup>93</sup> While of course it would go against their female roles to have these affairs if they were married in terms of their relationship needs (although it may be perfectly understandable in terms of them trying to find a way to survive) single women were seen in the same horrific light even though they were living up to their female role within the society by finding a relationship and starting a family.

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<sup>92</sup> Gildea *Marianne in Chains*, 53.

<sup>93</sup> Vinen, *The Unfree French*, 160.

## Stereotypes of Women

In her memoirs, Corinne Luchaire wrote of how others would comment on her beauty, and as a result worry she might be a spy. At one point, she was discussing the rude behavior she encountered from a German who thought she was a spy when her friend, Otto Abetz, overheard her and remarked that, “that’s funny! But see, it is very natural that we would mistake you for a spy. During war, we always take the pretty women to be spies. It is an honor that the horrible Burgmaster noticed your beauty. You should be flattered.”<sup>94</sup> The idea of using beautiful women as spies is interesting, as it appears that beautiful women were at once more threatening and less likely to be suspected. The fear of Luchaire being a spy because of her beauty indicates the power that beautiful women were supposed to have over men. In turn, this meant that sexualized women would be more likely to get important information by playing on this image. At the same time, by realizing that this was occurring, being a beautiful woman also posed a threat. Although in this case Luchaire was not herself a spy, this comment indicates how women were able to use their looks to collaborate during this time just as easily as they could use their looks to resist. Because most of the power within the regime was held by men, by playing up their sexualized feminine attributes women were able to more readily gain access to information that they were trying to attain or to get food and other goods needed to survive.

Mathilde Lily-Carré also posed this interesting issue in terms of beauty and femininity; as she was forced to collaborate, she went out of her way to establish a relationship that was based

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<sup>94</sup> Luchaire, *Ma Drôle de Vie*, 108.

« comme c’est drôle ! Mais voyons, c’est très naturel , on vous pris pour une espionne. En guerre, on prend toujours les jolies femmes pour des espionnes. C’est un hommage que l’horrible Burgmaster a rendu à votre beauté. Vous devriez en être flattée. »

much on flirting with her captor, Bleicher. Although this was her way to ensure her safety as she attempted to continue on with resistance work, she had to play on this role in order to continue her work without him suspecting anything. She recounted that the night that she slept with Bleicher was “the greatest act of cowardice in [her] life”; that “it was a purely animal cowardice, the reaction of a body which had survived its first night in prison, had suffered cold, felt the icy breath of death and suddenly felt warmth once more in a pair of arms... even if they were the arms of the enemy.”<sup>95</sup> She noted that this was one huge mistake in her life, and it is at this point that she realized her hatred of the Germans and was determined to gain revenge. This act was viewed as collaboration, even if it was an act of weakness tied to survival. Although she despised herself for it, it provided her with further protection from Bleicher later on even if it was an unintended result.

Beyond just being the beautiful and feminine woman, women were also expected to be fairly ignorant of politics and less intelligent. This comes through very clearly in Corrine Luchaire’s memoirs. She consistently discussed how she had no idea that the situation was as grave as it was because she never read or kept up with the news. Thus she claimed she was not really collaborating as she did not realize that her affairs with Germans would be considered problematic. During the Occupation, of course, this was not a problem, but was encouraged. Whether this was true or not, she played on this in the postwar when writing her story so that she would be seen as another ignorant woman, and thus not really guilty of collaboration. She wrote that “I was never interested in politics. I know I did not read the newspapers well. And all of the

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<sup>95</sup> Mathilde Lily-Carré, *I Was the Cat* (London: Horowitz, 1967) 115.

sudden, I found myself mixed up in events beyond my control, because one day I dined with this or that political figure, that I was received in this or that house.”<sup>96</sup> Everyone found themselves in various impossible situations that were beyond their control, as Luchaire points out. But since many of her situations involved some level of communication or relationship with those who were prominent within the collaborating governments, she could simply point to her female nature to steer others away from thinking she may have had any type of political agenda. In this way, her collaboration was a result of her female role; by not being interested in politics and not really paying attention to the news, she was merely following her roles and collaborating accordingly. Yet, at the same time, this must be questioned a bit, as she does show some small signs of being more aware of her situation, although perhaps this was more in hindsight. She recounted that while attending a German event she refused to stand during the national anthem of the Germans, noting that “I understood that my situation was delicate. It was impossible for me, as a Frenchwoman, my country at war with Germany, to stand for the German national anthem. I made my decision. The only one in the crowd of over a thousand people, I stayed seated.”<sup>97</sup> In this moment, she showed that she had some knowledge of how it would look to have some kind of support for the Germans, yet at the same time this did not later stop her from being around

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<sup>96</sup> Luchaire, *Ma Drôle de Vie*, 91.

« Je ne me suis jamais intéressée à la politique. Je sais mal lire les journaux. Et tout coup, je me trouve mêlée à des événements qui me dépassent, parce qu’un jour j’ai dîné avec tel ou tel homme politique, que j’ai été reçu dans telle ou telle maison. »

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 95.

« Je compris bien que ma situation était délicate. Il m’était impossible à moi, Française, mon pays étant en guerre avec l’Allemagne, de me lever pour écouter l’hymne allemand. Ma résolution fut prise. Seule dans cette foule de plusieurs milliers de personnes, je restai assise.

them, and she continued to fall back on not caring of politics and thus not having any political influence or impact by being around these Germans.

### **Consequences of Collaboration**

Women who were accused of collaboration were most notoriously punished by public head shavings. Fabrice Virgili argues this “was not a punishment for sexual collaboration, but a sexist one.”<sup>98</sup> In determining who to condemn to head shavings towards the end of the Occupation and after Liberation, there was no law which explicitly stated that relations with German men was illegal; yet it provided some sort of moral indignity which much compromised the state itself. Virgili notes that deciding how to punish these women based on their relations would be a nightmare legally especially as the government noted “it would be necessary to distinguish between women who had quite openly taken a German soldier as a partner and those who... had not so much gone in search of a German as a man.”<sup>99</sup> Although this clearly did not lead to a way in which the punishments were granted, as it would be much too difficult to determine, there was an awareness that there were relationships formed that were based on the need for a relationship while others were formed, in their view, to flaunt some sort of German sympathy that clearly went against the French.

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<sup>98</sup>Virgili, *Shorn Women*, 37.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

### **Chapter 3**

#### ***Les Résistantes***

“We had a passionate love for our country. This passion cannot be explained. Accepting the German occupation meant accepting subjugation. Then there was that passion for liberty. Some people knew what the Nazis were like- at least they had some idea of what Nazism represented. One had to resist such tyranny, such enslavement. That was the reason why some people did a great deal in the Resistance.”<sup>100</sup>

-Geneviève de Gaulle

This chapter examines the women involved in the resistance. It will first define the concept of resistance, which was any act to better one's life that went against the regime. It will then discuss the motivations of women to resist, namely for their families to survive and due to their personal ideologies. In order to resist, many women played upon their societal images to get better results. These images included the mother and wife, the promiscuous woman, and the invisible agent within society. Women also participated on an individual level to contribute to the resistance. All of these women faced great dangers in order to participate.

#### **The Resistance Movement**

##### **What is Resistance?**

In order to evaluate the role of women within the resistance, it is first necessary to define what “resistance” means. Several historians have made an attempt to do so, especially in regard to the history of resistance during the Second World War. From the 1960s to the present, there has been an evolution in how resistance is viewed. Raul Hilberg's earlier scholarship narrowly defined that arms are necessary to a proper resistance, and that in turn this led to a lack of

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<sup>100</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 93.

resistance on part of the Jewish people.<sup>101</sup> Yehuda Bauer, refuted Hilberg's conclusion, stating that resistance was "any *group* action consciously taken in opposition" to the horrors inflicted upon the Jewish people by the Nazis.<sup>102</sup> Although these two concepts focus mainly on Jewish resistance, they are viable starting points for my work. Lynne Taylor also examined resistance, focusing mainly on Northern France during the occupation. She concluded that resistance had to be something intended to somehow destabilize the regime, noting that to classify acts such as bread riots as resistance would be "too simple" and not accurate.<sup>103</sup> Vera Laska's has been most useful in forming my own definition of resistance. She argues that "resistance or underground activities covered a wide range of actions, from passive resistance in not viewing a German film, to outright guerilla warfare by partisans against the invaders."<sup>104</sup> This wide expanse of actions that can be constituted as resistance is key. Resistance was often a personal mindset; thus, no act was too small to be a part of it.

Resistance did not merely involve arms, as is evidenced by the multiple accounts of liaison workers within the resistance movement in France. They carried documents and valuable information, and even tools such as radios, that were imperative to the success of the movement and that were extremely dangerous to transport. While Bauer's argument relied on group activities, this would do much discredit to the individuals who protested Vichy and the Nazis. To argue that acts can only be considered resistance if it is in attempt to somehow oust out the

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<sup>101</sup> Raul Hilberg, "Two Thousand Years of Jewish Appeasement" in *The Holocaust* ed. Donald L. Niewyk (Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2011) 144.

<sup>102</sup> Yehuda Bauer, "Forms of Jewish Resistance" in *The Holocaust* ed. Donald L. Niewyk (Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2011) 151.

<sup>103</sup> Lynne Taylor, *Between Resistance and Collaboration* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000) 1.

<sup>104</sup> Vera Laska, "Resistance" in *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust* ed. Carol Rittner and John K. Roth (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1993) 252.

government, as Taylor does, implies that small acts such as bread riots were not in opposition to the regime, but only a response to the hunger created by it. Laska's vision, however, is much broader, which allows for the incorporation of the numerous acts that these women participated in.

For the purpose of this paper, resistance is any act against made against the situation that the people found themselves in as a result of Vichy and the Germans. Resistance did not require an organized group, but also occurred through many individual acts This includes all those who made any attempt to better their lives through any defiance against their oppressors Many accounts of women in organized groups exemplify this notion of organized and individual resistance. They often wrote of women unaffiliated with a group placing themselves in great danger to help those in the Resistance. All of these individuals found some sort of problem with the regime and wanted to find a way to try to improve their situation.

### **Motivation**

Women who participated in the resistance, whether organized or individual, did so for a plethora of reasons. Many of these reasons correlate directly to their prescribed societal roles as women- survival, family, even living up to women within French history who fought for their country. Others joined for more ideological reasons, such as political or religious beliefs, or for their loyalty to France. Others joined because they had a loved one within the resistance. Regardless of the reason, these women were willing to often put their lives on the line to help fight for a better society.

## Survival & Family

Perhaps one of the most important responsibilities of women was the survival of their family. As rations became more widespread and at the same time more difficult to obtain, it became increasingly difficult to get food on the table and to get the necessary supplies for the household. Rations were already in place as early as the winter of 1940 as the Germans took much of what France produced, and they became increasingly limited as the Occupation continued. Memoirs of the women involved in the resistance brim with comments about the lack of food. Lucie Aubrac mentions how when she got together with some of her colleagues, they would “trade thrifty recipes. Someone even suggests an omelet without eggs. It’s crazy! These restrictions, this advice about how to finagle a meal- it all conspires to direct everyone’s thoughts and efforts toward the most down-to-earth facts of daily life.”<sup>105</sup> As food essentially became an obsession and women had to come up with ways to make food using their rations, women looked toward the resistance to survive. As Aubrac noted, the notion of food took control of their everyday actions and goals, making them incapable of focusing on much else.

Resistance groups tapped into the female networks and the problems that women faced as a way to convince women to join their networks. This was a great tool to get women to join the movement to begin with; not only could women show the harms of the regime by pointing to their hungry children, but they could also target food lines as places to distribute information most relevant to the wives and mothers waiting in line. Agnes Humbert wrote about Colette, who went around local markets and placed pamphlets in the shopping baskets of women that explained how the shortage of food was a result of the German armistice.<sup>106</sup> By using this to

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<sup>105</sup> Lucie Aubrac, *Outwitting the Gestapo* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993) 145.

<sup>106</sup> Humbert, *Resistance*, 38.

make the people understand exactly why their families were hungry, it created more animosity toward the regime which was depriving French mothers of the ability to feed their families through the collaboration with the Germans.

Resistance members used daily struggles of mothers to support their cause. Not only were these worries used as a tool to get people thinking about the atrocities of the regime, but the resistance in many instances offered some way to help combat hunger. As the hunger problems became worse, national propaganda attempted to alleviate the perceived problem. Although resistance organizations did not always have the tools to feed their members, as food and money was scarce, it did provide more opportunities for food. Aubrac, for example, obtained three rations instead of two by using one of her husband's false identities after his arrest, something which she would not have been able to do had she not had access to the identification in the first place through a resistance group.<sup>107</sup> This was of course very dangerous, as she could have been caught by the *milice* and tortured for defying the regime in this way. Those who were underground relied on people who would help supply them with food. Madeleine Baudoin, for example, stole a gun and later sold it to obtain food and other supplies for her organization.<sup>108</sup> They also often had ties to family members in the countryside who had more access to food. By having the support of a network of resistance workers, it was easier to find ways to feed oneself and one's family to survive. It also offered a cover for those women involved in clandestine work—Hélène Renal described how she escaped arrest once in 1943 or 1944 by filling a bag with a double bottom with vegetables and then “went about like a dumb girl carrying a bag filled with

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<sup>107</sup> Aubrac, *Outwitting the Gestapo*, 26.

<sup>108</sup> Schwartz, “Partisanes and Gender Politics in Vichy France”, 129-130.

carrots, turnips, and leeks.”<sup>109</sup> Not only did the food provide a way for Renal to escape suspicion as hunger was widespread and it was generally the woman’s job to come up with the meals, but she even notes how she looked like a “dumb girl” to anyone else. Thus, women played upon multiple images of women at once to reach their desired ends- the image of the nourishing female, the unintelligent girl, and the ignorant woman who would have no idea that the resistance movements would even be going on.

Beyond merely keeping their families alive, many joined the movement for their families, hoping to fight for their future. Many parents risked everything to ensure that their children would not live in a world in which they would be oppressed. Marie-Louise de Luc joined the movement in 1940, one of the women to join earlier on. Otherwise known as “Madame X”, she remarked that “It was for our children that I joined the Resistance early on, as did my husband. I felt I had to fight to ensure their future in the world we believed in.”<sup>110</sup> The mother of a woman named Cecile, wondered how Cecile could continue in her resistance work as she had a child, and Cecile replied: “It is because I have a child that I do it. This is not a world I wish her to grow up in.”<sup>111</sup> Just as women had to ensure the survival of their children, they had to fight for their futures. This was just as important, and often involved much sacrifice. Many women of the resistance had to endure parting with their children in order to keep them safe. Marie-Madeleine Fourcade had to send her children away to trusted friends ensure their safety. Once it became clear that the Gestapo had been after her son at his previous school, she went as far as to send them to Switzerland. When her children were in Lyon, she noted that she felt that she “had

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<sup>109</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 203.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>111</sup> Caroline Moorehead, *A Train in Winter: An Extraordinary Story of Women, Friendship, and Resistance in Occupied France*. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2011) 29.

no right to see them” and expressed her great despair when they left.<sup>112</sup> These women were willing to risk everything for their children, and faced the terrible sadness that accompanied the separation between them, perhaps one of the most extreme sacrifices a mother could make.

Others joined the movement because those that they loved were involved in it already. Fourcade writes of a man captured by the Gestapo whose final wish was for the organization to protect his fiancée. When this girl came to Fourcade, she told her that she did not want to be sent into hiding, but that she desperately wanted to help however she could. She quickly became an asset to the resistance group Noah’s Ark.<sup>113</sup> By joining the movement, the man’s fiancée was able to help him and essentially be a part of his life even though he had been captured. In some cases, whole families became involved. Genevieve de Gaulle noted that “for a close-knit, patriotic family, the German Occupation concerned all of us. We were all more or less in the Resistance.”<sup>114</sup> A family effort made the movement that much stronger, as everyone was willing to fight for the other members of their family and it also provided a sense of trust that was often difficult to come by in organized groups, which were often very secretive. Gabrielle Ferrières recounts that “I did not really choose to join the Resistance. I simply joined my husband and brother in what they were doing.”<sup>115</sup> In all of these instances, the importance of family shines through. Women wanted to participate to stay with those they loved and fight for them. When a family came under fire, women worked immensely hard to save it, working with other members of the organization and essentially using the concept of family the regime tried to promote to

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<sup>112</sup> Marie-Madeleine Fourcade, *Noah’s Ark* (New York: E.P Dutton & Company, Inc., 1974) 232.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>114</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 90.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

undermine the regime itself. In many cases, these family efforts also contributed to the growth of regional groups.

### **Beliefs & Loyalty**

Women did not only participate to protect their families, but also to protect their beloved country and to fight for their ideals. This is particularly interesting as women were often the symbol of France, as is seen in the beloved Marianne, and thus in a way it was part of the responsibility of women to protect France. As Caroline Moorehead notes, flyers and posters were printed by various regional groups to remind women of the females who marched on Versailles to demand bread from Louis XIV, trying to convince them to protest bread rations.<sup>116</sup> The resistance, like Vichy, used traditional images of female heroes to call forth loyalty and encouraged participation. Joan of Arc was also a popular strong female that many used as means of giving French women an idol to look up to. By using these women as examples, it not only called upon a loyalty to the French state itself, but also acted as a testament to the importance of women in past struggles of France, and how their contributions were of immense importance to the success of France. This made it appear that without women, the fight against the new regime could not succeed, as previous struggles had shown. Many of the first smallest acts of Resistance as early as November of 1940 incorporated this patriotic feel; the Croix de Lorraine (the symbol of Joan of Arc) and V's for victory were drawn all over using lipstick, crayons, and paint and German posters were vandalized or torn down.<sup>117</sup> By using lipstick to protest the collaboration between the two states, women showed their disdain with where the country was

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<sup>116</sup> Moorehead, *A Train in Winter*, 24.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

heading in a way that tied it back directly to women. Yvette Farnoux tells of her early resistance activities, describing in particular that November 11, 1940 (Armistice Day): “I joined my friends to walk up and down the Champs-Élysées- one dressed in red, another in white, another in blue.”<sup>118</sup> By protesting the Nazis by subtly wearing the tricolor and marching down the historic Champs-Élysées, it sent a message of a sense of loyalty to their country and their traditions that was separate from those of the Nazis.

There were also ideological reasons behind resistance, that were not necessarily tied to a French loyalty but that were tied into the French culture. Renée Bédarida claims to have joined the resistance because she was Christian and she “knew that Nazism was anti-Christian and anti-human.”<sup>119</sup> This moral concept is very important, as she clearly recognized the immorality of the situation and tied it to something greater than just her French roots, but instead something human. The concept of being anti-human is also apparent in several accounts, as many of these women regarded the horrors that the Nazis imposed as well as the Vichy government with disdain and the desire to do something to change it. Claire Chevrillon recalled two women, Annie Billoud and Elizabeth de Bie, who housed her in 1943. She wrote that these two women, although not part of any organized group, “‘resisted’ in their daily lives” as they taught history and French, which allowed them to “speak of certain traditional moral values that were currently being infringed.”<sup>120</sup> By promoting French moral values through the teaching of French and history, it exhibited the intrinsic values the French should have and the importance of holding true to those traditions to preserve and revitalize France instead of taking other measures used by

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<sup>118</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 207.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>120</sup> Chevrillon, *Code Name Christiane*, 118.

Vichy and the Germans. Jeanne Chaton even noted that she was very much a pacifist, but that “there was the question of liberty. How can you remain pacifist if your country is occupied?”<sup>121</sup> This idea that there was something not only morally wrong but something traditional and cultural being violated ties back to this concept of French loyalty and ideology that was reflected in many women’s reasons to resist. The ideas concerning human rights were very much a part of French history and tradition that went back to their revolution and their republican ideals.

### **Using the Female Image to Rebel**

Women in Vichy France had an advantage when entering into the Resistance movement—namely, that they were women. Both Vichy and the Nazis promoted the image of women as wives and mothers as apparent in their larger policies, and completely uninvolved in the political phenomenon that was occurring (although the men were as well). Especially after the attempt in the interwar years to bring back the motherly image, there was a widespread hope amongst many of the French men that women would be more like this ideal, thus making these men blind to what women were capable of. Women were given the ability to slip in between the cracks and resist unnoticed, especially earlier in the years of the planned resistance. As Caroline Moorehead argues, towards the end of 1941 there were “relatively few women resisters already in prison, the myth of the unpolitical, home-loving woman still prevailing across much of France.”<sup>122</sup>

Although women did slowly begin to lose the protection that their gender brought them as it became more apparent that women were involved as they began to get caught, they never lost all of it, and more often than not it gave them an invaluable disguise. Weitz argues that many

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<sup>121</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 241.

<sup>122</sup> Moorehead, *A Train in Winter*, 67.

women knowingly “assumed a role” and acted out the part that they were expected to play.<sup>123</sup>

By appearing to fit within the gendered image that Vichy encouraged and the Nazis expected them to undertake, these women took immense risks in the resistance movement that would have been much more difficult, if not impossible, for the men to accomplish.

### **Mothers & Wives**

Vichy was intent upon promoting motherhood; in fact restructuring the family as part of a return to traditional values was a key tenet of the Vichy policy. Pétain made this painfully obvious throughout the regime, emphasizing the importance of good mothers not only to replenish the French population but also to establish it as a worthy society. At one point, he noted that “Mothers of France, our native land, yours is the most difficult task, but also the most gratifying. You are-even before the state- the true educators. You alone know how to inspire in all that inclination for work, that sense of discipline, that modesty, that respect, that give men character and make nations strong.”<sup>124</sup> From this comment alone, it is possible to see the influence that mothers had upon the future of France, and it is thus no wonder why mothers became so revered and important within this society. The connotations that accompanied motherhood made it very easy for women within the resistance to use this concept to their advantage. Of course, this is not to say that these women were not acting as mothers while doing so; many women within the Resistance joined because they felt it was their duty as mothers to do what was right for their children and families. Thus, some women used the role of mother that

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<sup>123</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 246.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

the regime prescribed as the very reason why they chose to act against it. Others took this even further and used it to their advantage to create almost a safe identity for Resistance work.

Dangerous clandestine work often relied on the image of the ideal mother. As Paula Schwartz notes, many women would place weapons “in ‘pregnant’ pouches on their person, in baby carriages, and even in baby diapers to ensure safe transport.”<sup>125</sup> In a society that claimed to revere mothers, this provided a good cover; after all, who would suspect a young woman to be concealing weapons or documents in her womb or near her baby? Of course, the image of the ideal mother was nothing new; nor was the idea of the subservient housewife. However, this continuing image of women in these positions within these separate spheres worked to their advantage: it was so engrained in the minds of those that sought out any troublemakers that they were left often untouched.

Just as mothers were important, so were wives, and as such there was an effort made to create a stronger France based upon the strength of families. As Pétain wrote in 1940, “the family is the essential unit; it is the foundation of the social structure; one must build upon it. If it gives way, all is lost; while it holds, everything is saved.”<sup>126</sup> This praise of family ensured that resistance workers could work much better under the disguise of being a couple; it would be much less conspicuous for a woman to be meeting a man under this guise than for two men to meet. Agnès Humbert wrote of several instances in which women of the movement met men by cafés and other public venues. One instance occurred when one of the higher ranking members of her resistance groups, Vildé, “went off for a few minutes to pick up some false identity papers

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<sup>125</sup> Schwartz, “Partisanes and Gender Politics in Vichy France” 132.

<sup>126</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance* 46.

that Simone Martin-Chauffier was arranging for him; she was waiting for him at a café on place Pigalle.”<sup>127</sup> Such interactions provided a veil of protection as authorities ignored the seemingly romantic meetings between a man and a woman. These relationships were not only helpful in passing off valuable information and weapons, but also in gaining information. Rayna Kline notes the importance of visiting prisoners, and that “many young women presented themselves as the fiancées or friends of the prisoners in order to gain information on who was in prison, the charges against them, and the threats to the rest of the movement.”<sup>128</sup> As women were supposed to be the caretakers, it was not considered out of place to see a woman bringing goods to the prisoners or coming to check in on their well-being. It would not even be suspected that they would be gathering information, but rather that they were staying within their expected roles.

Perhaps one of the best examples of this is the situation of Lucie Aubrac, who is a well-known resister who helped participate in spite of her pregnancy. After the arrest of her husband Raymond, Aubrac knew that she had to do something to free him, and went out of her way to appeal to the more sexualized image of women that was pre-established to try to set him free. On June 23, 1943, she went to go see the head of the German police services in Lyon, Obersturmführer Klaus Barbie to try to get her husband back after his arrest. She attests to putting “on a very pretty checkered rayon suit, big white porcelain daisy earrings, and a tiny pillbox hat with a little veil” to put her femininity on display. As she was pregnant as well, she used this fact to help her make her case to get her husband back, claiming that instead of being married he was actually a lover who had gotten her pregnant and she needed him to marry her to

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<sup>127</sup> Humbert, *Resistance*, 41.

<sup>128</sup> Rayna Kline “Partisans, Godmothers, Bicyclists, and Other Terrorists: Women in the French and Under Vichy.” *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History*, vol. 5 (1977) 379.

legitimize the pregnancy.<sup>129</sup> By recognizing the call that France was making to mothers and the ideal family, Aubrac realized that her best chance was to approach the officials by playing upon this idea. Although she was unable to get her husband released through this ruse, she was able to talk to the head of the German police in Lyon without even suspecting an ulterior motive. Her best possible disguise was that of a future mother, needing the male protection and support that a husband could give her. She even returned later on requesting an official marriage with Raymond before his execution would occur so that she could pass on imperative information for Raymond as to their plans to free him. Aubrac played up to the expectations for women in the regime even moreso when she begged the Obersturmführer for him to allow this marriage to occur, telling him that “I’m expecting a child. For my family’s sake and for society’s, I absolutely cannot be an unwed mother. And this child is entitled to have a father.”<sup>130</sup> If Aubrac had not gone to see Barbie about this circumstance, pleading to his conceptions of motherhood and family, then it is likely that her husband would not have been able to escape. She even plays slightly upon the image of the dumb girl, who was tricked by some man and now desperately needed to fix the situation. This is a clear example of a job that a woman had to do; no man could gain this access to a member of the Gestapo in this manner. By acknowledging her importance as a mother, she was able to get into the system without even being suspected.

### **Young, Beautiful Women**

The Vichy regime was focused increasing the size of French families, and as Weitz notes, “French women were told that to attract the male of the species- to ensure reproduction- women

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<sup>129</sup> Aubrac, *Outwitting the Gestapo*, 79.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

needed to be both morally and physically attractive.”<sup>131</sup> At the same time, however, French women were repeatedly chastised for “their vanity and material concerns” thus meaning that women had to be attractive while at the same time not focusing on it too obviously.<sup>132</sup> Although the image of the housewife did not involve being materialistic or vain, at the same time there was some cultural underlying perception of women being beautiful, which many used to their advantage. When Aubrac appealed to Barbie, she did not only focus on her role as a mother and wife, but she also made sure to look the part even more by wearing more feminine clothing that reinforced a particular image of women. The sexuality and beauty of women that has been a part of the generalizations of women also played a huge role within the resistance movement, as well as their gullible characters. Beautiful women were more likely to be able to get by without suspicion and to sometimes even get help from those that they were plotting against. One resister, named Danielle, was well aware of this helpful concept. She “had made efforts to lose some weight and dress more fashionably, telling friends laughingly that the Germans were far less prone to stop women who looked pretty and well turned out.” She found that “flirting a little with the Germans could yield excellent results.”<sup>133</sup> This is interesting that moments like these were so prevalent within the working of the resistance movement; while Danielle was a part of a group, she had the backup to make sure that this exchange was not misconstrued as something more. Yet, in another situation, she may have been accused of collaboration because of this interaction, especially if there was no record of her trying to escape search by a German officer. Another resister, Angèle, also recalled a moment when she realized just how helpful being a

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<sup>131</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 47.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> Moorehead, *A Train in Winter* 47-49.

pretty young woman could be: “I remember one day when I was transporting documents, a policeman arrested me because I did not have a light on my bicycle. And then he proposed we go out on a date... I spun.... [The Germans] were not suspicious of girls, especially those who were pretty.” She went on to describe how she even wanted to dye her hair blonde and get luxurious clothes to avoid suspicion, although her husband pointed out that dressing like a member of the bourgeois would not be helpful to her.<sup>134</sup> This was likely in part because it went against the ideal image that both Vichy and the Germans had of women; especially as times were so hard, they were expected to be self-sacrificing and frugal, not self-indulgent.

Women used their sexuality to get past the Germans and French alike; Paula Schwartz acknowledges that “literature and testimony brim with tales of women resisters flirting their way past security checks or encouraging the gallantry of German soldiers who unwittingly carried suitcases packed with arms safely past checkpoints.”<sup>135</sup> One resister named “Claude” was able to assassinate a key Gestapo man wearing “her only dress set off to its best occasion by the addition of a glamorous ostrich feather hat” when she accompanied him to dinner. After the extravagant meal,

‘Claude’ maneuvered their exit at a pre-appointed time, leading her suitor to believe their evening was to have a grandiose finish... In the back seat [of the car] she met the eager advances of her future victim with a revolver, deftly pulled from her left side before his roving hand could discover it, and fired point blank.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Ania Francos, *Il Etait des Femmes dans la Resistance* (Éditions Stock, 1978) 40.

« Je me souviens d’un jour où je transportais des documents, un policier m’a arrêtée parce que je n’avais pas du lumière sur ma bicyclette. Et puis il m’a proposé un rendez-vous... J’ai filé.... Ils ne se méfiaient pas des filles, surtout lorsqu’elles étaient jolies. »

<sup>135</sup> Schwartz, “Partisanes and Gender Politics in Vichy France” 132.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

By playing upon the sexuality of women, the role of the beautiful woman could lead to much success in resistance work. In a society that was intrinsically misogynistic and run by men it is of no surprise that women could use their behavior to seduce men to get what they wanted. Madeleine Passot was another woman who used this clearly to her advantage; as Moorehead notes, Passot was “slender, fearless, elegant with her red nails and tailored suits”, in that way a perfect candidate for clandestine work, and she was known for sitting by Germans on the trains as she travelled with documents “rightly confident that they would gallantly protect her at checkpoints.”<sup>137</sup> While women were deemed by society to need protecting, it rarely dawned upon the officials of the regime that they may need protecting against these women. By recognizing this advantage over the patriarchal system which was blinded by their ideas of women, female resisters had many encounters in which they used assumptions about their beauty and femininity to scrape by in difficult areas.

### **Invisible Agents**

Even women who did not play upon the protection of the image of mother, wife, or sexualized woman were able to use their femininity as a good cover. As women did not even receive the right to vote in France until 1945, there was not much thought of women being involved in politics, especially when they were supposed to be consumed with their family. This in itself gave women a way in which they could move around much easier than the men could. They were often given tasks that involved carrying weapons, money, documents, and even food to other agents, as well as working on the clandestine newspapers and distributing pamphlets.

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<sup>137</sup> Moorehead, *A Train in Winter*, 30.

While in many instances these tasks were perceived to be less important, these jobs were actually quite dangerous and the men within the organizations really depended on the women to provide this framework for their resistance actions. Agnès Humbert recalls her role in such activities: “I make Cassou laugh when I appoint myself the group’s ‘runner’, like the apprentices in couture houses who run errands between the different ateliers. The telephone is virtually out of bounds to us now, so it will be my job to carry instructions and advice between members.”<sup>138</sup> Another young woman, named Célia Bertin, recalled her experience in the first year of the occupation when

one day, I came upon a security check when leaving the Métro. I was carrying a radio transmitter in a travel bag. The Gestapo agents were searching everyone and making the men put their hands up. Inwardly terrified, I smiled at the soldier—the first and only time I smiled at a Nazi— and, struggling with my bag, I looked as if I had trouble opening the zipper. He smiled back and let me go.<sup>139</sup>

Women were able to become the transportation for goods and messages because they were not seen as a threat. Women could play upon the general stereotypes of them needing protection, being dependent, and being unable to really get involved outside of the home.

That being said, women were often kept within these clandestine roles because they would be placing the whole system in danger if too many of them were placed in more militant positions. When one organization group was in need of weapons, Madeleine Baudoin was able to snatch a revolver from a man in a crowded train without him even realizing it was gone.<sup>140</sup> Her success in being able to obtain this weapon was likely due in part to her gender; she was able to be near enough to this man to snatch it and then hide it in her bag without him even being

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<sup>138</sup> Humbert, *Resistance*, 15.

<sup>139</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 113.

<sup>140</sup> Schwartz, “Partisanes and Gender Politics in Vichy France” 129-130.

suspicious of her actions. Yet although women were imperative in getting weapons and transporting them as part of their clandestine work, few were actually involved in militant resistance. This was due in part to a lack of interest on the part of the women; many women commented that they could not see themselves using guns and others wrote of their relief that they did not have to use them. However, it was also largely emphasized by gender roles. First, women were still not perceived as being as able to be involved in such work, even by those within the movement, as the gender roles so engrained within society of course did not disappear once these women joined a movement. Not only were the males (who were often those who held the power in resistance groups) under the impression that women could not perform the same tasks, but many of the women themselves had these ideas so engrained in them that they too believed that they should not be involved. Also, their roles as an invisible agent within society because of their gender proved to be immensely important. In fact, when women asked if they could start using arms in one group, they were told no because they held so much more importance as a liaison worker. These women were told that “your role is infinitely more important than that of a simple soldier” as their role enabled the group to stay connected and operate well.<sup>141</sup> Without these women in clandestine roles, the groups would have crumbled; thus women were more important in their roles in the shadows than in taking up arms that they likely were not even trained to use.

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 145.

## **Women on the Outskirts- Individual Sacrifices**

Outside of the organized resistance networks, women made small gestures of resistance to make their voices heard. While adhering to the image of the self-sacrificing woman, these women too risked everything to help the resistance cause. They sheltered individuals who were hiding and in many instances saved their lives, perhaps tying back to the nurturing image of women as well. Many women took in resisting individuals and took care of them like they would their own family, thus continuing their role within society. Women participated at many levels in the resistance movement, often in ways that are not still told as part of the history of the movement. There are accounts of the resistance that tell of individual women's experiences, who often faced much danger to help those within an organized movement. Various female resisters describe families who sheltered them when they were being sought by the police; of the concierges who in some cases saved them from arrest, and various others. One female resister, named Annette, remarked that "the concierges were exemplary. They helped without hesitation. They told the police or the Gestapo they did not know the whereabouts of those being sought- when in fact they did. At times, concierges warned those about to return to an apartment or room where capture awaited them."<sup>142</sup> Anne-Marie Soucelier also recalled that a particular family in Lyon sheltered many resistance workers in their home, and that their concierge saved the family from suspicion arising from the resistance workers coming and leaving often in the summer of 1943. She explained to the Gestpo that the family had six children and that comings and goings were to be expected, and went on to warn Anne-Marie when the Gestapo came.<sup>143</sup> Individuals like these made an immense impact on those in the organized resistance movement, even though

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<sup>142</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 224.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

they were not part of a resistance group. Many families also took on the role of sheltering those who opposed the regime, and oftentimes in these cases the women took the brunt of the challenge in helping them, especially when it meant another mouth to feed and when it put their whole family in danger. The family that Soucelier spoke of is just one example; in Marie-Madeleine Fourcade's memoir as her time as the leader of Noah's Ark, she described several instances in which women housed and helped to take care of various people within her group, including a young woman named Henriette Amable. Although this girl did have connections to the movement, Henriette herself was not in it, and she made sure that those staying there did not "lack for anything."<sup>144</sup>

Many other individual women did much to help the resistance movement although they were not necessarily part of a group. Women sometimes used their jobs as a way to go against the system. Elizabeth Terrenoire discusses in particular those who worked with food card distribution, noting that "in spite of the surveillance and danger, [they] largely contributed to the revitalization of the young *réfractaires*."<sup>145</sup> She also acknowledges those women who were able to supply false identification cards through their positions within the public administration. One young girl who helped the Noah's Ark group repaired the lifebelts at a submarine base, and would prick holes in them while also listening to gather information about the German U-Boats.<sup>146</sup> The Germans likely attributed this flaw to her failure to be able to sew, considering her to be a silly girl instead of a plotting resister. These women who used their jobs in a way to help

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<sup>144</sup> Fourcade, *Noah's Ark*, 193.

<sup>145</sup> Elisabeth Terrenoire, *Les Femmes dans la Résistance : Combattantes sans Uniforme*. (Bloud et Gay, 1946) 26. « malgré la surveillance et le danger, contribué pour une grand part au ravitaillement des jeunes réfractaires. »

<sup>146</sup> Fourcade, *Noah's Ark*, 194.

out the resistance faced much danger, but that did not stop them from helping out where they could.

## Conclusion

Women who participated in either collaboration or resistance during the time of the Vichy regime and the Occupation were placed in black and white categories afterwards, providing the misleading perception that these women operated solely in these negative or positive groups. The reality, however, was much blurrier than that. Women did what they could to survive in a time of complex strife, in which they were put to the test to simply maintain some sense of normalcy in a state of chaos. They were encouraged to collaborate during the regime itself. Vichy pushed their collaboration agenda ceaselessly, making it immensely dangerous to side against Vichy or the Germans. To go against the regime indicated lawlessness in a community in which following the law was expected. Once women started to resist, they found another venue to help ensure their survival as well. Although exceedingly dangerous, women became assets to the resistance groups because of the shroud that their societal images allowed them to hide behind. Oftentimes, these acts of resistance proved imperative to maintaining their own sense of normalcy and survival.

In either case, women played upon their societal roles to be able to live within a society that increasingly posed more problems for them, often causing women to cross the lines between the two groups. Regardless of this, however, women were placed in a single category- either collaborator or resister- after the collapse of Vichy and its collaborationist policies. The grey zone that was so prevalent during the occupation itself appeared to have been forgotten afterwards. Those who were praised at one time for collaboration were later condemned for their actions, while those who were hunted for their resistance efforts were later regarded in high

esteem. This switch that occurred without addressing the ways in which many had to participate in both sides led to disastrous results for many women, who were judged on how they upheld their feminine ideals, although it is clear that women on both sides were often acting under these prescribed societal roles.

It would be incorrect to claim that women were split between resisters and collaborators based on how they acted in relation to their expected roles. Many women had similar motivations, which tended to correlate directly to how they felt they needed to contribute to society. Lucie Aubrac, for example, was very much celebrated for her role in the resistance because she did so not only while pregnant but also to procure safety for her husband and thus a sense of security. Meanwhile, women who had to deal with similar problems- not knowing about the well-being of their loved ones, for example- were condemned if they loved a German, and thus it was assumed that the relationship could not be genuine. Mothers who sacrificed their safety by working in the resistance in order to keep their families alive were glorified, while mothers who collaborated to put food on the table were cast into a dark shadow. Women who found themselves in impossible situations would later be judged for their actions, while it seems impossible to properly judge such a situation. Of course, not all women in the resistance joined for those reasons; there were women who were politically active and who acted on that as part of their motivation. And there were women who collaborated with Vichy and the Nazis because they agreed with their beliefs. But many women who were placed in these groups were women who were trying to continue their role within the society that they knew, to continue their lives as mothers, wives, and significant others in a world that was otherwise getting turned on its head.

After the Liberation, women were punished for collaboration, mainly in the form of having their heads shaved and becoming known as “*les tondues*.” For the most part, there was little sympathy for those who had any connection with the Germans; instead they were used as blame for the defeat of France, exemplifying how a weakened France had fallen with the help of certain individuals who did not have the interests of their country at heart. Upon seeing a café full of German soldiers with their French girlfriends, Father Bruckberger noted that “those girls could be dipped in tar and burned in the public square and it would affect me no more than a fire in the fireplace of a neighbor’s house.”<sup>147</sup> When Carré brought Bleicher with her to one of her meetings with a resistance agent, Duvernois, upon declaration of his arrest he looked at her and said “What a slut you are!”<sup>148</sup> This complete lack of trying to understand and the sense of betrayal that was felt by these men was common, and is clearly reflected in the number of women who were punished for their so-called collaboration, even though in many instances it did not have a direct influence upon the state itself. Women were accused of collaboration for various things; according to Virgili, they were accused for denunciations, political collaboration, having German or Italian nationality, and having intimate relations with the Germans.<sup>149</sup> As Weitz notes, “because the Occupation blurred the boundaries between private and public life” many women were accused because of their relationships, and there is clearly a sense of resentment towards female collaborators as they were supposed to be the stability of the French moral society.<sup>150</sup> Female collaborators were treated in some ways more harshly and punished in a more sexist manner because their collaboration went much deeper in the eyes of society;

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<sup>147</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 278.

<sup>148</sup> Lily-Carré, *I Was the Cat*, 108.

<sup>149</sup> Virgili, *Shorn Women* 11-16.

<sup>150</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 268.

instead of acting as the sacrificing mothers of France, they went against her with their greed and their hearts.

Those accused of collaboration with the Germans and Vichy were often denied an understanding that in collaborating they were often following their gender expectations. Whether they were searching for meaningful relationships, or finding ways to keep their families alive, women were accused of stepping completely outside of their roles to the point of destroying France when instead many were just trying to find their place in their chaotic society.

Right after the Liberation of France, there was indeed some recognition of the female resisters; as Weitz notes, “Charles de Gaulle created the order of the Companions of the Liberation to honor those who had helped free France” but out of over one thousand medals rewarded, only six were given to women.<sup>151</sup> However, in spite of this lack of national recognition right away, women who were in the Resistance movement were often praised, both during and after, because of the achievements they made, oftentimes in relation to their femininity. Lucie Aubrac in particular is often written of admirably because of her pregnancy and her drive to free her husband, both of which fit into a conceptualized ideal of the woman. In Elisabeth Terrenoire’s work, *Combattantes Sans Uniforme; les Femmes dans la Resistance*, which was written in 1946, shows this idolatry when she specifically emphasizes Aubrac’s situation while describing her resistance work: “Raymond Aubrac, chief of the secret army of the Southern Zone, had been arrested in June of 1943. A few months later, his wife learned that he was condemned to death and that a car would be going to take him to Fort Montluc. Even

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 10.

though she was seven months pregnant, she herself organized, with a frank group, the attack of this car and freed her husband.”<sup>152</sup> As this account of women in the movement was written so closely to the actual events, it is clear that these women were particularly important in promoting feminine values, still often in regard to family and motherhood.

At the same time, this regard for feminine values left many holes in remembering the roles that women played in the resistance. Many women downplayed their role within the movement, perhaps because of the idea that because they were doing what they had to- as mothers, wives, patriotic French women- that they had not done anything particularly special. Sacrifice had been a part of the female image, and the sacrifices that many made to partake in the resistance were remembered in that way, and thus many of their contributions remain unknown. Gabrielle Farrières, for example, who joined the resistance because of her husband and brother, remarks that she “did not have an exceptional role. I was simply a liaison agent, a courier.”<sup>153</sup> Numerous women referred to their work as clandestine workers with little glory, some even describing their missions merely as errands. Just as much as women were unexpected to take a large part in the resistance, it was also very much their job, and this led to difficulty in remembering the importance of their contributions and the danger that they consistently faced.

Overall, women played a very important role within the resistance movement, both those who joined groups and those who worked on their own. They worked to protect their families and their country, both of which were very much associated with feminine ideals within society.

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<sup>152</sup> Terrenoire, *Les Femmes dans la Resistance* 23.

« Raymond Aubrac, chef de l’armée secret pour la zone sud, avait été arrêté en juin 1943. Quelques mois plus tard, sa femme apprit qu’il était condamné à mort et qu’une voiture allait l’emmener du fort Montluc. Bien qu’enceinte de sept mois, elle organise elle-même, avec un groupe franc, l’attaque de cette voiture et elle délivra son mari. »

<sup>153</sup> Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance*, 95.

But they also realized the ways in which they could use the images of women to their advantage in their work, and in doing so they made immense strides that would have been nearly impossible for men to partake in. Although their femininity did not in guarantee they would not be caught, especially later in the years of occupation as women slowly became more suspect, it did provide them a cushion which they could exploit as they wished and which allowed them much more fluidity.

There is still much more to be explored in this area. How did society view women who collaborated through an organized group, such as the select few females in the *milice*, versus those who were deemed collaborators through relationships? Were there crimes seen in the same light, in spite of a different amount of involvement? And how did class influence both movements? Were women who were wealthier more or less likely to be charged with collaboration? How did finances influence why women got involved on either side? I hope to be able to explore some of these themes in my master's thesis.

While women on both sides were judged based on their gender, the struggle that France has had with recognizing the horrors of the collaboration with the Germans that they participated in has on some level made it difficult for much understanding to occur for those who were deemed the villains. Yet, how was it to be determined after the war which women had their heads shaved from humiliation for their apparent collaborating and those women who had their heads shaved in camps because of their resistance activities? The shame of one and the heroism of the other are almost ironically connected; in some way resisting and collaborating both led to some loss of femininity in the eyes of society.

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