

Communist Women's Resistance in Occupied Paris:
Engagement, Activism and Continuities
from the 1930s to 1945

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Abstract

The French communist resistance movement has been recognised as one of the most active networks of the French Resistance during World War II. This thesis addresses a gap in the scholarly literature concerning both the structure of the movement and the contribution of women to the communist resistance. While women are now included in the majority of general histories, the historiography has tended to understate the participation of female resisters. Women, however, were extensively involved as members of the communist resistance movement. This thesis allows us to gain an understanding of women as key contributors to the functioning of resistance networks.

This study argues that women were integral to the success of the communist resistance movement. Detailed investigation of female communist resisters enables us to develop a deeper understanding of the emergence of resistance and how it was sustained. A resistance network was dependent upon the contribution of all its members. This thesis illustrates how the complementary roles adopted by women shaped resistance in France. The goal of the communist movement was popular resistance. Women were essential for this objective to succeed. Gender played a key role in determining how women resisted, particularly as members of the communist resistance. Women were able to develop their own initiatives and organise all-female parallel, but connected, sub-networks as part of the communist resistance movement. Women performed a range of roles as communist resisters. Over the course of the war they adapted their resistance activities to suit the changing circumstances in which they found themselves.

In addition, this study explains how the attitude of the communists towards women's informal participation in politics affected women's involvement in resistance activities. Through an examination of the activities of the Parti Communiste Français and the inclusion of women in communist groups during the 1930s, this thesis demonstrates how the pre-war political engagement of communist women prepared them to perceive opportunities to resist. The anti-fascist struggle of the 1930s informed women's choices to commit to resistance. The fact that communist women were politically active affected their choices as resisters, made them aware of the consequences of resistance, and enabled them to understand the importance of their contribution to resistance.

Thesis Declaration

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I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

Signature

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Abbreviations

BS	Brigade Spécial
CdF	Croix de Feu
CMFCGF	Comité Mondiale des Femmes Contre la Guerre et le Fascisme
CNR	Conseil National de la Résistance
FN	Front National
FTP	Francs-Tireurs et Partisans
JC	Jeunesses Communistes
MRN	Musée de la Résistance Nationale
OS	Organisation Spéciale
PCF	Parti Communiste Français
PP	Préfecture de Police
STO	Service de Travail Obligatoire
UFF	Union des Femmes Françaises
UJFF	Union des Jeunes Filles de France

Introduction and Review of the Historiography

This thesis presents a detailed analysis of female resisters within communist resistance networks in Paris. My thesis argues that the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) mobilised women to a great extent as essential members of the communist resistance movement. In this thesis, I illustrate the remarkable integration of female resisters in PCF underground activities and the reasons for their extensive participation. To provide evidence for this argument, I consider the range of activities which women performed, and I place their contribution to resistance within the context of the communist network as a whole. I build on previous studies of resistance by including a discussion of the engagement of women within communist networks during the 1930s.

My thesis addresses a range of questions concerning communist women's activism in Paris. What was the nature and extent of communist women's resistance? How did women's resistance contribute to the success and longevity of resistance networks? In addressing these questions, my core premise is that our evaluation of the role of women in the resistance should not privilege some kinds of activities over others. Instead, it is essential to acknowledge that resistance was a collective movement in which all the elements were equally important because they were interdependent.

I unpack this argument over the course of my thesis through a detailed discussion of women in the communist resistance. I ask: How did the attitude of the communists towards the informal involvement of women in politics affect women's engagement in the French Resistance? Did it enable and facilitate their resistance? The communists encouraged the widespread inclusion of women in their networks, both before and during the war. When it came to organising resistance, the PCF drew heavily on its experience of the Popular Front, 1936-1938. I argue that this resulted in women being particularly active in communist resistance groups. Further, I suggest that their pre-war political activities affected women's perception of resistance, its consequences and its importance, as well as the choices they made during the war.

In order to understand the crucial role of women in communist networks, it is necessary to examine the variety of their activities in detail. Why did communist networks target women as a specific group of potential resisters? What activities did the communist networks encourage women to perform? What did the communists envision as women's contribution to resistance? These questions shape the structure and analysis of my study. I consider how the PCF was able to exploit traditional gender roles when organising resistance activities. Women's resistance activities either complemented those adopted by men, or could not be performed by men. Activities such as collecting supplies and engaging in public protest are two such examples. Women were also able to create their own all-female parallel sub-networks for which they were fully responsible. Communist networks were unusual because they allowed women the opportunity to develop their own initiatives. Women seized the opportunity to resist along with all the attendant responsibilities. Women's contribution to the growth and sustainability of communist resistance was essential. My thesis emphasises that resistance networks were only able to function because of the contribution of all their members. Examining the experiences of women who were active in communist resistance networks confirms that women were essential members of the French Resistance, however we understand or define the term.

The unique experience of life in France during and after occupation has resulted in a complex historiography. The development of the historiography and public memory has been so complicated and intertwined that historians have written studies focusing solely on the scholarship.¹ There are two reasons why the literature concerning France during World War II has developed in such a complex manner. The first concerns the difficulty experienced by the population in accepting the extent of French collaboration with the Nazis. The subject of collaboration between citizens, the police and Nazi authorities was largely ignored for over two decades after the war. The second reason relates to the sheer variety of the experiences of French women and men during the occupation. Different experiences were dealt with individually over the course of the evolution of the historiography. In the scholarly literature, this resulted in the shifting of focus between various social groups in distinct periods. As a consequence, it took decades for the

¹ See: Henry Rousso *The Vichy Syndrome: history and memory in France since 1944*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991; Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1997; Olivier Wieviorka, *La Mémoire Désunie: le souvenir politique des années sombre de la libération à nos jours*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2010.

scholarship to touch on all the different facets of life during the occupation, the 'bad' and the 'good'. As a result, some groups did not have the same opportunities to have their stories told. The phases evident in the historiography are the reason that certain aspects of day-to-day life, and of resistance, did not receive equal attention.

This thesis suggests that women in communist resistance networks are one example of an identifiable group that has not yet received adequate attention in the scholarship. Communist women were significant actors in the resistance, yet the historiography does not reflect the level of their involvement. After the war, resistance was most often discussed as an almost exclusively male phenomenon. Since the 1990s, however, there has been increased interest in female resisters, as we shall see below. This scholarship has largely focused on individuals in exceptional positions, such as leadership or combat roles. Women in the rank-and-file, who made up the majority of female participation in resistance networks, remain relatively neglected in the literature. In particular, the extent of communist women's contributions at this level warrants further study. My analysis of female communist resisters allows us to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the interdependent and complementary nature of resistance roles.

In order to locate this thesis within the existing scholarship, it is necessary to plot each of the stages of the development of the historiography. The stages usually coincided with a broader shift in society that required asking new questions about life during the occupation. Each transition into a new phase has increased our knowledge concerning the 'dark years' in France. The scholarship concerning France and World War II is vast. In order to identify the strands in the historiography that are relevant to my analysis, the following discussion focuses on three aspects of the scholarly literature. These are the French Resistance in general, communist resistance, and women in resistance. It is essential to consider how these three strands in the historiography overlap and shaped each other in order to understand how each impacts on the framework of my thesis.

I. Plotting the decades of resistance historiography, from 'bias' towards 'balance'

There are three key phases that define the changing attitude towards resistance. These phases were not always determined by research interest alone. The first two, in particular, were defined by societal demands and demographic changes. The first phase lasted approximately two decades, spanning from 1944 to the late 1960s. During this

period, historians focused on the exploits of the internal and external resistance undertaken by French citizens. Resistance leaders, specific acts of resistance and the organisation of resistance networks were the subjects of memoirs and historians' studies. Resistance became a necessary topic of study, not only in the interest of urgently preserving information, but also for political, psychological and social reasons. General Charles de Gaulle, chief of the London-based Free French, became leader of the Provisional Government, formed in 1944, which was charged with the difficult mission of uniting a nation seemingly on the brink of civil war. Robert Gildea argues that

[t]o deal with the trauma of defeat, occupation and virtual civil war, the French developed a central myth of the French Resistance. This was not a fiction about something that never happened, but rather a story that served the purposes of France as it emerged from the war.²

Gildea argues that there were three essential elements to the myth: resistance had been constant since de Gaulle called the French people to resist over the BBC on 18 June 1940; a minority had resisted but had been supported by the vast majority of the French population; the French, with the contribution of the Allies and foreign resisters, 'had liberated themselves and restored national honour, confidence and unity'.³

French unity and a focus on the future, rather than the past, became the objectives for post-war leaders. Resistance, rather than collaboration, was featured almost exclusively during the first stage of the scholarship. Immediately after the liberation, an open discussion of French collaboration would have been divisive. The idea of France as a nation of resisters was accepted by many French people who were keen to boost their self-esteem after the quick defeat of 1940 and questionable choices made during the occupation. Pieter Lagrou writes that

[a]ny study of the consequences of the occupation must take into account the tremendous effort to reconstruct the nation's self-esteem. The social consequences of war and occupation cannot be deduced mechanically, since they are refracted and recast through this prism of

² Robert Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows: a new history of the French Resistance*, London: Faber and Faber, 2015, 2.

³ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

ideological and political context. ... post-war collective memories ... were all shaped by the straitjacket of post-war patriotism.⁴

The speech de Gaulle made when he arrived in Paris on 25 August 1944 illustrates the importance of self-esteem and patriotism: 'Paris liberated! Liberated by its own efforts, liberated by its people with the help of the armies of France, with the help of all of France, that is France in combat. The one France, the true France, eternal France.'⁵ Henry Rousso writes in his now classic book concerning the development of the historiography, *The Vichy Syndrome*, published in French in 1987, that '[t]his myth did not so much glorify the Resistance (and certainly not the resisters) as it celebrated a people *in resistance*'.⁶ The French population was portrayed as ideologically and spiritually aligned with the resistance, whether they were members of a resistance movement or not. Rousso continues that '[t]his image was to be superimposed on the far more complex and inconsistent realities of the Occupation. Its unavowed objective was to present an interpretation of the past in light of the urgent needs of the present.'⁷ It was imperative for the first period of the historiography to focus on resistance as a unifying national movement given the political and social needs of the immediate post-war period.

The emphasis of post-war politics on the regeneration of France impacted on how both resistance and collaboration were defined. The internal divisions brought about by the occupation and the collaboration of the Vichy government left the majority of the French population with additional psychological trauma. Brian Jenkins touches on the need to focus on resistance in the post-war reconstruction period. According to Jenkins,

[t]he restoration of national pride and self-respect also required that, after the initial (emblematic) purges, the extent of wartime collaboration be played down and the issue be treated as resolved. All those political parties which could claim resistance credentials (and especially the Gaullists and the Communists) quickly recognised, not only that this was a vital source of legitimacy, but that it was in their own interests for as many people as possible to feel able to identify with this patriotic resistance legacy (and therefore with *them*).⁸

⁴ Pieter Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: patriotic memory and national recovery in Western Europe, 1945-1965*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 2-3.

⁵ General Charles de Gaulle quoted in Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, 3.

⁶ Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome*, 18. Emphasis in the original.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Brian Jenkins, 'Introduction: contextualising the Immunity Thesis,' in *France in the Era of Fascism: essays on the French authoritarian Right*, ed. Brian Jenkins, Canada: Berghahn Books, 2005, 5. Emphasis in the original.

The definition of collaboration during this period was necessarily narrow. In 1954 Robert Aron wrote the first significant work on the Vichy government. His book, *Histoire de Vichy*, reinforced myths that depicted Marshal Philippe Pétain as leading a government that acted as a shield to protect France from the worst of Nazi demands. Martin Evans observes that 'by underlining the massive resistance of ordinary French people, Aron was offering up a synthesis of the period which pleased Communists, Gaullists and conservatives alike'.⁹ Leaders of the Vichy regime and its administration had been open about their commitment to collaboration and so could not escape punishment. Underlings and whole-hearted political supporters of the Vichy regime, however, remained relatively untouched by the restricted administrative purges. Collaboration was understood to be limited to a political or economic act that had facilitated and actively assisted Nazi directives.

The definition of resistance was also narrow at this time. As mentioned, the focus was on active resistance. Resistance meant direct engagement with the enemy, but it also included indirect engagement through gathering intelligence, recruiting resisters or propaganda activities, such as producing a clandestine press. Groups connected to, or directly involved with, the Free French in London, or groups involved in guerrilla warfare were deemed the heroes of the resistance. Assassinations, train derailments and seizures of supplies or weapons were evoked as typical actions of a resister. The narrow definition was, in part, due to the need to make decisions about who would benefit from a pension scheme. Resisters, *réfractaires* (male workers who had escaped compulsory deportation to Germany) and deportees were all entitled to a pension. In an article which focuses on the statutes concerning resisters, Olivier Wieviorka describes the salient points of the statute of May 1946 that defined a resister.¹⁰ The definition focused on the military aspect of resistance. The person in question, usually male, must also have been voluntarily involved for a minimum of three months with a recognised network that was fighting for the freedom of France. This statute, Wieviorka notes, was structured similarly to the statute concerning veterans of World War I and thus connected the two conflicts. Defining the resistance in military terms tied the resistance struggle to France's military

⁹ Martin Evans, 'Robert Paxton: the outsider,' *History Today* (September 2001), 27.

¹⁰ Olivier Wieviorka, 'Les Avatars du Statut de Résistance en France (1945-1992),' *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 50 (April-June, 1996): 55-66.

history and, by so doing, gave resisters further legitimacy. Providing a legal framework in which to understand what constituted resistance limited the definition to active resistance that could be quantified and verified. Such a limited definition was useful for the immediate post-war period but became problematic, especially where female resisters were concerned. Excluding women from the early formal definition limited the perceived significance of female resistance.

The development of the first period of the historiography was, in large part, due to those responsible for the collection and publication of research. The Comité d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale (CHDGM)¹¹ became the research body that was charged with the task of building an archive of the war years. The CHDGM was founded in 1951, after the amalgamation of two separate research committees, and was placed under the auspices of the Prime Minister's office. The historian Henri Michel (1907-1986) was named secretary general. A graduate in history, Michel worked as a secondary school teacher, joined the French Socialist Party, became a resister and ended the war as a member of the Comité Départemental de la Libération du Var. He was dedicated to his new role as historian of the war and believed that it was essential to collect all the information possible while former resisters were still alive. Two or three correspondents, mostly secondary school teachers like Michel, were appointed in each French department. They were charged with finding written material that had survived and obtaining first-hand testimonies from resisters.¹² By the late 1970s there were 156 correspondents¹³ involved with the committee who had collected 'some 700 cartons of materials related to resistance, collaboration, deportation, and forced labour, together with 20,000 photographs and 900 rolls of microfilm'.¹⁴ The journal *Revue d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale*, which Michel founded in 1950, published the first scholarly articles concerning wartime France.¹⁵

Michel's work provides an indication of the approach taken by historians throughout the first phase of the historiography. He was the most influential historian of this period, not only because of his leadership role within the CHDGM, but also because

¹¹ The CHDGM became the Institut d'Histoire du Temps Présent attached to the CNRS in 1977. I use the anglophone style of capitalisation throughout my thesis for consistency.

¹² Arthur Funk, 'Henri Michel, 1907-1986,' *Military Affairs*, 51: 1 (January 1987), 25.

¹³ Julian Jackson, *France: the Dark Years, 1940-1944*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 6.

¹⁴ Funk, 'Henri Michel,' 25.

¹⁵ Jackson, *France: the Dark Years*, 6. The journal was retitled *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* in 1987.

of his own research. Julian Jackson underlines that Michel's 'prolific output included the first general history of the Resistance in 1950, the first doctoral thesis devoted to it, and the first scholarly study of a single resistance movement [Combat]'.¹⁶ He was co-author on Alain Resnais' documentary *Nuit et Brouillard* (1956), the ground-breaking film that included images of deportation and concentration camps. In 1967 he founded the Comité Internationale d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale which included historians from 37 different countries. In 1974 Michel organised the first international conference on the subject of the liberation of France. In all, he wrote 21 books between 1954 and 1984. Michel's work reflected the trend of the first period of scholarly enquiry. His earliest studies concentrated on the organisation of French resistance and the ideology of the various movements. The majority of early written histories emphasised the mode of functioning of resistance networks and movements, their structure, organisation, hierarchy and chains of command.¹⁷ For the wider public, which had not had any part in resistance activities, this basic information was useful as a starting point for understanding the realities of resistance.

The resisters who featured in the work published during the immediate post-war period were almost exclusively male. Resistance networks were described as quasi-military units with commanders and active soldiers. Gildea writes that the Gaullist myth of resistance was 'military, national and male'.¹⁸ Male resisters, albeit inadvertently, often contributed to the pervasiveness of the myth by publishing their memoirs.¹⁹ Women resisters tended to be more reticent concerning their activities during the war. As a result, few of their stories were shared publicly until decades later. Early histories depicted, in detail, instances where resisters engaged in attacks on Nazi soldiers with an analysis of the impact of individual actions. External resistance, meaning the military and training networks organised in London close to de Gaulle, also appeared in histories of the first

¹⁶ Ibid., 8.

¹⁷ See: Dominique Veillon, *Le Franc-Tireur: un journal clandestine, un mouvement de Résistance. 1940-1944*, Paris: Flammarion, 1977; Henri Michel, *Les Courants de Pensée de la Résistance*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962; Marie Granet and Henri Michel, *Combat : histoire d'un mouvement de résistance*, Paris: Albin-Michel, 1957; id., *Défense de la France: histoire d'un mouvement*, Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1960; Marie Granet, *Ceux de la Résistance*, Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1964; Henri Noguères et al., *Histoire de la Résistance en France de 1940 à 1945*, 5 vols., Paris: Robert Laffont, 1967-1981; M.R.D. Foot, *Resistance: an analysis of European resistance to Nazism, 1940-45*, London: Harper Collins, 1977.

¹⁸ Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, 3.

¹⁹ See: Christian Pineau, *La Simple Vérité 1940-1945*, Paris: Editions Julliard, 1960; Henri Frenay, *La Nuit Finira*, Paris: Robert Laffont, 1973; Claude Bourdet, *L'Aventure Incertain : de la Résistance à la Restauration*, Paris: Éditions Stock, 1975; Charles d'Aragon, *La Résistance sans héroïsme*, Paris: Seuil, 1977.

period of the historiography.²⁰ Significant individuals or single networks were the focus of separate studies, as were networks with British connections. For example, the Special Operations Executive (SOE), a British agency that sent operatives into France, and internal French groups that sent information to Britain and relied on imported supplies, both received attention.²¹ Jean Moulin, de Gaulle's emissary who travelled to France to unite the internal networks and tie them with the external resistance, also figured regularly.²²

The preoccupation of early histories is reflected in the subject of the articles in the first issue of the *Revue d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale* published in November 1950. Three articles were concerned with the organisation and running of resistance in France, two with financial aspects and one with the organisation of the maquis. Two focused on the external resistance. The first was a homage to Jean Moulin, the other a study of the French programs broadcast on BBC radio. Lastly, one article concentrated on the German authorities operating in France.²³ The issue ended with a list of abbreviations of wartime terms and organisations and two book reviews. Early histories focused on men engaged in active resistance and thereby met the political, psychological and social needs of the time.

The second phase of the general historiography began with a gradual rejection of the narrative of widespread resistance. This next stage, however, popularised a myth that was just as problematic as the 'heroic reinterpretation' of the war years that was created during the first phase.²⁴ From the late 1960s, historians began to critique the 'resistancialist' myth, as it has come to be known. However, in so doing they created a counter-myth of France as a nation of collaborators. The pressure for social change and the spirit of rebellion felt in France throughout the 1960s resulted in the eventual rejection of the simplistic interpretation of the war years. The generational revolt of the late 1960s prompted the call for an acknowledgement of the less heroic experiences of

²⁰ Pierre Guillan de Bénouville, *Le Sacrifice du Matin*, Paris: Robert Laffont, 1946; Colonel Passy (André Dewarvin), *2^e Bureau Londres*, Paris: Raoul Solar, 1947; id., *10 Duke Street, Londres (Le B.C.R.A.)*, Paris: Raoul Solar, 1948; id., *Missions Secrètes en France*, Paris: Librairie Plon, 1951.

²¹ See M.R.D. Foot, *SOE in France: an account of the work of the British Special Operations Executive in France, 1940-1944*, History of the Second World War, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1966.

²² Moulin was arrested in June 1943. He died two months later after prolonged and brutal beatings by his Nazi interrogators, in particular Klaus Barbie. He remains a powerful symbol of the resistance because of his role in unifying the internal networks. See: Henri Michel, *Jean Moulin: L'unificateur*, Paris: Hachette, 1964; Henri Frenay, *L'Énigme Jean Moulin*, Le Temps des révélations, Paris: Robert Laffont, 1977.

²³ *Revue d'histoire de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale*, 1 (November 1950): 1-114. Contributors were Georges Bidault, Fr. Bloch-Lainé, Pierre Denis, Général Rivet, Marie Granet and Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac.

²⁴ Jackson, *France: the Dark Years*, 2.

the occupation. Robert O. Paxton's *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order*, published in 1972 and translated into French the following year, appeared at this opportune moment.²⁵

Paxton's work challenged the benign view of Vichy. Building on the work of the German historian Eberhard Jäckel, the British historian Alan Milward, and that of Michel in his 1966 book, *Vichy année 40*, Paxton argued that Vichy pursued collaboration and failed to protect France from the consequences of occupation.²⁶ Paxton worked extensively in the German archives, which allowed him to present evidence indicating that the French authorities had been involved in the arrest and deportation of French citizens and refugees, including resisters and Jews. Jean-Pierre Azéma points out that Paxton's work had 'the effect of a minor bombshell' amongst historians and educated readers of *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*.²⁷ He argues that this was because Paxton had provided an overall interpretation of Vichy that tied together its political and domestic policies. Paxton argued that the Vichy ministers collaborated with the Nazis, not to protect France, but because it allowed them the opportunity to implement their national plans for France. Moshik Temkin summarises the 'bombshell' of Paxton's argument:

the men of Vichy had acted not out of opportunism, or survival instinct, but out of conviction. They were not simply traitors, they were ideologues. ... collaboration with Germany on the foreign front and the implementation of the National Revolution on the domestic front were two sides of the same coin.²⁸

Evans argues that 'by showing how, in the interests of stability, national feeling favoured collaboration, Paxton put the responsibility for the Vichy regime back on to the French themselves. Hence his book, as [Paxton] readily admitted, was not very flattering for French self-esteem.'²⁹

²⁵ Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: old guard and new order 1940-1944*, London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1972.

²⁶ See: Eberhard Jäckel, *Frankreich in Hitlers Europa: die deutsche Frankreichpolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1966; id., *La France dans l'Europe de Hitler*, trans. Denis Meunier, Paris: Fayard, 1968; Alan S. Milward, *The New Order and the French Economy*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970; Henri Michel, *Vichy Année 40*, Paris : Robert Laffont, 1966.

²⁷ Jean-Pierre Azéma, 'The Paxtonian Revolution,' in *France at War: Vichy and the historians*, ed. Sarah Fishman et al., Oxford and New York: Berg, 2000, 15.

²⁸ Moshik Temkin, ' 'Avec un Certain Malaise': the Paxtonian trauma in France, 1973-74,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38: 2 (April, 2003), 293.

²⁹ Evans, 'Robert Paxton,' 27.

Paxton became a controversial but hugely influential historian. His interpretation and methods were criticised by certain historians and supporters of the Vichy regime.³⁰ Some objected to his reliance on German archives while others even attacked him as a foreigner who was incapable of understanding French history. Not all French people were ready to accept responsibility for Vichy's choices and actions. In 1992, Paxton once again caused controversy when he was called to be an expert witness in a court case. Paxton testified against Maurice Papon who was charged with crimes against humanity for his part in the deportation of Jews from Bordeaux, to Drancy, and later to Auschwitz. Paxton came to be considered as a leading expert on the dark side of France's wartime history. His influence on the historiography is evidenced in the collection of essays titled *France at War: Vichy and the Historians*, published in 2000. The first part of the book, comprising four essays, is devoted to *l'ère paxtonienne*.³¹ Azéma describes the impact of Paxton's book as a 'revolution' that completely altered the analysis of the Vichy regime and changed the course of the development of the historiography. The release of *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order* became a significant event and heralded the second period of scholarship regarding France at war.

Why did Paxton's book have such an impact? The timing of the release holds the answer. Temkin lists a number of events that laid the groundwork for the acceptance of Paxton's thesis. Both Rousso and Temkin regard the death of de Gaulle, 'the great symbol and consensus-maker himself',³² in 1970 as significant. The release in France in 1972 of Marcel Ophuls' controversial documentary *Le Chagrin et la pitié* (The Sorrow and the Pity, 1969) also contributed towards preparing the ground for the rejection of the resistancialist myth. According to Richard Golsan: 'Often credited with almost single-handedly shattering the Gaullist myth of Resistance, *The Sorrow and the Pity* recorded in film a thoroughgoing counterhistory to the narrative proposed by the Gaullist myth'.³³ Golsan further argues that

[t]his counterhistory embraced the defeatism of France's leaders in 1940 ... ; the disturbing idealism and dignity of some pro-Nazi fanatics ...

³⁰ See: John F. Sweets, 'Chaque Livre un événement : Robert Paxton and the French, from *briseur de glace* to *iconoclaste tranquille*,' in *France at War*, ed. Fishman et al., 21-24 and the Appendix compiled by Sweets of the reviews of Paxton's work, 303-307.

³¹ Fishman et al. eds., *France at War*.

³² Temkin, 'The Paxtonian Trauma,' 292.

³³ Richard Golsan, *Vichy's Afterlife: history and counterhistory in postwar France*, Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2000, 73.

; the passivity and occasional opportunistic anti-Semitism of “the man in the street”... ; and, finally, the horrors of official Vichy anti-Semitism ... and the Final Solution.³⁴

The film *Lacombe Lucien* (1974), directed by Louis Malle, also caused a controversy on its release. Golsan contends that it received ‘an undeserved reputation as a pro-collaborationist apology for the bourgeoisie’ after its initial positive reception as a film that caught the true nature of the occupation in France.³⁵ The introduction of a more complicated, and therefore controversial, version of wartime events through film gave audiences of the 1970s a chance to consider that there were other experiences of wartime France beyond resistance.

Political events and societal demands continued to influence the direction of the scholarship. The publicity of details concerning the cases of Papon and Paul Touvier prompted debate that further fuelled the developing counter-myth of widespread collaboration. In 1971, in a spirit of forgiveness and leaving the past to rest, Gaullist President Georges Pompidou agreed to pardon Paul Touvier. During the war, Touvier had been a member of the French civilian collaborationist organisation, the *Milice*, which was a state-sponsored fascist militia. He was responsible for hunting down, and even killing, Jews. As a result, he had been sentenced to death in absentia immediately after the war. The Touvier affair caused an uproar that divided public opinion. According to Temkin, the death of de Gaulle, the release of certain films and controversial, very public, war-crimes trials all consolidated the conviction of a generation who were ‘eager to find fault with their fathers and elders’.³⁶

The focus that was placed on collaboration in the 1970s continued until the early 1980s. Public and scholarly interest in collaboration resulted in the expansion of the definition of collaboration. The ‘nation of resisters’ was now depicted as a ‘nation of collaborators’. Collaborators who had intentionally cooperated with Nazi authorities for a myriad of reasons were perceived to have been active all over France. Those who had denounced others or been involved in enforcing Nazi edicts and commands were labelled as collaborators. Collaboration, as defined in the second phase, included *attentistes* who passively waited for the war to unfold, supporting neither resistance nor collaboration,

³⁴ Ibid., 73-74.

³⁵ Ibid., 73.

³⁶ Temkin, ‘The Paxtonian Trauma,’ 292.

which consequently allowed the collaborationist regime to function unhindered. This second phase continued to neglect women's roles during the war. The second period of the historiography insisted that millions of French people had venerated Pétain and that Vichy had introduced the laws that characterised occupied France and discriminated against sections of French society. The fact that the French police, not Nazi soldiers, had arrested Jews and communists was another revelation of this period. Lastly, studies claimed that the resistance had been a small minority of the population of France and that 'most people had been *attentistes* not heroes'.³⁷ It was only during the third phase that the Occupation could be discussed not in 'black and white, but in shades of grey'.³⁸

The 1980s saw a shift in the literature towards a more balanced historiography. Neither resistance, nor collaboration, remained the primary research focus of this final phase of the general historiography. Society, rather than politics, became the central theme of historical analyses. Jackson writes that the shift was from 'a study of the regime to a study of those who lived under it'.³⁹ Both the first and second phases, despite their biases, had enriched the literature by facilitating detailed investigations into the two extremes of French behaviour during World War II. John Sweets notes that

by the 1980s the study of wartime France had been enriched by new sources, especially German documents, and by attention to previously neglected aspects of the era. Both depth and breadth had been added by investigations of the collaborationist movements and by the recognition that they had emerged from a French heritage as native to the country as those traditions from which the resistance was born.⁴⁰

After resistance and collaboration had been accepted as two aspects of France's wartime narrative, the scholarship could expand with the acknowledgement that occupied France was not characterised by one single experience, but many.

At the beginning of the third period of the historiography, the role of Vichy in the fate of the Jews remained to be researched. The detailed discussion of collaboration had prepared the way for the in-depth research published in the 1980s and 1990s concerning

³⁷ Jackson, *France: the Dark Years*, 2.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁰ John F. Sweets, *The Politics of the Resistance in France, 1940-1944: a history of the Mouvements Unis de la Résistance*, DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976, 746.

the Jewish population of France.⁴¹ After publishing *Vichy France*, Paxton was commissioned to write a book concerning Vichy's role in the Holocaust. It took ten years for him to complete *Vichy and the Jews*, published in 1981. Evans explains that 'Paxton found the research so depressing that the Canadian historian Michael Marrus was brought on board as co-author'.⁴² Other historians have commented on the difficulty of researching the fate of the Jews of Europe. The problematic interaction of history and memory, along with the entangled moral and historical complexities, meant that many historians avoided commencing such research. In the immediate post-war period, even Jewish historians chose not to publish works that focused on the persecution of Jews by Vichy. According to Gildea, it was the release of three films, *L'Affiche Rouge* in 1976, and *Terroristes à la Retraite* and *Shoah* both in 1985, which moved the spotlight onto the Jewish population and Jewish resisters.⁴³ He argues that *Shoah*, directed by Claude Lanzmann, most effectively 'focused on Jews as victims of extermination rather than as violent resisters'.⁴⁴ Gildea continues: 'This shaped a powerful new paradigm that increasingly saw the Second World War not through the lens of resistance but through that of the Holocaust.'⁴⁵ The truth of the multiple realities, even when ugly and divisive, needed to be discussed in order for France, and Europe as a whole, to acknowledge the painful memories of World War II.

Only after resistance and collaboration had been explored could the darker and more complicated history of the Holocaust be included in the narrative of wartime

⁴¹ See: Michael Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, New York: Basic Books, 1981; Serge Klarsfeld, *Memorial to the Jews Deported from France, 1942-1944: documentation of the deportation of the victims of the Final Solution in France*, New York B. Klarsfeld Foundation, 1983; Jacques Adler, *The Jews of Paris and the Final Solution: communal responses and internal conflicts, 1940-1944*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987; Anne Grynberg, *Les Camps de la Honte: Les internés juifs des camps français*, Paris: La Découverte, 1991; André Kaspi, *Les Juifs pendant l'Occupation*, Paris: Seuil, 1991; Asher Cohen, *Persécutions et Sauvetages: Juifs et Français sous l'occupation et sous Vichy*, Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1993; Susan Zucotti, *The Holocaust, the French and the Jews*, New York: Basic Books, 1993; Michael R. Marrus, 'Jewish Resistance to the Holocaust,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 30: 1 (January, 1995): 83-110; Donna Ryan, *The Holocaust and the Jews of Marseille: the enforcement of anti-Semitic policies in Vichy France*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1996; Renée Poznanski, *Jews in France during World War II*, Massachusetts and New Hampshire: Brandeis University Press, 2001; id., *Propagandes et Persécutions: la Résistance et le "problème juif," 1940-1944*, Paris: Fayard, 2008.

⁴² Evans, 'Robert Paxton,' 28.

⁴³ Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, 6. *L'Affiche Rouge*, directed by Frank Cassenti, 1976; *Terroristes à la Retraite*, directed by Serge Mosco, 1985; *Shoah*, directed by Claude Lanzmann, 1985.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

France. Rousso dubbed what he identified as the final stage of the historiography, which began in 1974, as the 'Obsession' phase.⁴⁶ Golsan writes that this phase was

marked primarily by the reawakening of Jewish memory, which had been repressed in the postwar years by, among other things, the Jewish community's desire to reintegrate itself into the national mainstream and not to set itself apart by emphasising what happened to it at German *and* French hands during the Occupation.⁴⁷

Paxton led the way in detailing the role of the French authorities in the Final Solution. *Vichy and the Jews* was 'the first comprehensive account of Vichy's own anti-Semitic policies in which Paxton and Marrus showed that the laws of October 1940, whereby Jews were turned into second-class citizens, owed nothing to Nazism'.⁴⁸ Significantly, they emphasised the involvement of Vichy police in the 1942 round-ups of Jewish families. Part of the story of the Jewish population of France is the rescue of Jews by networks that ferried them across borders or gave them shelter. Studies of this nature appeared from the late 1990s through the early 2000s.⁴⁹ Research into the persecution of the Jews was included in the third stage of the historiography because it was this phase that recognised that different groups had different experiences of the war.

The final phase of the historiography is defined by no single subject. The expansion of research interest now covered all aspects of life in France during World War II. Social histories, which concentrated on issues of daily life in order to gain an insight into the experiences of the majority, rather than the extremes of either resistance or collaboration, began to be published.⁵⁰ Previously ignored sections of society began to be

⁴⁶ See: Henry Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy, de 1944 à nos jours*, Deuxième édition, revue et mise à jour, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990, 155-248.

⁴⁷ Golsan, *Vichy's Afterlife*, 9. Emphasis in the original.

⁴⁸ Evans, 'Robert Paxton,' 28.

⁴⁹ See: Andy Marino, *A Quiet American: the secret war of Varian Fry*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1999; Sheila Isenberg, *A Hero of Our Own: the story of Varian Fry*, New York: Random House, 2001; Tela Zasloff, *A Rescuer's Story: Pastor Pierre-Charles Toureille in Vichy France*, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003; Limor Yagil, *Chrétiens et Juifs sous Vichy, 1940-1944: sauvetage et désobéissance civile*, Paris: Cerf, 2005; Patrick Henry, *We Only Know Men: the rescue of Jews in France during the Holocaust*, Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007; Susan Zucotti, *Père Marie-Benoît and Jewish Rescue: how a French priest together with Jewish friends saved thousands during the Holocaust*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013; Peter Grose, *A Good Place to Hide: how one French community saved thousands of lives in World War II*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2014; Caroline Moorehead, *Village of Secrets: defying the Nazis in Vichy France*, London: Chatto and Windus, 2014.

⁵⁰ See: Pierre Laborie, *L'Opinion Française sous Vichy*, Paris: Seuil, 1990; Jean-Pierre Azéma and François Bédarida et al. eds., *Le Régime de Vichy et les Français*, Paris: Fayard, 1992; Dominique Veillon, *Vivre et Survivre en France 1939-1947*, Paris: Éditions Payot Rivages, 1995; Dominique Veillon and Jean-Marie

written into the literature. Likewise, certain daily-life concerns, such as rationing and the reaction of the population to directives of the Vichy and Nazi authorities, began to receive attention. It was also during this period that women were featured in histories of the occupation.

The diversity of subjects addressed throughout the 1990s is illustrated in three significant history conferences that took place during the decade. The papers of the 1994 conference were published as *La Résistance et les Français: enjeux stratégiques et environnement social* and are divided into four parts. The first featured the external resistance and the Allies' activities in France. The second considered the church and Catholic resistance. The third section comprised regional studies and papers on resistance in the provinces, while the fourth concentrated on post-war society through investigation of the purges and the politics and memory of resistance.⁵¹ Held in 1995, the papers from the second conference were published as *Mémoire et Histoire: la Résistance*.⁵² This collection is also divided into four sub-sections. The first is concerned with different approaches for studying resistance. The second looks at the beginnings of various resistance networks. The third concentrates on the identity and specificity of particular groups within the French resistance. While the fourth focuses on memory and the depiction of resistance. The third collection of published conference papers to which I want to draw attention is that titled *La Résistance et les Européens du Sud* that took place in 1997.⁵³ The published papers are divided into three parts. The first concentrates on women's resistance, rescue and mutual aid. The second explores resistance in different localities by different social groups. The third includes papers on politics and power, both in the resistance and after liberation. The expansion of research interests broadened not only knowledge of the war, but also the understanding of resistance, as we shall see in the following two sections.

Flonneau, *Le Temps des Restrictions en France 1939-1949*, Paris: Institut d'histoire du temps présent, 1996; Robert Gildea, *Marianne in Chains: in search of the German Occupation, 1940-1945*, London: Macmillan, 2002; Richard Vinen, *The Unfree French: life under the Occupation*, London: Allen Lane, 2006; Shannon L. Fogg, *The Politics of Everyday Life in Vichy France: foreigners, undesirables, and strangers*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

⁵¹ Jacqueline Sainclivier and Christian Bougeard eds., *La Résistance et les Français: enjeux stratégiques et environnement social*, Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1995.

⁵² Jean-Marie Guillon and Pierre Laborie, eds., *Mémoire et Histoire: la Résistance*, Toulouse: Éditions Privat, 1995.

⁵³ Jean-Marie Guillon and Robert Mencherini, *La Résistance et les Européens du Sud*, Paris: Harmattan, 1999.

II. Developing the historiography of communist resistance amid political controversies

The historiography of the communist resistance went through similar phases to that of the resistance in general. As the communists were members of a political party, research into the communist resistance was more noticeably influenced by the political landscape in France and the post-war Soviet Union. Communist resistance has been variously celebrated and avoided by historians. In recent scholarship, however, it has been recognised as an essential aspect of the French Resistance.

The resistancialist myth was supported by communist resisters and historians during the immediate post-war period. Communist resistance was at first celebrated because the focus of the literature was on active resistance. Communist groups had been particularly effective throughout France in localised armed combat. Gildea writes that the communists,

who played a leading role in resistance combats and emerged as the largest political party after the war, were happy to subscribe to the dominant narrative so long as they enjoyed power, but when the Cold War came in 1947 and they were ejected from the government, they insisted on their own separate story.⁵⁴

French communists identified themselves as the party of the 75,000 *fusillés* (executed/shot) due to the high number of their members who had been killed by the Nazis as political enemies. Martyrdom became the story of the communist experience of resistance. As was the case with Gaullist resistance histories, communist histories first focused on the organisation of networks and active resistance.⁵⁵ The vast majority of the works published during this period were memoirs or scholarly works written by resisters.⁵⁶

There were differences, however, between the Gaullist and communist interpretations of the nature of the resistance. Firstly, the communists argued that the

⁵⁴ Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, 4.

⁵⁵ See: Fernand Grenier, *C'était ainsi... (souvenirs)*, Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1959; Charles Tillon, *Les F.T.P. : la guérilla en France*, Paris: Julliard, 1966; Jacques Duclos, *Le Parti Français Communiste dans la Résistance*, Paris: Institut Maurice Thorez, 1968; id., *Mémoires: dans la bataille clandestine, tome 3*, Paris: Fayard, 1970; Abraham Lissner, *Un Franc-Tireur Juif Raconte*, Paris: privately published, 1969; Annette Wiewiorka, *Ils Étaient Juifs, Résistants, Communistes*, Paris: Denoël, 1986; Stéphane Courtois, Denis Peschanski and Adam Rayski, *Le Sang de l'Étranger: les immigrés de la MOI dans la Résistance*, Paris: Fayard, 1989.

⁵⁶ See: Raymond Fournier, *Terre de Combat: récits sur la Résistance*, Paris: Hachette, 1974; Albert Ouzoulias (Colonel André), *Les Fils de la Nuit*, Paris: Éditions Grasset Fasquelle, 1975; Charles Tillon, *On Chantait Rouge*, Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont, 1977.

Gaullist resistance had not had as significant an impact as the communist resistance. Secondly, communists argued that the resistance in general had a greater non-military and popular reach than the Gaullists recognised. This argument reflects the difference in their approaches to resistance. During the occupation, the communists had an overarching goal to incite popular resistance. This enabled them to regard the contribution of unarmed resistance as more important than did other networks. Despite their recognition of non-violent forms of resistance, women still did not feature heavily in early communist-written histories.

The second period of the historiography prompted a re-examination of the claims of the PCF regarding its resistance credentials. Given that it spanned both the 1970s and the 1980s, Cold War politics also impacted on the written history of the PCF during the second phase. In this second period of the historiography, communists tended to address the history of the PCF in its entirety, thereby including the activities of the PCF during the war years as just one period of the history of the French Communist Party.⁵⁷ The activities of the PCF during the 1930s were mentioned either as just one chapter of the general history of the PCF or within histories of the Popular Front era. The activities and ideology of the PCF in 1939 and 1940, however, prompted debate amongst scholars and party activists throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. The rejection of the resistancialist myth that characterised the second period of the historiography prompted questions regarding the extent and early commitment of the communist resistance. The PCF was forced to address its ambiguous position towards resistance while the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact was in force from August 1939 to June 1941. Paula Schwartz, writing in 1987, noted that ‘historians of the Resistance have focused heavily on Gaullist formations, leaving the operations mounted by the French Communist party to party historians’.⁵⁸ In part, this is because the communist resistance functioned separately to the Gaullist resistance during

⁵⁷ See: Jacques Fauvet, in collaboration with Alain Duhamel, *Histoire du Parti Communiste Français de 1920 à 1976*, 2d ed., Paris: Fayard, 1977; Pierre Daix, *La Crise du PCF*, Paris: Seuil, 1978; id., *Les Hérétiques du PCF*, Paris: Robert Laffont, 1980; Philippe Robrieux, *Histoire Intérieure du Parti Communiste*, 4 vols., Paris: Fayard, 1980-1984; George Ross, *Workers and Communists in France: from Popular Front to Eurocommunism*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982; M. Adereth (Maxwell), *The French Communist Party, a Critical History (1920-1984): from Comintern to “the colours of France”*, Manchester, NH: Manchester University Press, 1984; Annie Kriegel with the collaboration of Guillaume Bourgeois, *Les Communistes Français dans leur Premier Demi-Siècle, 1920-1970*, 2d ed., Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1985; Jean-Paul Brunet, *Jacques Doriot, du Communisme au Fascisme*, Paris: Balland, 1986; id., *Histoire du PCF, 1920-1986*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1987.

⁵⁸ Paula Schwartz, ‘Redefining Resistance: women’s activism in wartime France,’ in *Behind the Lines: gender and the two World Wars*, Margaret R. Higonnet et al. eds., New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1987, 148-149.

the war owing to ideological differences. In May 1943, the nation-wide Conseil National de la Résistance (National Resistance Council, CNR) was formed. It consisted of representatives from all major resistance networks, clandestine political parties and trade unions. Sweets writes that the

process of unification had required months of difficult negotiations. Mutual suspicions bred by clandestine conditions and pride in and loyalty to one's original organisation meant that local resistance leaders were often reluctant to see their movements absorbed and subordinated to a distant regional or national hierarchy, even though they accepted the fundamental notion that strength lay in unity.⁵⁹

The PCF was a member of the CNR but was always treated with suspicion due to the political and revolutionary platform of the communists.

Throughout the second phase, non-communist historians were pitted against communist historians in a debate that centred on the influence of the Soviet Union on the PCF and the initiatives of the communists during the first year of occupation.⁶⁰ Non-communist historians focused either on the failure of the PCF to go against the non-confrontational policy of the Comintern, or the August 1940 attempt of the PCF to have *L'Humanité* reinstated as a legally published paper.⁶¹ Communist historians responded by denying particular accusations or simply justifying the PCF's choices. It became the norm in 'orthodox French history' that there was no communist resistance before the invasion of the Soviet Union.⁶² It was also assumed during this period that the communists had accepted the decrees of the party without hesitation, confusion or exceptions. The communists, on the other hand, maintained that they had been committed to resistance

⁵⁹ John F. Sweets, *Choices in Vichy France: the French under Nazi occupation*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, 210.

⁶⁰ See: Angelo Tasca, *The Russo-German Alliance: August 1939 – June 1941*, trans. John and Micheline Cullen, London: Chapman and Hall, 1950; Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *L'Abîme, 1939-1945*, Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1982; Francis Crémieux and Jacques Estager, *Sur le Parti, 1939-1940*, Paris: Messidor-Temps Actuel, 1983; Roger Martelli, 'La Stratégie Communiste de Munich au Front National,' *Cahiers d'Histoire de l'Institut de Recherches Marxistes*, 14 (September, 1983): 9-46; id., *Communisme Français. Histoire Sincère du PCF, 1920-1984*, Paris: Messidor-Éditions sociales, 1984; Jean-Pierre Azéma et al. eds., *Le Parti Communiste Français des Années Sombres, 1938-1941*, Paris: Seuil, 1986; Roger Bourderon and Yvan Avakoumovitch, *Détruire le PCF: archives de l'État français et de l'occupant hitlérien, 1940-1944*, Paris: Messidor-Éditions sociales, 1988; Roger Bourderon and Germaine Willard, *1940: de la défaite à la Résistance*, Paris: Messidor-Éditions sociales, 1990.

⁶¹ David Wingeate Pike, 'Between the Junes: the French communists from the collapse of France to the invasion of Russia,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 28:3, 1993, 469.

⁶² H. R. Kedward, 'Behind the Polemics: French Communists and Resistance 1939-41,' in *Resistance in Europe*, eds. Stephen Hawes and Ralph White, London: Allen Lane, 1975, 97.

from the moment of occupation. Some historians and party members published works that reconsidered the question of communist resistance. These studies analysed both the uncompromising party line and the early resistance of individuals who operated outside PCF directives.⁶³ One such example that differed from the norm was *Le PCF dans la guerre: De Gaulle, la Résistance, Staline...* written by Stéphane Courtois and published in 1980.⁶⁴ The work of Courtois is still recommended by historians today because it is so comprehensive. Courtois, along with Annie Kriegel, another prominent communist historian, went on to establish the journal *Communisme* in 1982, in order to facilitate research and discussion between communists and non-communists.⁶⁵

The research focus had expanded by the 1990s to allow for a less politically motivated and a more nuanced approach to the history of communist resistance. In 1993, David Wingeate Pike published an article that combined aspects from both sides of the debate into one cohesive argument. He maintains that there was little communist resistance before the invasion of the USSR and the collapse of the Nazi-Soviet pact in June 1941. He does emphasise, however, that there were communists involved in resistance before June 1941 who operated in defiance and 'open violation of the Party's orders'.⁶⁶ Pike also comments that communist historians had allowed themselves to be distracted by their attempt to 'rescue the Party from the stigma that clings to it like a leech'.⁶⁷ He argues that a focus on what little communist resistance was undertaken in the first year of occupation would have benefited the reputation of the party more than denying their early acceptance of non-aggression tactics. By the 1990s the focus had shifted to the people involved in a network, rather than their politics. Research into how a network survived, who was involved and who it targeted, both as enemies and as friends, allowed a more accurate and complicated history to emerge. Knowledge of the communist resistance benefited from this shift into the third stage of the historiography.

The broadening of the focus beyond individual networks and movements, another defining characteristic of the third period, meant that communist resistance began to be

⁶³ See: Henri Noguères, Marcel Degliame-Fouché and Jean-Louis Vigier, *Histoire de la Résistance en France*, Paris: Robert Laffont, vol. 1, 1967; Roland Gaucher, *Histoire Secrète du Parti Communiste Français, 1920-1974*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1974, 322-332; Kedward, 'Behind the Polemics,' 94-116.

⁶⁴ Stéphane Courtois, *Le PCF dans la guerre: De Gaulle, la Résistance, Staline...*, Paris: Ramsay, 1980.

⁶⁵ Annie Kriegel was a teenage communist resister during the war. See her memoir *Ce Que J'ai Cru Comprendre*, Paris: Robert Laffont, 1991. For the majority of her career she avoided the war years as a research topic, choosing instead to focus on the history of the PCF.

⁶⁶ Pike, 'Between the Junes,' 480.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 465.

included in general resistance histories. *In Search of the Maquis* (1993) by Roderick Kedward, is one example where communist resistance is not the focus, but in which communist units and groups feature throughout due to the widespread nature of their resistance.⁶⁸ Thomas Christofferson, in his 2006 history of France during World War II, makes multiple references to communist resistance.⁶⁹ In *Résistantes*, published in French in 2012, German historian Corinna von List draws attention to women in communist networks, particularly in the chapters concerned with housewives' activism and the clandestine press.⁷⁰ Wieviorka's *Histoire de la Résistance* (2013) contains numerous sections on the communist resistance.⁷¹ Gildea includes women, communists and communist women throughout his 2015 study of the French Resistance. None of these studies provides a comprehensive analysis of women's activities or centrality within the communist resistance movement. Studies such as these, however, have allowed the communists to be widely recognised as one of the largest groups of resisters. It is now accepted that they were organised and experienced in clandestine activities and that they encouraged all sections of society to join them in the struggle for liberation. Despite this recognition, there has been little recent work concentrating solely on communist resistance. My thesis presents an in-depth study that addresses the gap in our knowledge of the social organisation of the communist resistance movement.

Women resisters have not featured extensively in histories of the communist resistance. In August 1944, Colonel Rol-Tanguy publicly recognised the contribution of female resisters. He was quoted praising female resisters: 'Women? Truly, without them, half of our work would have been impossible.'⁷² This type of individual recognition still did not result in the widespread inclusion of women in resistance histories. Communist women resisters have not been entirely neglected as they have figured prominently in various histories that focus solely on women. My study links women more strongly to the communist resistance movement in order to illustrate how integral female resisters were to the functioning of the entire movement. The story of communist resistance is

⁶⁸ Roderick Kedward, *In Search of the Maquis: rural resistance in southern France, 1942-1944*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993. Other important early work of Kedward includes: id., *Resistance in Vichy France: a study of ideas and motivation in the Southern Zone, 1940-1942*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1978; id., *Occupied France: collaboration and resistance, 1940-1944*, Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1985.

⁶⁹ Thomas R. Christofferson with Michael S. Christofferson, *France During World War II: from defeat to liberation*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2006.

⁷⁰ Corinna von List, *Résistantes*, trans. Solveig Kahnt, Paris: Alma, éditeur, 2012.

⁷¹ Olivier Wieviorka, *Histoire de la Résistance: 1940-1945*, Paris: Perrin, 2013.

⁷² Colonel Rol-Tanguy quoted in Jacqueline Marchand, 'Les Femmes?', *L'Humanité*, 31 August 1944, 1.

incomplete without a detailed understanding of the activities of communist women resisters. My thesis is an example of the next stage of the research needed to integrate communist women's resistance into the general history of communist resistance.

Communist networks were the only resistance networks to recruit and engage women 'as women' in a meaningful and self-conscious way. Due to this approach, the percentage of women in communist networks was higher than in other networks, which made them more visible to historians researching women's resistance. Elisabeth Terrenoire included communist women in her 1946 book of profiles of women resisters.⁷³ In 1965 Charlotte Delbo published a collective biography of all the French women deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1942.⁷⁴ The convoy carried 230 women, 119 of whom were communist (including Delbo). Marianne Monestier studied eight women in *Elles étaient cent et mille...* (1972), four of whom were communist.⁷⁵ In 1978, Ania Francos frequently mentioned communist women resisters in her book which focused on women in several movements of the French Resistance.⁷⁶ In 1983 Marie-Louise Coudert published a book that recounted the stories of 20 female resisters, 17 of whom were connected to communist networks, even though some were not communists themselves.⁷⁷ Schwartz is one of the few historians to have focused specifically on communist women and aspects of their resistance.⁷⁸ Caroline Moorehead, though not an academic, has written one of the most detailed books – *A Train in Winter* (2011) – concerning the consequences of women's commitment to resistance. It focuses on the same convoy as the work of Delbo mentioned above.⁷⁹

Communist networks were instrumental in involving women in resistance and yet, curiously, this subject has not been addressed in a comprehensive manner. In the third phase of the scholarship, women's biographies and memoirs began to be published on a wider scale. Pierre Durand wrote a short biography of resistance leader Danielle

⁷³ Elisabeth Terrenoire, *Combattantes sans Uniformes: les femmes dans la Résistance*, Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1946.

⁷⁴ Charlotte Delbo, *Convoy to Auschwitz: women of the French Resistance*, trans. Carol Cosman, Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1997.

⁷⁵ Marianne Monestier, *Elles Étaient Cent et Mille...*, Paris: Librairie Arthème-Fayard, 1972.

⁷⁶ Ania Francos, *Il Était des Femmes dans la Résistance...*, Paris: Editions Stock, 1978.

⁷⁷ Marie-Louise Coudert with Paul Hélène, *Elles, la Résistance*, Paris: Messidor/Temps Actuels, 1983.

⁷⁸ See: Paula Schwartz, 'Partisanes and Gender Politics in Vichy France,' *French Historical Studies* 16: 1 (Spring 1989): 126-151. See also Susan B. Whitney, *Mobilising Youth: communists and Catholics in interwar France*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009 for a look at communist youth during the inter-war period with a section dedicated to young women.

⁷⁹ Caroline Moorehead, *A Train in Winter: a story of resistance, friendship and survival*, London: Chatto and Windus, 2011.

Casanova, published in 1990, detailing her activities as a communist from the late 1920s until her death as a resister in 1943.⁸⁰ In 2012, Dominique Durand wrote a biography of Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier, a prominent resister involved with the PCF leadership.⁸¹ The book spans decades of her life as a communist before, during and after the war. Other women who survived the war published memoirs of their experiences in the communist resistance.⁸² The historiography had developed, by the 1990s, to the extent that these women could be recognised not only as resisters, but specifically as communist resisters.

III. The gradual inclusion of women in the historiography of Resistance

Women were essential members of the French Resistance. Yet, it was not until the 1990s that women resisters began to be included systematically in wartime histories. Although the widespread activities of female resisters were not acknowledged within the historiography until the 1980s, some women made an effort to publicise the extent of female resistance at the end of the war. As noted above, Terrenoire dedicated a book to female resisters in 1946. The communist Union des Femmes Françaises (UFF), formed during the war, published a series of booklets containing information on numerous women resisters in 1945 and 1946.⁸³ During the 1980s, two factors altered the status quo of the first two periods of the historiography. Social histories, which included women's experiences, became popular, and the definition of resistance was expanded. By the 1990s French resistance began to receive renewed scholarly attention. The conferences of the mid-1990s demonstrate this. In 2006, Christofferson wrote that 'the Resistance has regained some of the lustre lost to the grand narrative of collaboration during the 1970s and 1980s'.⁸⁴ Shannon Fogg noted in her 2008 book that, in 1993, Kedward had written 'that organised Resistance relied on the support of local residents (especially women) in ways that have yet to be fully researched'.⁸⁵ Detailed regional studies allowed a deeper understanding of the different layers of resistance networks. Recognition of female

⁸⁰ Pierre Durand, *Danielle Casanova, l'Indomptable*, Paris: Messidor, 1990.

⁸¹ Dominique Durand, *Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier: une femme engagée, du PCF au procès de Nuremberg*, Paris: Éditions Balland, 2012.

⁸² See Cécile Ouzoulias-Romagon, *J'étais Agent de Liaison FTPF*, Paris: Éditions Messidor, 1988; Lise London, *L'Écheveau du Temps, La Mégère de la rue Daguerre: souvenirs de Résistance*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995; Jeannette Thorez-Vermeersch, *La Vie en Rouge: mémoires*, Paris: Belfond, 1998.

⁸³ Collection Musée de la Résistance Nationale (hereafter referred to as MRN): Fonds de l'UFF, Carton no. 6. L'Union des Femmes Françaises, Femmes Héroïques series, 1945-.

⁸⁴ Christofferson, *France During World War II*, 100.

⁸⁵ Fogg, *The Politics of Everyday Life*, xiii. Kedward, *In Search of the Maquis*, 88-90.

resisters emerged through such studies but, as Kedward noted 23 years ago, and Fogg again highlighted more recently, their contribution still remains to be comprehensively researched.

With a resurgence of interest in the resistance, and a growing appreciation of the multiple forms of resistance, academics began to debate the broadening of the previously narrow definition. François Bédarida, in an article from 1986, draws attention to the problems and limitations of definition and how this hampered an understanding of popular resistance. A limited definition had created a skewed perception of the day-to-day reality of resistance networks. Bédarida offered his own definition: ‘Resistance is clandestine action performed, in the name of liberty and the nation and human dignity, by volunteers organising the fight against domination (and most often occupation) of their country by a nazi or fascist or satellite or allied regime.’⁸⁶ For Bédarida, it was important that the double motivation of resisters to defend both their country and humanity be highlighted. Jacques Sémelin focuses on the limitations of early definitions in his influential book *Unarmed Against Hitler: Civilian Resistance in Europe, 1939-1943* (published in French in 1989, and translated into English in 1993). He argues that it is necessary to have two categories of resistance, armed and unarmed. Sémelin writes that ‘the unarmed approach may seem surprising since the popular image of resistance to Nazism is of insurrectional violence. Recent historians have shown, however, that what is called *resistance* is a highly complex phenomenon in which armed and unarmed forms of opposition intertwine.’⁸⁷ This is most definitely the case in communist resistance networks, as we shall discover. Sémelin goes further: ‘I have proposed the concept of *civilian resistance*, defined as the spontaneous process of resistance by civilian society using unarmed means, and mobilising either its principal institutions or its people – or both at the same time.’⁸⁸ Scholars in the third phase developed definitions that recognised the multiform nature of resistance.

The task of defining resistance remains problematic as any definition necessarily limits what is considered to be resistance. Olivier Wieviorka and Jacek Tebinka also draw attention to the discussion of definition. While they use the expanded definition that

⁸⁶ François Bédarida, ‘L’Histoire de la Résistance Lectures d’Hier, Chantiers de Demain,’ *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire* 11: Numéro spécial, Nouveaux enjeux d’une décennie. Fascismes, antifascismes, 1935-1945 (July-September, 1986), 80.

⁸⁷ Jacques Sémelin, *Unarmed Against Hitler: civilian resistance in Europe, 1939-1943*, trans. Susan Husserl-Kapit, Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993, 1.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

includes those who hid, fed, or housed resisters, passed on information and worked as liaison agents, for their research, they do not focus on defining resistance. Instead, Wieviorka and Tebinka chose 'to explore whether and how everyday life was able to assist resistance, whatever its shape, by providing a fertile ground'.⁸⁹ Despite having the same framework for understanding the multiple layers of armed and unarmed resistance, Wieviorka and Tebinka separate that which Sémelin understands to be intertwined. Wieviorka also discusses how to define resistance in his 2013 general study of the French Resistance, *Histoire de la Résistance, 1940-1945*. He accepts that resistance should be defined as more than active resistance. First, he suggests that the clandestine nature of resistance activity is the most useful way to identify resistance. But, even this framework remains problematic for him as it excludes strikes and protests which were in open opposition to the Vichy regime and Nazi directives.⁹⁰ Gildea also reflects on the development of the understanding and definition of resistance in his comprehensive study of the French Resistance published in 2015: 'The dominant narrative of resistance today is a humanitarian and universal myth of the struggle for the rights of man, which allows a greater role for women and rescuers of Jews, and a lesser role for freedom fighters with Sten guns.'⁹¹ Throughout his book, women, communists and foreigners – those previously hidden in resistance histories – feature in many roles in various networks. Their inclusion differentiates Gildea's work from previous general histories.

While there remains no single definition on which all historians agree, the definition has been expanded through debate and the publication of inclusive resistance histories since the 1990s. Those who supported active resisters, passed on information, acted as couriers, collected money for resisters and their families or distributed the clandestine press are now included as resisters in studies of wartime France. Emphasis should not be placed on the particular task an individual performed, but on the will of individuals to reject the intolerance of fascism and commit to social justice. This was possible through many different forms of action. The expansion of the definition is essential for the development of my argument. I argue that the nature of resistance necessitated the development of support as well as active units. One without the other

⁸⁹ Olivier Wieviorka and Jacek Tebinka, 'Resisters: from everyday life to counter-state,' in *Surviving Hitler and Mussolini: daily life in occupied Europe*, eds. Robert Gildea, Olivier Wieviorka and Anette Warring, Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006, 153.

⁹⁰ Wieviorka, *Histoire de la Résistance*, 103.

⁹¹ Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, 19.

would have had little or only short-term impact. Given the reliance of resisters on both aspects, all activities that contributed towards resistance must be included in our understanding of resistance activities.

The problem of definition is particularly relevant to the analysis of women's contributions to resistance. Early on in the literature, women's resistance activities were separated from resistance proper and termed 'support' activities. Support activities were usually performed by women, but sometimes also by men, who were sympathetic to resistance. While support activities were understood to be important to the functioning of resistance, those who performed these tasks were not classified as resisters as such themselves. As mentioned above, I interpret female resistance differently. Margaret Collins Weitz raised the issue of definition in her 1995 book on female resistance. According to Weitz, '[t]he comparative invisibility of women in French Resistance history may be attributed in part to the problems inherent in a definition of resistance and to the nature of women's contributions'.⁹² The most common tasks women performed were the support activities that sustained and complemented active units. Such tasks were not included in early definitions of resistance that required physical engagement with Nazi and/or Vichy authorities. In 1997, Claire Andrieu wrote that women's resistance was only just beginning to be researched methodically. She argued that the previous parameters of gauging women's involvement in resistance had been calculated in such a way that was sure to under-represent *la résistance féminine*. One aspect of these parameters was definition.⁹³ In 2000, Andrieu again mentioned the problems of established methodological approaches and called for a social history of women resisters that used multiple categories of analysis. She believed this would create a sociological and quantitative approach to female resistance that would better represent the numbers and tasks of women in the resistance.⁹⁴

Feminism as a social phenomenon pushed the roles of women and the importance of women's history further into the spotlight. The women's movement of the 1980s

⁹² Margaret Collins Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance: how women fought to free France, 1940-1945*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1995, 7.

⁹³ Claire Andrieu, 'Women in the French Resistance: revisiting the historical record,' *French Politics, Culture and Society*, 18: 1 (Spring, 2000): 13-27.

⁹⁴ Id., 'Les Résistantes, Perspectives de Recherche,' *Le Mouvement Social*, 180: Pour une Histoire Sociale de la Résistance (July-September, 1997): 69-96.

affected academic practices and the perception of women and their roles in history.⁹⁵ Women's contribution to resistance was re-examined as part of the wider shift to detail women's experiences throughout history. The attitude of female resisters themselves was also changing so that they began to recognise the contributions they had made. As mentioned above, women also started to publish their memoirs, which further helped to insert a place for women's stories within the historiography.⁹⁶ During the immediate post-war period, part of the reason women tended not to insist on their resistance credentials was the narrow perception of the confrontational and heroic resistance ideal. The expansion of the definition during the 1980s, allowed women not only to be included as resisters by historians, but also for women to have the opportunity to share their stories as legitimate resisters.

A detailed analysis of women's tasks themselves, unhindered by the problem of definition, and their relation to the wider resistance network, was the next step for further research into female resistance. Women provided lodging and all manner of aid to resisters. They acted as couriers of information and weapons. They engaged in fundraising activities to collect money and goods to sustain resistance groups. They wrote, typed and delivered clandestine papers and cared for the families of those who had been arrested. Women were rarely the leaders of large networks, or rarely involved in violent and easily quantifiable actions. After the definition of resistance was expanded, the non-confrontational nature of women's resistance no longer excluded them from the resistance narrative. Sémelin, as mentioned above, cites the reasons why unarmed resistance was important. He argues that unarmed resistance was also resistance in its own right and a vital part of the armed resistance struggle. Vaillant-Couturier, a communist resister and vocal spokeswoman for resisters and deportees after the war, wrote in her foreword to *Elles, la Résistance* that 'in the Resistance, for the realisation of the *grands objectifs*, all the small tasks were indispensable'.⁹⁷ Vaillant-Couturier drew attention to the fact that, along with armed resisters, women and men were shot or

⁹⁵ See: Louise A. Tilly and Joan W. Scott, *Women, Work and Family*, New York and London: Methuen, 1987; Joan Kelly, *Women, History and Theory: the essays of Joan Kelly*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984; Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, Revised ed., New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

⁹⁶ See Marie-Madeleine Fourcade, *Noah's Ark*, trans. Kenneth Morgan, London: Allen and Unwin, 1973; Lucie Aubrac, *Outwitting the Gestapo*, trans. Konrad Bieber with Betsy Wing, Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993; Agnès Humbert, *Résistance: a woman's journal of struggle and defiance in occupied France*, trans. Barbara Mellor, New York: Bloomsbury, 2008 (original published in 1946).

⁹⁷ Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier in Coudert, *Elles, la Résistance*, 17.

deported for performing support roles. She wanted the contribution, risks and consequences of all women's actions to be recognised in order to ensure that women resisters be remembered by later generations.

Definition has been, and remains, an important aspect of the discussion for academics focusing on female resistance. On the subject of definition, Schwartz noted in 1987 that the Vichy regime prohibited any and all activities associated with resistance activities, including support tasks.⁹⁸ She writes that 'it is significant that the German and Vichy authorities employed the expanded definition of resistance'.⁹⁹ Still, after 30 years, her thesis has not been systematically applied. For my topic, her analysis adds another layer to the discussion of definition. Keeping in mind the definition of resistance as applied by the authorities allows us to consider a resistance activity according to the consequences one suffered if caught performing that activity. Both Vaillant-Couturier and Schwartz emphasise that women resisters suffered harsher consequences than the original narrow definition would imply. Women were arrested, and in many cases deported, for carrying clandestine written material or housing and feeding a resister. Successful resistance necessitated having individuals perform varying tasks which put all the lives of those involved in danger. An expanded definition takes this fact into account. Other historians, including Andrieu and Suzanne Langlois, argue that women's participation was marginalised and underestimated due to the fact that their contributions were not easy to quantify. Langlois addresses the marginalisation of female resisters in film. She argues that women did not appear in early films that portrayed the popular image of resistance as male, active and confrontational.¹⁰⁰ Due to the early establishment of resistance along these limited lines, it continues to be difficult to change the popular perception of a traditional resister.

Women's histories of the war years have tended to include an epilogue discussing the impact of women's wartime experiences on their post-war lives. The common tendency of general histories, on the other hand, is to focus on the war years alone with only cursory discussion of the prelude or aftermath of the war. Both approaches can be problematic which is, in part, why my thesis is concerned with the 1930s along with the war years. My study explores what enabled and facilitated women to join communist

⁹⁸ Schwartz, 'Redefining Résistance,' 142.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 147.

¹⁰⁰ Suzanne Langlois, 'Images that Matter: the French Resistance in film, 1944-1946,' *French History*, 11: 4 (1997): 461-490.

resistance networks, as well as what informed their decision to become resisters, by including an analysis of the pre-war decade.

French women were granted suffrage in 1945. Subsequently, their contribution to resistance has sometimes been cited as women 'earning' the right to vote. This has led to the debate about whether the liberation of France also brought 'liberation' for female citizens. The consensus is that French women were not emancipated by an Allied victory. In 1984, for example, Michelle Perrot wrote that women's involvement in the war was not enough to remove all the pre-war social and political restrictions.¹⁰¹ In the concluding chapter of her book concerning all aspects of women's lives in occupied France, Hanna Diamond asks: 'How far was this a real liberation for women, and to what extent did gaining the right to vote change women's lives or enable them to participate in the post-war political scene?'¹⁰² Like Perrot, Diamond comes to the conclusion that women's lives did not change in any significant way after the liberation. In 1995, the first volume of the French journal of women's history, *CLIO. Histoire, Femmes et Sociétés*, was dedicated to women's involvement in the French Resistance. Three of the articles contain a discussion of whether women experienced a separate liberation alongside that of their country.¹⁰³ Such a discussion focuses on outcomes which were unforeseen by women in the resistance. Suffrage was never a stated goal of their resistance participation. To ask whether being a member of the resistance impacted on women's post-war lives in a progressive way is unrelated to their commitment to resistance. A discussion of resistance in terms of outcomes runs the risk of shifting the focus away from what women were actually doing as resistance members and why.

Research concerning female resisters increased over the course of the 1990s to include all aspects of women's resistance. The range of subjects in the *CLIO* volume of 1995 gives an insight into the broad research interests of the 1990s concerning female resisters. Apart from the three articles that discussed the 'liberation' of women, two were concerned with women arrested and/or punished for collaboration. Another was a regional study of women involved with the resistance in southern France. The three remaining articles were all concerned with the impact of gender on women's roles and

¹⁰¹ Michelle Perrot, 'Sur le front des sexes: un combat douteux,' *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 3 (July, 1984): 69-76.

¹⁰² Hanna Diamond, *Women and the Second World War in France 1939-1948: choices and constraints*, Harlow, UK: Pearson Education Ltd, 1999, 16.

¹⁰³ *CLIO. Histoire, femmes et sociétés*, 1: Résistances et Libérations: France 1940-1945 (1995).

the writing of their history. One discussed women's ability to shape spaces of liberty, and one focused on the role of gender in shaping our perceptions of women resisters. The last article discussed women's absence in the established historiography. At the time of the transition from the second to the third stage of the historiography, the general absence of women was noted and addressed.

Women were neglected for so long in the scholarly literature, however, that more work remains to be done to make up the lost ground. Recent works continue to draw attention to the ongoing need to research women's wartime experiences. Carol Mann, in *Femmes dans la Guerre, 1914-1945*, published in 2010, writes that armed conflict has always been the focus of academics researching countries during times of war. She mentions the lack of recognition given to those who 'silently ensured the survival and continuity from behind the lines'.¹⁰⁴ Susan Grayzel writes that 'above all, the seemingly unknowable bodily pain of warfare became the basis for denial of women's claims to speak authentically of war'.¹⁰⁵ Studies of women and their involvement in World War I provide a framework within which to discuss women's engagement in the resistance. Women were visible as nurses and home-front campaigners during World War I, which meant their contribution was more easily located, but still not fully recognised.¹⁰⁶ In her preface to *Résistantes*, von List explains her choice as a German doctoral student to write her thesis on women in the French Resistance.¹⁰⁷ She explains that there was almost nothing written in German on female resisters in France. In order to address the dearth of scholarship she does not focus on one particular network. Instead, all her chapters tackle a different aspect of female resistance. The comments of Mann and von List highlight that, despite the valuable research concerning women resisters, more work remains to be done for women to receive the attention that adequately reflects the significance of their resistance.

The experiences of women, not just in France, but across Europe, have been studied less intensively by historians than the experiences of men. The participation of women across Europe in World War II has generally been researched along national lines

¹⁰⁴ Carol Mann, *Femmes dans la Guerre (1914-1945): survivre au féminin devant et durant deux conflits mondiaux*, Paris: Pygmalion, 2010, 12.

¹⁰⁵ Susan R. Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War : gender ,motherhood, and politics in Britain and France during the First World War*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999, 7.

¹⁰⁶ See Susan Pedersen, *Family, Dependence and the Origins of the Welfare State: Britain and France, 1914-1945*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

¹⁰⁷ Von List, *Résistantes*.

due to the differing circumstances of each country. In the literature concerning women in Nazi Germany the focus since the late 1980s has been the debate over women as perpetrators and women as victims.¹⁰⁸ This debate necessarily required the discussion of the definition of collaboration and resistance. Jane Slaughter examines the impact of gender on resisters, their roles, opportunities, limitations and decision to join resistance networks in order to focus on women in the Italian Resistance.¹⁰⁹ Ingrid Strobl mentions that one subset of the literature differs from the norm regarding the research of female resistance. She writes that women have consistently been included in histories written by Jewish academics focusing on Jewish resistance. Strobl notes: 'The survivors of the mass slaughter who have to battle against the myth of their passivity, are proud of their fighting women'.¹¹⁰ In her book *Partisanas* (2008), which features women in armed units across Europe, Strobl underlines the point that there have been positive changes in how female resisters are currently perceived. She argues that there is now a general acknowledgement that women 'made a decisive contribution to the fight against fascism'.¹¹¹ Strobl credits interviews with participants and detailed research as showing 'that the infrastructure underpinning all manner of resistance was the handiwork primarily of the women'.¹¹² In her article of 2009 that focuses on women resisters in Yugoslavia, Vesna Drapac makes some general observations on women's inclusion, or lack thereof, in wartime histories.¹¹³ Drapac argues that debates and discussions focusing on how gender affected individuals' experiences of collaboration and resistance, and how those experiences differed, can provide a more nuanced methodological approach for understanding daily life in World War II Europe. My thesis will build on these developments in the scholarly literature in order to analyse further women's widespread involvement in resistance activities.

¹⁰⁸ See: Gisela Bock, 'Ordinary Women in Nazi Germany: perpetrators, victims, followers, and bystanders,' in *Women in the Holocaust*, eds. Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998: 85-100; Elizabeth Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East: agents and witnesses of Germanisation*, New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2003; Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: women, the family and Nazi politics*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1987; Adelheid von Saldern, 'Victims or Perpetrators?: controversies about the role of women in the Nazi state,' in *Nazism and German Society, 1933-1945*, ed. David F. Crew, London and New York: Routledge, 1994: 141-165.

¹⁰⁹ Jane Slaughter, *Women and the Italian Resistance, 1943-1945*, Denver, CO: Arden Press, 1997.

¹¹⁰ Ingrid Strobl, *Partisanas: women in the armed resistance to fascism and German occupation*, trans. Paul Sharkey, Edinburgh and Oakland: AK press, 2008, 4.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Vesna Drapac, 'Women, Resistance and the Politics of Daily Life in Hitler's Europe: the case of Yugoslavia in a comparative perspective,' *Aspasia* 3 (2009): 55-78.

The approach of this thesis

My thesis contributes to the substantial body of knowledge on women's resistance in France by focusing on the resistance of female communists in Paris. My study, thereby, provides us with a more comprehensive view of what it meant to resist in Paris during the occupation. My aim is not to 'demythologise' resistance, as this has been done elsewhere, but to focus on the actual female resisters who understood their activities as resistance. I accept that on the surface, the narrative of my thesis may seem to present a positive, even nostalgic, interpretation of the French Resistance. This is due to the resisters who are the subject of my research. The female resisters featured in this thesis knew of the brutal aspects of resistance – the betrayals, torture, reprisals, executions – but they were rarely involved in the pursuit and punishment of traitors. These women were idealistic. They were dedicated to communism because they wanted to make the world a more equal place.

This thesis does not contribute to the debate on French women's equality in society. Women were not equal to men in the 1930s or 1940s. Other studies have shown that women throughout Europe, including those in communist groups, experienced difficulties in their lives because of gender bias. I realise that gender relations were a problem for female resisters across Europe, but this problem is not the subject of my thesis.¹¹⁴ The material which informs my thesis does not answer the question of whether women had difficulty being accepted as resisters by their male comrades. I found virtually no examples of women's complaints regarding this issue. This is a significant finding in itself and could form the basis of another thesis. There could be many reasons French communist women did not have the same problems as their European sisters, or, if they did, why they are not discussed in my sources, but it is not part of the analysis of this study.

¹¹⁴ For examples of studies which address gender bias see: Richard Stites, 'Women and Communist Revolutions: some comparative observations,' *Studies in Comparative Communism* 14: 2-3 (1981), 106-122; Juliane Furst, 'Heroes, Lovers, Victims: partisan girls during the Great Fatherland War,' *Minerva* 18: 3-4 (2000), 38-75; Donna Harsch, 'Approach/Avoidance: communists and women in East Germany, 1945-49,' *Social History* 25: 2 (2000), 156-182; Tassoula Vervenioti, 'Left-Wing Women between Politics and Family,' in *After the War was Over: reconstructing the family, nation, and state in Greece, 1943-1960*, ed. Mark Mazower, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000, 105-121; Jomarie Alano, 'Armed with a Yellow Mimosa: women's defence and assistance groups in Italy, 1943-45,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 38: 4 (2003), 615-631.

The problem I wish to address is that French women's involvement in resistance has not been taken as an equal contribution in the historiography due to the particular roles they performed. The roles of women and men were most often divided along gender lines. Men dominated in the visible roles of resistance and, as a result, theirs is the story that has dominated in resistance histories. I argue that just because this has been the case in the past does not mean that we should accept that women's contribution to resistance was either less significant or less political than that of their male counterparts. As Schwartz writes, 'even women who held supporting roles, who took other resisters into their homes and fed, clothed, and protected them, performed political acts and made political choices'.¹¹⁵ My study demonstrates and refines the idea that resistance took many forms. How communist women saw the value of their resistance at the time is central to the argument of my thesis. Once we bring in women's voices, our perception of resistance changes and allows us a greater understanding of the French Resistance in general. As a result, I focus on the idealistic, dedicated mission of resistance as understood by the communist women resisters themselves.

My thesis contributes to the debate on the extent and nature of resistance in France. Despite the development of the historiography of France during World War II, historians continue to identify an enduring gap in the literature concerning female resisters. This gap endures because female resistance continues to be under-researched. General histories still portray the majority of tasks performed by women in the resistance as support tasks. The connection between women's roles and the goals and achievements of the larger networks is not usually defined in a clear manner. The co-dependency of members of any given network must be acknowledged in order to address how those resisters previously excluded from the historical literature, such as women, should be included.

This study addresses gaps within the existing historiography by focusing on women's involvement in communist resistance networks. The women featured in this analysis were all based in Paris, the city from where the clandestine PCF directed its operations. Compared to other French resistance networks, communist groups actively encouraged women to join their resistance movement. The structure and goal of the communist resistance made the inclusion of women necessary, even essential. The aim of the communists was popular resistance. In order to achieve this they needed women to

¹¹⁵ Schwartz, 'Redefining Resistance,' 143.

resist. The structure of the communist resistance movement also enabled women to become resisters on a larger scale than other networks. Different branches of the communist resistance were intentionally responsible for different activities in order to allow the more effective growth and sustenance of the movement as a whole. This thesis examines not only the extent of the tasks that women resisters performed, but also how their tasks were perceived and constructed to contribute effectively to the communist resistance movement.

I go beyond the generally rigid periodisation evident in the historiography in order to develop a clearer understanding of what enabled and facilitated female resistance. Research on the war that breaks down chronological barriers is becoming more common. This trend is evident in the work of Lagrou, who focuses on the post-war period alongside the war itself in order to construct 'a social history of the consequences of the Second World War'.¹¹⁶ For my thesis, a focus on the 1930s provides context for women's entrance into, and acceptance within, communist resistance networks. In order to understand better female resistance, however, it is useful first to understand the opportunities women had to be active in pre-war communist groups. The contacts women made and their pre-war experiences enabled them to perceive opportunities to enter into resistance networks. Women were politically educated in communist groups. They were given different opportunities to engage with government policy and the wider community through their communist activism. A consideration of formal PCF policy regarding women and their roles gives an insight into why women were accepted as resisters in a way that was not available to women in other networks.

This thesis does not attempt to account for all the reasons that women joined the resistance struggle. As Wiewiorka and many others have written, it is impossible for historians to explain the countless personal reasons that resulted in an individual's decision to join the resistance. The resistance, however, did not occur in a vacuum. It is possible to see how the encouragement shown by the leadership, the contacts women made as members of pre-war communist groups, and the leadership and responsibility women assumed in certain groups during the 1930s combined to establish pathways that women could use to enter into resistance networks. A detailed discussion of women's opportunities in communist groups during the 1930s provides a new insight into the organisation of women involved in communist resistance.

¹¹⁶ Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation*, 3.

This thesis amplifies the perception of female resistance by considering in close detail the roles played by women in the communist resistance movement. In order to establish a clearer understanding of the realities of resistance, I have adopted a broad definition of resistance. This means that all tasks that needed to be performed for the successful functioning of a network will be included. Women who provided help and care for other resisters knew they were aiding resistance and that they could be arrested and charged as 'terrorists' for doing so. Women who performed so-called support roles and the wives and mothers who answered the communist call to protest publicly against the lack of rations are all included as resisters. The perception of female resisters held by French and Nazi police will be discussed to illustrate the limitations of a narrow definition. Using an inclusive definition of resistance encourages a more accurate understanding of the functioning of resistance networks and helps to address the hitherto marginal inclusion of women resisters in general resistance histories.

Establishing the range of roles performed by women within communist networks will help to determine women's contribution and their place within the resistance. An examination of the specific tactics used by the communist resistance movement leads to a deeper understanding of the approach of the communist movement towards resistance. Some roles within communist networks were given to women precisely because they were women. This was the case from the earliest possible moment when women were entrusted as go-betweens to facilitate the construction of the PCF underground. The men were recognisable and had to remain in hiding whereas the women still had freedom of movement. Often, they benefited from gender stereotypes that prevented French or German police from suspecting a well-dressed young woman of subversive behaviour. Exceptional women who occupied leadership roles will also be discussed to stress the range of women's resistance. The complementary nature of different groups within the network will be evaluated in order to examine the place of women within the larger movement. The unique nature of the communist resistance can be explored through a detailed analysis of the high level of female involvement. Such a discussion can contribute to the ongoing development of the general historiography.

Sources

Each of the chapters of this thesis focuses on a different collection of sources in order to investigate, in detail, the range of activities performed by women within communist

resistance networks. The vast majority of material to which I refer is held in the archives of the Musée de la Résistance Nationale and the Paris Préfecture de Police. The Musée de la Résistance Nationale (MRN), which is located on the outskirts of Paris in Champigny-sur-Marne, was opened in 1985 with communist and labour connections. Gildea writes that it collected

the written testimonies of resisters from communist backgrounds, often of immigrant origin. It also archived the original returns to a call in 1984 from the communist daily *L'Humanité* for testimonies from “the unknown of the Resistance”, a wide repertoire of resistance gestures and memories sent in by ordinary people.¹¹⁷

As a result, the MRN has a large collection of material on communist resistance, most of which was donated by communist militants or their families. Families across France are still discovering their parents' or grandparents' documents from the war and donating them to the MRN. Some of the material in my thesis has not been used in previous studies because it was only recently added to the archives. Schwartz and Moorehead have used some material from the Préfecture de Police archives in their published research. Due to the limited scholarship concerning women in communist resistance networks, the majority of material from the MRN, however, has not received comprehensive attention in any previous studies. Numerous memoirs also feature throughout the chapters to provide biographical and anecdotal information.

The bulk of source materials from the MRN archives that feature in this thesis are underground newspapers published by the women's groups of the communist resistance. Individual editions are usually a double-sided, typed piece of paper divided into columns. Material from a range of 68 titles, all those available at the MRN, will be discussed. Some of the titles had multiple runs in the archives, others only one edition. The vast majority are dated with a month and year, although some reference only the year. Sémelin underlines the importance of the underground press. He argues that ‘the underground press must not be considered as just one element among others in resisting Nazism ... nor was [it] a simple instrument of counter-propaganda in the psychological war carried on by rival powers’.¹¹⁸ The underground press could achieve multiple goals of resistance movements at once. It was a way to articulate the ideology of a movement and to recruit

¹¹⁷ Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, 14.

¹¹⁸ Sémelin, *Unarmed Against Hitler*, 85.

new members. A piece of paper was not only a safer way to contact a number of strangers, but it was also an effective way to contact a larger percentage of the population than any individual would have been able to do face to face. Sémelin notes that it was through the process of writing that networks formulated their guiding values which they sought to protect through resistance.¹¹⁹ Resisters knew that it was also necessary to provide an alternative to the official press sanctioned by Vichy and the Nazis. Lucie Aubrac led her Gaullist resistance networks in two operations to rescue her husband and associates after they had been arrested by the German police. She wrote that people only bought Vichy newspapers 'to keep posted about the many ration coupons entitling them to food distributions'.¹²⁰ Collaborationist publications could not be relied upon to give an accurate report of events. Underground networks had the responsibility, as a movement of the people, to pass on to the public, information about resistance operations and the realities of new government policies.

It was important to communicate with the population, but the most important goal of the underground press was to encourage its readers to act. In Sémelin's words: to 'convince and assert a collective self on the basis of which the new ideological order – that of the occupation – could be rejected'.¹²¹ He argues that inciting people to action was the most important aspect to the work of the clandestine press. This is evident in the case of the women's newspapers. The majority of each edition was spent calling women to action. Articles first established a common feeling of discontent, and then called women to act to change the status quo. The reports of events included in the papers are also used as a segue to the call for action. A report of what had happened was followed by either a call to stop the authorities, or to continue the good work of those patriots who were already active. The repetition of this structure supports the claim that the importance of the clandestine press lay foremost in inciting action.

As well as the women's underground newspapers, the MRN archives contain some other documents that are valuable for my research. One example is the Ivry police department's collection of hundreds of individual sheets and cards containing personal details of known communist resisters. These cards are ideal to illustrate the extent of the persecution of communist militants from 1939 through to the end of 1940. Another

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Aubrac, *Outwitting the Gestapo*, 201.

¹²¹ Sémelin, *Unarmed against Hitler*, 85.

useful collection of documents is the monthly series of underground newspapers written by, and for, the communist internees inside the female Prison de la Petite Roquette. There are six editions of this newspaper leading up to the end of the war. Each edition consists of four pages of handwritten articles relating both to life inside the prison and events outside the prison. The last, and most recently donated, piece of material that has been invaluable is the journal of a leading communist resister, Lucienne Maertens. She was a communist activist and resister who occupied various roles of responsibility in the later years of the war. In October 1943 she was given the job of liaison between the women's branch of the communist resistance, the Union des Femmes Françaises (UFF), and the other groups of the network. In October she began writing in a personal journal to keep track of her work and plot the progress of her groups' activities. She continued writing after she was given the job of working with active units and *réfractaires* in February 1944. Her journal, comprising 62 pages of handwritten notes, spans the period from October 1943 through to July 1944. Due to the danger of keeping evidence, this kind of material is rare. Maertens' notebook is an invaluable source that adds detail to what is known of female communist resistance.

The material from the Préfecture de Police (PP) in Paris consists of reports, interview transcripts and surveillance logs pertaining to five investigations into communist resistance activity. All five investigations involve many female resisters. The information in the files is very detailed concerning the investigation and discovery of the suspects, but less so regarding interviewing and sentencing. An analysis of these reports does reveal, however, not only the activities for which women were arrested, but also the attitude of the French police towards female communist activists. The police reports also indicate the consequences women resisters suffered for their actions and the perceptions of gender roles prevalent among the French and Nazi authorities. Drawing from this range of different materials allows a clearer picture to emerge of the development of women's activities within the communist resistance.

Chapter summary

My thesis consists of five chapters. It is structured chronologically, with separate chapters focusing on a different aspect of women's activities within the communist resistance movement. As the situation of the war changed, so did the priorities of the resistance. As a result, so did the tasks of the women in communist networks. After an overview of

French communism during the 1930s which includes an examination of the PCF, communist women and women's roles in French society during the 1930s, the focus shifts to communist resistance during the war. This structure provides context, and a more detailed understanding of the evolution of women's involvement in French communist groups. Included in Chapter Five, the final chapter of this thesis, is an analysis of the emergence of resisters from the shadows so as to consider how women viewed their own involvement in the communist resistance.

Chapter One concentrates on the 1930s. Events and political changes during this decade directly informed the anti-fascist agenda of the PCF and its attitude towards female (political) engagement. The analysis in Chapter One deals first with the political situation in France and then with the status and perceptions of women in French society. The rise of the extreme Right, the formation of the left-wing political alliance, the Popular Front, and the development of the political policies of the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) all provide essential context for an understanding of the attitude of, and attitude towards, the PCF before the war. The all-female communist Union des Jeunes Filles de France (UJFF), formed in 1936, receives significant attention in this chapter. The UJFF became the official all-female branch of the PCF that provided support, recreation and political education for young women. The UJFF was organised and run by women who were already communist activists, all of whom went on to join the communist resistance and organise women's resistance. Chapter One also delves into the contradiction that existed between women's legal status as non-citizens because they did not yet have suffrage, and the increasingly politically engaged generation of women of the 1930s.

Chapter Two focuses on the transition period from peace to war to occupation, from September 1939 through to mid-1941. These two years were particularly difficult for the PCF. The party had to reorganise first after the PCF was outlawed by the French government, and then again in order to adhere to Comintern directions. Women were instrumental in re-forming the party. A discussion of women's early activism allows the development of my argument that gender was utilised to allow the most efficient functioning of the communist resistance network. This chapter covers the shift from women's informal involvement in politics to their engagement in resistance. I argue that, for women who had already been involved in communist activities, resistance was another method of engaging in informal politics. These women recognised and embraced opportunities to resist because of their pre-war involvement in communist networks.

The years 1942 and 1943 are the focus of Chapter Three. This chapter draws on the documents from the PP. Throughout these two years in particular, communist resisters were mercilessly targeted by French police and Nazi authorities. The women featured in Chapter Three were arrested and charged but their sentences differed from men's because they were women. I suggest that women were treated as quasi-soldiers. They were neither solely civilians nor soldiers. A focus on consequences suffered by women resisters allows an examination of women's commitment to resistance and how gender impacted upon both their choices as resisters and their concept of resistance. I argue that women resisters were seen as a threat by the French and Nazi authorities, but were treated differently because of their gender.

Chapter Four concentrates exclusively on women's underground newspapers printed in late 1942 and throughout 1943. All editions were published by local women's committees and written by and for women. The detailed analysis of these newspapers allows us to develop a clearer understanding of the arguments used to mobilise women. It also provides the opportunity, through repetition, to identify the self-defined goals of women's resistance and the varied roles adopted by female resisters. The themes raised in the newspapers provide a useful insight into women's resistance. Both the activities of, and interactions with, the multiple branches of the communist resistance clarify the role of women within the larger movement. This chapter further develops the argument that the different groups of the communist resistance were intentionally complementary.

Chapter Five, the final chapter of my thesis, concentrates on 1944. As the occupation continued, the increased likelihood of an armed battle and the growing number of interned and deported resisters emerged as the two defining characteristics of the war in France. Resistance was expanding which meant that women were more involved in the communist resistance movement than ever. Maertens' journal, featured in the analysis of Chapter Five, provides invaluable insights into the range of roles women resisters were performing in the last months of the occupation and the increased interaction between women's groups and male units. After incarceration or deportation, women remained committed to the cause of resistance. The examination of coping mechanisms used by communist female prisoners to survive prisons and camps emphasises how women used their initiative to perform resistance in changed circumstances. The news sheets written by female internees of the Prison de la Petite Roquette and the series of booklets published by the UFF in 1945-1946, both discussed in

Chapter Five, illustrate how women themselves viewed female resistance and its legacy. This final chapter builds on my argument that women's involvement in resistance was so essential and so widespread that their contribution cannot continue to be downplayed as it has been in the past.

Chapter One

The Growth of the Parti Communiste Français and the Increasing Political Engagement of Women in the 1930s

No person experienced World War II as an isolated period in their life. What women faced in 1930s France informed their behaviour during the war. The purpose of this chapter is two-fold. Firstly, it will provide a discussion of the political situation in France and the development of the ideology of the Parti Communiste Français (PCF). Such a discussion offers essential context that is necessary to comprehend the attitude of the PCF towards women and resistance. Secondly, this chapter examines the perceived and actual roles of women within French society. An account of women's roles and opportunities in general will precede an in-depth analysis of women's activities as members of communist groups specifically. This structure allows me to establish how and why communist groups differed from other political groups, including in terms of their attitude towards women.

The detailed discussion of the evolution of PCF policy in this chapter is the background that helps explain the priorities of the PCF during the war. The formation and achievements of the Popular Front coalition worked as guiding principles for the PCF's involvement in resistance activities. Members learnt not only that cooperation against common enemies could be successful, but also that appealing to a wide range of people through their own dedicated organisations enabled the party to include more activists and broaden communist activities. This chapter demonstrates that PCF policy and the status of women in communist groups in the 1930s, facilitated women's increased political engagement. The PCF drew heavily on its successful tactics of the 1930s when organising resistance in general, and women's contribution to resistance in particular.

French society in the 1930s was shaped by the effects of the Depression, strike waves, the Popular Front government, the increased momentum of the debate around fascism, and the fear of war. Political divisions became more pronounced which resulted in the rise of the political extremes of both the Left and Right. The PCF was one of the

most vocal and influential political parties of the final years of the Third Republic. The evolution of the PCF throughout the 1930s and into the 1940s can only be understood in the context of the rise of the Right, which prompted a unification of the Left, and established the PCF as an influential political party. This chapter begins with an analysis of a few important events that resulted in the growing rift between the Left and Right in France. A discussion of the consequences of the divisions between the Left and Right will reveal why the French communists developed certain policies and tactics. An exploration of the disunity of the Left, and their subsequent decision to unite, will demonstrate how the experience of the PCF in the Popular Front government impacted on the strategies adopted by the communist resistance movement. Some of the lessons learned during the 1930s were challenged by the Nazi-Soviet pact that was signed in June 1939. The reputation and early resistance strategies were undermined by the position of the Comintern, as we shall learn in this chapter, but overall communist resistance developed successfully and used the lessons of the anti-fascist struggle to good effect. The Popular Front disintegrated but, as we shall see, the tactics developed by the PCF during these tumultuous years outlived the government and eventually informed the choices made by the underground communist resistance.

The 1930s were a decade of heightened social and political engagement for women in France. However, the position of women in French society remained ambiguous. Women increasingly entered public life, but in a manner that remained gendered. Despite the fact that women still could not vote, political parties made appeals to women to join their newly established female branches. For example, women had numerous opportunities to be involved in communist activity. Their experiences of the Popular Front and the anti-fascist struggle during the 1930s defined women's communist activism. It is essential to understand the pre-war attitude of communist activists in order to understand women's involvement in communist resistance networks. Two of the women who feature in this thesis occupied influential positions as party activists in the late 1930s. Danielle Casanova (1909-1943) was a communist militant responsible for organising the all-female branch of the PCF, the Union des Jeunes Filles de France (Union of Young French Women, UJFF). She helped to organise its events and to publish its magazine. During the occupation she became a leader of communist resistance. She was arrested and sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau where she died of typhoid. Her role as a resister, and her death for the cause of resistance, transformed her into a communist martyr.

Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier (1912-1996) was a photo-journalist for communist publications and a leading figure in the UJFF. She joined the underground PCF and was later arrested and deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Vaillant-Couturier survived deportation and returned to France after the war. She became a spokesperson and campaigner for female resisters and returned deportees. Women, such as Casanova and Vaillant-Couturier, had multiple opportunities to engage in pre-war communist networks. They were trusted and motivated to adopt resistance roles with considerable responsibility, at least in part, due to their extensive involvement in communist activities during the interwar period.

The politics of the Great Depression: a difficult beginning to a turbulent decade

In order to understand how the changes made by the PCF during the Popular Front era impacted on communist women's resistance we need some background on political events and the PCF. While France managed to stave off the worst effects of the Depression until 1931, well after the majority of other European countries, it nevertheless had difficulty overcoming the consequences of the international financial crisis. Brian Jenkins comments that the disproportionate impact felt in different industries proved 'significant in defining the nature of the social unrest that triggered political crisis'.¹ It is estimated that French unemployment reached between one and two million at its peak in 1936. France did not suffer the same levels of unemployment as Germany, but the Depression created a significant crisis in France nonetheless. Social and political divisions became more pronounced over the course of the 1930s as a result.

It was the consequences of the Depression, and the failure of successive governments to ease its worst effects, that led to the extreme divisions of French left- and right-wing groups. Seen as tentative and inadequate, the political centre in France gradually became less and less popular, while the two political extremes gained wider acceptance. Jenkins argues that this was 'an era of growing political antagonisms and anxieties, when political support had to be actively sought and engaged rather than simply assumed'.² In a bid to attract new members, both extremes turned their attention to sections of society that felt disempowered and frustrated with politicians who seemed

¹ Brian Jenkins, 'Plots and Rumours: conspiracy theories and the *Six Février* 1934,' *French Historical Studies* 34: 4 (2011), 652.

² *Ibid.*, 656.

to ignore their interests. Women began to be targeted on a much wider scale, not as voters (French women were not granted full suffrage until 1944, and did not vote in a general election until 1946), but as supporters who could swell membership numbers, influence the votes of their male family members and contribute to action that aligned with their group's core values and ideals. The number of French female communists and their activities, for example, increased exponentially from the mid-1930s onwards.³ Arguably, the most meaningful distinction in French politics, indeed European politics, which emerged in the 1930s, was between fascists and anti-fascists.

The extreme right-wing leagues rose to prominence in France in the early 1930s. The rise of the leagues is significant in establishing the context of the pre-war PCF. The activism of French communists against the right-wing leagues defined their commitment to anti-fascism during the 1930s and beyond. Due to their divisive tactics, which prevented communists from cooperating with any other political party, the PCF did not share in the election victory of the left-leaning Radical government in 1932. The elected Radicals and socialists proved unable to agree upon a course of action best suited to softening the effects of the Depression. A parliamentary majority remained elusive, which resulted in multiple cabinet reshuffles. There were six changes in administration between 1932 and 1934. Julian Jackson writes that 'ministerial instability at a time when France was experiencing the worst effects of the world slump had resulted in a surge of anti-parliamentary feeling'.⁴ Discontented conservative and right-wing organisations lent their support to numerous expanding radical Right leagues.

The opposition of the right-wing groups to the left-wing government had been growing since the election in 1932, but it was not until February 1934 that anti-parliamentary feeling reached its height. After reports involving fraud, ill-gotten millions and the protection of the guilty by people in high places, it was the Stavisky Affair that provoked a reaction that threatened societal and political stability. Alexandre Stavisky (1886-1934) was a failed actor who specialised in making money as a con-man. Drawing on previously unseen archival sources, Paul Jankowski goes into considerable detail explaining Stavisky's schemes.⁵ Some of Stavisky's earlier scams included selling the

³ See: Susan B. Whitney, *Mobilising Youth*, 208. Specific figures discussed later in this chapter.

⁴ Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: defending democracy, 1934-38*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 1.

⁵ See: Paul Jankowski, 'Stavisky and His Era,' *French Politics and Society*, 10: 2 (1992): 48-65; id., *Stavisky: a confidence man in the Republic of virtue*, New York: Cornell University Press, 2002.

'Matryscope' which was claimed to detect pregnancy within 24 hours of conception, and cheating the Italian government out of money by means of a false munitions contract.⁶ His final plan involved the issue of false bonds using false jewels as security. The Affair began when it was announced on 8 January 1934 that Stavisky had committed suicide in Switzerland after learning of his imminent arrest. Stavisky's story became a political scandal after it was revealed that multiple government ministers were implicated, directly and indirectly, in his scheme. The most damaging connection was to Prime Minister Camille Chautemps. It was revealed that the justice ministry postponed hearings for previous charges of extortion 19 times after Stavisky was released on bail in 1926. Chautemps was forced to resign because his brother-in-law was the public prosecutor at the time. Once Stavisky's dealings became public knowledge in January 1934, the right-wing leagues staged demonstrations almost every night. This tactic succeeded in exacerbating the atmosphere of instability and social upheaval. The scandal had little to do with the details of Stavisky's fraud, and more to do with the political instability of the time.

Why is the Stavisky Affair an important event when plotting the development of the PCF? The scandal prompted by the investigation of Stavisky did not affect the PCF directly. It was the reaction to, and consequences of, the scandal that greatly impacted on the PCF. It was only after the violent show of force of the Right in France that the Comintern sanctioned the development of a Popular Front program in France. The impact of the Popular Front policy on the PCF can be seen in the cooperative tactics and anti-fascist agenda ultimately adopted by the communist resistance. The development of the Popular Front was also significant for female communists as it was during this era that women began to be included in a meaningful way in communist activities specifically, and French politics in general. The Stavisky Affair gave the right-wing groups who were not satisfied with the response of the left-leaning government a chance to demonstrate their frustration. Without the explosion of support for the extreme Right in early 1934, it is unlikely that the Popular Front in France would have developed as it did. It is therefore necessary to go into detail about the event that acted as a trigger for the dramatic change in French left-wing political policy of the 1930s.

In reaction to the Stavisky Affair, the Right was able to unite its supporters and stage a mass protest. The timing, rather than the details, of Stavisky's case determined

⁶ Jankowski, 'Stavisky and His Era,' 50.

the events of February 1934. Sean Kennedy notes that ‘the Third Republic had known worse scandals ... But the outrage on both the left and the right was intense ... The entire republican system was now seen by many citizens as irremediably corrupt.’⁷ Jankowski comments that ‘a successful scandal depended, in the end, on the level of public indignation, and sometimes the scandal failed ... Occasionally indifferent, more often avid, the public fluctuated: and in Stavisky’s case, it nearly went out of control.’⁸ Jankowski asks why it was Stavisky’s case that prompted such a reaction.⁹ He concludes that it was the timing that determined the reaction to the Stavisky scandal. He writes that the ‘affair broke at a moment of economic depression, diplomatic anxiety, ministerial instability, demographic decline, and so on – all the sombre after-effects of the First World War’.¹⁰ Right-wing groups, in particular, used the Affair to mobilise existing anti-parliamentary feeling.

The PCF’s commitment to establishing a French Popular Front in the aftermath of the events of 1934 must be placed in the framework of the escalation of the radical right-wing leagues in the 1930s. The action of the extreme Right determined, to a certain extent, the development of the PCF and the Popular Front in France, both of which would have a great impact on the communist resistance. In 1934 there were five important leagues. According to numbers kept by the French police, the largest was the Solidarité Française (SF) with 180,000 members, 80,000 of whom were in Paris. It was the Croix de Feu (CdF), however, the next largest, that came to be the most influential of the leagues, thanks to its leader.¹¹ Colonel François de la Rocque (1885-1946) was a military man, and World War I veteran. He was patriotic, Catholic and politically conservative. After retiring from the military he joined the CdF, originally a veterans’ organisation, and took over its leadership in 1930, just one year after joining. De La Rocque expanded the league to include a paramilitary organisation, an affiliated daughters’ and sons’ organisation and an organisation open to any who shared the ideals of the CdF. The Jeunesses Patriotes (JP),

⁷ Sean Kennedy, *Reconciling France against Democracy: the Croix de Feu and the Parti Social Français*, Montréal and London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007, 44.

⁸ Jankowski, ‘Stavisky and His Era,’ 50.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹¹ Robert Soucy, *French Fascism: the second wave, 1933-1939*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995, 37.

Action Française (AF) and the Francistes were the final three radical Right leagues.¹² The leagues were the driving force of the Right in France during the 1930s.

The hatred that existed between the Left and the Right was evidenced on the evening of 6 February. The leagues staged a huge demonstration on the evening when the Chamber of Deputies was due to vote on the proposed cabinet under the Radical Édouard Daladier. The far Right was opposed to yet another cabinet reshuffle that moved the government further to the Left. Daladier had also agreed to remove Jean Chiappe, the Paris Prefect of Police. Chiappe's removal frightened his supporters who believed that he was responsible for holding off a social revolution. The 6 February riot was the most violent clash on Paris streets since the Commune of 1871. Out of the total 40,000 protestors, 16 people died, 655 were injured, and 236 were hospitalised. Within the ranks of the police and Republican Guards, one was killed, 1,664 injured, while 884 had their wounds dressed and were able to return to service immediately.¹³ Despite winning a confidence vote on the evening of 6 February, Daladier resigned the following day because he wished to avoid further confrontations between police and veterans. The appointment of the conservative Gaston Doumergue as prime minister calmed the extreme Right and prompted their press to call for an end to social disorder before their fear of a civil war became a reality. The communists, never ones to back away from a fight, further exacerbated the fear of civil war when they organised a counter-demonstration for 9 February. According to David Clay Large, '[t]heir purpose was to show that they would not stand idly by while the far Right – as in Rome and Berlin – took over the country.'¹⁴ The police responded brutally, resulting in the deaths of six workers. The communists could not contend with the extreme Right leagues alone.

An unforeseen consequence of the riot was the effective resurgence of the French Left. In 1931 Maurice Thorez (1900-1964) had been approved by the Comintern as the new leader for the PCF after an on-off rivalry with Jacques Doriot, who, unlike Thorez, did

¹² SF was founded in 1933 by Jean Renaud and François Coty. The CdF began as a veteran's league but became politicised under Colonel de la Rocque from 1931. The JP was run by Pierre Taittinger; AF was run by Charles Maurras as a royalist, fascist party. The Franciste Movement was founded by Marcel Bucard in 1933. See *ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁴ David Clay Large, *Between Two Fires: Europe's path in the 1930s*, New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990, 51.

not show discipline or commitment to party policy.¹⁵ Thorez commented in his memoir, published in 1938, that the lasting consequences of 6 February ‘were to be precisely the opposite of what the reactionaries had hoped and longed for. Something was to be born out of the light of the fires started by the fascist bands.’¹⁶ The 6 February riot changed the attitude of the PCF for the next two decades. After the riot, the PCF realised the popularity, strength and danger posed by the right-wing leagues. Confronted with such a show of strength from the Right, the disunity of the French Left was brought into relief. We shall see in the remainder of this chapter that its opposition to the extreme Right is what defined the commitment of the PCF to anti-fascism during the 1930s. The mutual animosity between the Left and Right shaped the politics of these two decades. The fascist/anti-fascist divide was the reason that the PCF adopted the Popular Front program. This policy decision provides some background to the party’s wartime commitment to resistance. The anti-fascist struggle and Popular Front program were also the reasons that women had the opportunity to be more directly included in communist activities from the mid-1930s.

Renewed purpose for the PCF with the rise of anti-fascism

The widening of the Left/Right divide throughout the 1930s, along with the consequent growing tensions, gave the communists experience of opposing fascism. We will see that the ideology of a resistance network was essential to its goals and formation. The ideology of the communist resistance was honed during the 1930s, specifically during the anti-fascist campaign. The communists’ involvement in the Popular Front government not only made the PCF a mainstream political party but it also educated communists in the possibilities of co-operation with non-communists against a common enemy – fascism.

The debate over French fascism has been important for the historiography of the Right in France during the inter-war period. The debate, which spanned three decades, focused on whether the far Right in France could accurately be described as fascist. In the period immediately following World War II, academics believed that fascism had been a minor movement in France. Some historians argued that the extreme right-wing groups in France had not succumbed to fascism. This view was later dubbed the ‘immunity’ thesis

¹⁵ After being expelled from the PCF, Doriot formed the fascist Parti Populaire Français (PPF) in 1936. The paramilitary units of the PPF remained active on behalf of the collaborating and occupying authorities during the war.

¹⁶ Maurice Thorez, *Son of the People*, trans. Douglas Garman, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1938, 79.

by Michel Dobry, a political sociologist.¹⁷ It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that many historians began to assert that fascism was central to French politics during the interwar years. There is still no consensus on how prevalent fascism was in France, but critics of the immunity thesis have grown in number. In more recent years there has been a shift away from the focus on fascism to a consideration of extreme Right groups and figures beyond the fascism debate.

For my thesis the most important point to emphasise is that French communists saw the extreme right-wing leagues as fascist. William Irvine notes that paramilitary and anti-parliamentary groups insisted on defining themselves as neither Right nor Left.¹⁸ The leagues, however, were the ideological enemies of the PCF. The debate over whether or not the leagues were fascist is irrelevant for my purposes because the anti-fascist communists, and socialists, clearly identified the leagues as fascist. The French Left saw parallels between the extreme Right leagues in France and the successful fascist movements in Germany and Italy. Thorez made the observation in his memoir that

[i]f the proletariat was not quick to follow up the plots and machinations of its enemies, if it did not profit from the experience of the Germans, if it was going to make the mistakes and errors of our neighbours, we also might well see the triumph and victory of French fascism, which, within our own borders, would slaughter and enslave the workers and, outside them, would deliver France into the hands of Hitler and Mussolini.¹⁹

The German communist and socialist parties had been banned, their members were harassed, attacked, persecuted, imprisoned and, often, killed.²⁰ Both Hitler and Mussolini had transformed their democratic systems into fascist totalitarian regimes that became violent when confronted with opposition. In France, the reaction of the communists and socialists to the rise of fascism can partly be seen as a pre-emptive protection of the safety and existence of their parties.

French left-wing parties reacted to the leagues because they identified them as fascist and did not want fascism to gain power in France. Under the title 'Demonstrate!', the 6 February 1934 edition of *L'Humanité* read: 'Under pretext of the dismissal of

¹⁷ See: Michel Dobry, 'La Thèse Immunitaire Face aux Fascismes. Pour une critique de la logique classificatoire,' in *Le Mythe de l'Allergie Française au Fascisme*, ed. Michel Dobry, Paris: Albin Michel, 2003.

¹⁸ William D. Irvine, 'Beyond Left and Right, and the Politics of the Third Republic: a conversation,' *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques*, 34: 2 (2008), 135.

¹⁹ Thorez, *Son of the People*, 75.

²⁰ See: Large, *Between Two Fires*.

Chiappe, the fascist organisations and governmental troops are mobilised against workers: a violent debate will take place tonight at the Chamber.²¹ The headline for the day following the riots illustrated the fear of left-wing supporters: ‘Against the fascists, against democracy which *se fascise*, working Paris retaliated.’²² The socialist newspaper, *Le Populaire*, drew attention on 6 February to the riots of the extreme Rightists that were planned for that evening: ‘The Camelots du Roy, the Jeunesses Patriotes, the “Croix de Feu” and other fascists start war in defence of their Chiappe and against the Republic.’²³ After the riots the headline read: ‘The fascist takeover failed.’ Along the bottom of the front page were photos of rioters attacking cars and a bus burning in the street. In the article, the fascist groups were portrayed as a threat, even though the title acknowledged their failure to gain power.²⁴ For the political parties of the Left, the leagues were perceived as a violent menace to the Republic. As we shall see, the French communists were right to be concerned for the future of their party and their members.

The French Left began to work together because they believed it was the only way to prevent the CdF gaining political control in France. Historians are inclined to downplay the threat that the CdF posed because it never took power. This is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, this analysis disregards how other groups of the 1930s perceived the CdF. Left-wing groups believed that power was within the reach of the far Right in France. As far as they were concerned, the CdF posed a very real threat to their political process and future. Robert Soucy points out that

[a]lthough the second wave of French fascism consisted of several rival fascist movements, some much smaller than others, its combined strength was considerable. When Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933 the total membership of the NSDAP was about 850,000 (if one includes Hitler Youth, 950,000), that is, about 1.5% of a national population of 60 million. In 1937 the [CdF] alone had nearly a million members in a population of 40 million.²⁵

²¹ *L’Humanité*, 6 February 1934, 1, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k404908q.item> (accessed 5 September 2016).

²² *L’Humanité*, 7 February 1934, 2, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k4049093.item> (accessed 5 September 2016).

²³ *Le Populaire*, 6 February 1934, 1, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k821459r.item> (accessed 5 September 2016).

²⁴ *Le Populaire*, 7 February 1934, 1, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k821460p.item> (accessed 5 September 2016).

²⁵ Soucy, *French Fascism*, 36.

The size of the French fascist movement was thus considerable, especially in the context of the rise of fascism on an international scale. The conservative and right-wing press was supportive of particular actions of Hitler. Some of the more extreme papers even called for ententes with Italy, Germany and, after 1936, Franco's government in Spain. They were prepared to align themselves with fascism rather than risk the rise of socialism and communism. The CdF was a genuine threat to the future of the communists.

The second reason that it is problematic that historians underestimate the influence of the CdF relates to the fact that the Vichy regime can be seen as its ideological successor. Samuel Kalman notes the importance of the Faisceau in the 1920s and the CdF in the 1930s in preparing the ground for the broad acceptance of the Vichy regime. He writes that both of these groups wished to renovate and re-create the French state, just as Vichy would aim to do after the defeat. According to Kalman, they 'aspired to the conquest of power in order to implement their transformative program. In the process, they prepared a generation of right-wing French men and women to support an authoritarian state, creating a substantial clientele for the Vichy regime'.²⁶ Whilst this perhaps overstates how supportive the French population remained towards Vichy, the CdF, nevertheless, influenced the future Vichy ministers, as we shall see in Chapter Two. The parallels were not lost on the communists, who would oppose the Vichy regime just as they had opposed the CdF. The fascist leagues were seen as a threat due to their huge membership, paramilitary units and provocative rhetoric. The PCF and Comintern realised that, when faced with a strong fascist opponent, continued use of divisive tactics was detrimental to the party and dangerous for France.

The Popular Front in France

i) Adopting a cooperative policy to combat a common enemy

The self-identification of the French communists as anti-fascists prompted their opposition to the French leagues and convinced them to reassess their tactics and commit to the Popular Front. Ronald Tiersky, like Thorez, notes that the demonstration of 6 February 'was more importantly a catalyst for the union of the Left after fourteen years of bitter division'.²⁷ The Left was split from within and this made it particularly weak when

²⁶ Samuel Kalman, *The Extreme Right in Interwar France: the Faisceau and the Croix de Feu*, Cornwall, GB: Ashgate, 2008, 4.

²⁷ Ronald Tiersky, *French Communism, 1920-1972*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1974, 55.

confronted with the show of mass force from the Right throughout January and February 1934. The threat of the extreme Right precipitated the timely evolution of the French Left. The decision to form a cohesive left-wing agenda based on a common adherence to anti-fascism was fundamental in forming the identity of the communists as anti-fascists above all else. This stance subsequently impacted heavily on PCF opposition to the Vichy regime and the Nazis and on their resistance activities.

Why was the Left so divided in 1930s France? Their divisions can be traced back to the split within the socialists leading to the formation of a French communist party in 1920. After the socialists failed to achieve any of their political goals in the wake of World War I, many French socialists began to question the party's techniques and mentality. A majority of Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO) delegates voted for adhesion to the Third International at the Congress in Tours in December 1920. The Section Française de l'Internationale Communiste (SFIC) was thus formed and later became the PCF in October 1921. The major change in party structure for the newly formed PCF was its adherence to the Comintern. It was now inextricably linked to the international movement. The French communist leadership had to submit to the authority of Stalin and Comintern directives. In Chapter Two, we shall see that the close links between the Comintern and the PCF caused the PCF to be banned in 1939 and complicated its commitment to resistance up until June 1941. From 1928, the Soviet Union directed the PCF to implement the 'class against class' strategy. This directive was an ultra-sectarian line that 'set revolution as the immediate goal and defined Socialists and Social Democrats as enemies'.²⁸ This tactic was not popular because it divided votes on the Left. Unlike the Radicals and socialists, the PCF was consequently unable to capitalise on the vulnerability felt by the working classes as a result of the Depression in the election of 1932. The lowest membership figure of the PCF was recorded in 1933.²⁹

Faced with the growing fascist movement throughout Europe, the Comintern had to develop a more resilient tactic. In 1934, the PCF was able to use its individual experiences to impact decisions made in Moscow. James R. Barrett writes of the importance of the experiences of French and Spanish communists who were faced with strong national fascist movements in shaping the concept of the Popular Front. Both Barrett and Jackson focus on the fact that it was the timely combination of events in

²⁸ James R. Barrett, 'Rethinking the Popular Front,' *Rethinking Marxism*, 21: 4 (October, 2009), 531.

²⁹ Jackson, *The Popular Front*, 25.

France and policy debates in Moscow that resulted in the adoption in France of what would become known as the Popular Front policy. Barrett summarises the situation thus:

Popular Front is best understood not simply as “orders from Moscow,” but rather as the consequence of three related influences: rank-and-file agitation “from below” within the various national sections of the movement; internal debates and factionalism within the leadership of the Comintern; and the USSR’s pursuit of its security in the face of Nazi aggression.³⁰

By the time the Comintern officially adopted the Popular Front strategy in August 1935, both France and Spain had already begun the foundation for a Popular Front program. Barrett writes that in Spain the communists joined with the socialists and anarchists following the brutal response to workers’ protests in Asturias in 1934. In the case of France, he emphasises the fact that PCF leaders ‘developed the strategy in opposition to the growing French fascist movement and as the best chance for some measure of political influence’.³¹

Thorez reflected that it was the actions and violence of the right-wing leagues that prompted unity against fascism. He wrote: ‘The fury of the reactionary and Fascist press, its incitement to murder, the bitterness of its hatred ... linked indissolubly together all those who were determined to spare France the shame and horror of fascism.’³² While his reflections underplay the divisions on the Left, Thorez clearly articulated anti-fascism as the determining factor of political unity. On 12 February, separately massed communist and socialist demonstrations converged on the Place de la Nation. The initiative was taken by the rank-and-file who ‘rushed together chanting repetitively “Unity! Unity! Unity!”’.³³ Tiersky continues that ‘the SFIO and PCF leaders were more or less forced into accepting the principle of “unity of action” on the spot’.³⁴ The PCF officially adopted the program of the Popular Front four months later at their Ivry conference in June 1934.

The French Left was divided into three parties in the early 1930s: the Radical Socialists, the Socialists and the Communists. Thorez first approached the leader of the

³⁰ Barrett, ‘Rethinking the Popular Front,’ 533.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Thorez, *Son of the People*, 78-79.

³³ Tiersky, *French Communism*, 55.

³⁴ Ibid., 56.

SFIO, Léon Blum (1872-1950), to form a Popular Front alliance. Blum recognised that a French unity agreement, and the necessary change in policy, was a part of a larger Comintern campaign. He saw joining with the PCF as a bulwark against fascism spreading in France and as a pre-emptive step in preventing international aggression in Europe.³⁵ On 27 July, a 'Unity of Action' pact was signed by the communists and the socialists. A change of PCF tactics was essential in order to convince the Radicals that the PCF could evolve to become a viable political ally. The PCF abandoned its vigorous anti-military campaign, while the Franco-Soviet *rapprochement* of 1934 helped to legitimise further the PCF in the eyes of the Radicals.³⁶ By the summer of 1935 the Radicals were also signatories to the unity alliance. The Popular Front electoral program was signed on 11 January 1936.

The support shown for the Popular Front coalition in the April-May elections of 1936 signified for the communists the value of their new cooperative tactics. A majority of the eligible population voted for the victory of the Popular Front coalition, with Blum as prime minister. Walter Sharp wrote in *The American Political Science Review* in October 1936 that in France '[t]here was a desire, somewhat confused and not wholly articulate, for some sort of change. Within the general framework of democracy, new men with a new policy were sought.'³⁷ The success of the changes made by the PCF had a lasting impact on the leadership. The commitment of the PCF to the coalition government illustrates its growing understanding that joint action could help to achieve its goals, and in some cases was essential to defeat its enemies. Its previous sectarianism was thus abandoned for a cooperative policy that included 'not only Communists and Socialists but all progressive forces willing to join in the struggle against fascism'.³⁸ Thorez articulated the French communist position in his memoir. He wrote, '[w]e love France: the classic home of revolutions and class struggles, the cradle of humanism and liberty, where culture has always thrived. It is not a question of choosing between communism and fascism, but between fascism and democracy'.³⁹

The PCF took its new mandate seriously. Appeals were made to a wider audience in order to increase membership numbers. For example, the leadership realised that encouraging women to become official party members could not only expand their

³⁵ See Jean Lacouture, *Léon Blum*, trans. George Holloch, New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982, 215.

³⁶ Simon Dell, *The Image of the Popular Front: the masses and the media in interwar France*, Basingstoke, GB and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 54-55.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 868.

³⁸ Barrett, 'Rethinking the Popular Front,' 532.

³⁹ Thorez, *Son of the People*, 88.

membership, but also their activities, campaigns and policies. Women's experiences of the Popular Front and the anti-fascist struggle during the 1930s defined women's activism and involvement in communist groups. Their pre-war activism informed their choices and their perception of the opportunities for activism during the war. Given the urgency of the anti-fascist campaign, and the goal to form a 'popular' movement, women became more heavily involved in French communist politics than ever before. Communist women's parallel campaigns benefited the PCF. The women themselves benefited from their inclusive experience in Popular Front politics. As we will see, the women's branch of the PCF, formed in 1936, continued to operate during the war to facilitate the growth of communist resistance and survived into the post-war era.⁴⁰ The years of the Popular Front directly informed the PCF's approach to anti-fascism, to women's engagement, and its willingness to work alongside non-communists who shared its ideas about social and political justice.

ii) Change through cooperation: the valuable lessons of the Popular Front

After the 1936 elections there was an atmosphere of anticipation amongst Popular Front supporters. This was the first socialist-run government France had ever elected and so expectations were high. The month between the elections and the day when Blum and his cabinet could take office saw the beginning of a massive strike wave. By 11 June, five days after Blum took office, two million people were on strike. In the majority of cases, the strikes were, in reality, factory occupations that gave the workers a sense of community and control over their working lives. Occupation of factories meant that owners could not hire a different workforce, but instead had to listen to the workers' requests. The significance of the strike movement for my thesis is that it was an empowering experience for those involved that left a lasting impression on how they viewed collective action.

The strikes gave workers a sense of community and a chance to celebrate the beginning of a new political era in France, an era that they had been instrumental in securing. Over the course of June, the strikes began to evolve from factory occupations to make-shift camps with entertainment, food and drink. What originated as spontaneous performances to amuse the strikers, turned into more structured entertainment to

⁴⁰ The Union des Jeunes Filles de France formed in 1936 became the Union des Femmes Françaises (UFF) during the war. The UFF continued until 1998 when it became Femmes Solidaires.

celebrate the election victory and keep the strikers off the streets. At factories with male workers, women came during the day to deliver food to family members, or to show their support, but they always left before dark in order to adhere to prevailing societal norms. Simon Dell has analysed the press coverage of the strikes. He discusses the photos used, and the impression given not just of the strikes, but also of the strikers, including the many women involved. He describes the festival-like, peaceful and joyful atmosphere in the factories.⁴¹

Simone Weil, the renowned social philosopher, spent time working in a factory in the early 1930s in order to gain an understanding of the working class and their burdens. In her journal, she reflected on the difference in the mood of the workers during the 1936 strike wave compared to previous strikes. Weil wrote that the decisive factor for such a large and united strike movement was the election of the Popular Front government. She observed: 'Every worker, seeing the socialist party arriving in power, had the feeling that faced with the boss, he was no longer the weakest.'⁴² She highlighted the joy that could be felt in the factories. Where female workers had been isolated at their machine, they were now part of a community. Where they had been previously stuck in sedentary work, they could now wander around the factory, and where there had been only the noise of the machines there was now laughter, music, and singing.⁴³ For the first time the major department stores were forced to close because the shop assistants had joined the strikes and occupied their stores. Department store workers, usually well-dressed women, hung banners that shocked the public by revealing how low their wages really were.⁴⁴ Workers, male and female, were united and hopeful for the change they expected to come.

The new government wasted no time in enacting the social policy changes that all three members of the coalition had agreed upon. Joint action resulted in the formation of the Popular Front government which brought about significant change and immediate impact. In its first twelve weeks, the Popular Front government voted in 24 reforms and passed 113 laws. The first were the Matignon Agreements that gained new union rights, collective bargaining, paid holidays, wage rises of 12 per cent and reduction to a 40-hour

⁴¹ Simon J. Dell, 'Festival and Revolution: the Popular Front in France and the press coverage of the strikes of 1936,' *Art History*, 23: 4 (November, 2000): 599-621.

⁴² Simone Weil, *Œuvres Complètes, tome II: Écrits historiques et politiques, volume 2: l'expérience ouvrière et l'adieu à la révolution (juillet 1934-juin 1937)*, eds. André A. Devaux and Florence de Lussy, Paris: Gallimard, 1991, 356.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 357.

⁴⁴ See: Jackson, *The Popular Front*, 87-95. Sian Reynolds, *France Between the Wars: gender and politics*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996, 121-125.

week for all industrial workers. The government then launched a major public works program, nationalised the arms industry, democratised the Bank of France to give more input to shareholders and government, and established a national Wheat Board to control prices. The school-leaving age was raised to 14 years and the fascist paramilitary leagues were disbanded.⁴⁵ During the war, French conservatives in Vichy did not forgive the Popular Front coalition for their 'excessive' social policy changes.

The PCF was eager to create links between its rank-and-file members and two sections of French society from whom they were disconnected. The first was intellectuals. The PCF wanted the working class to engage with intellectuals, culture, history and a French cultural patrimony. The goal was to introduce those who had formerly been disempowered and isolated to the part they could play in the politics and culture of France. The second group was Catholics. Throughout the 1930s, the PCF made attempts to engage with the Catholic community under the program dubbed the 'outstretched hand'. The idea was to work with Catholics to continue to support, guide and improve workers' lives. It was referred to as the outstretched hand program because the communists had stretched out their hand to an ideological enemy.⁴⁶ While it had limited success, the concept had some impact. Later, multiple underground editions of communist resistance papers would include calls for Catholics to join the resistance struggle. It is evident that the PCF wished to expand not only its influence, but the influence of the working classes within French society.

The Popular Front encouraged a new engagement in public life for its members who had previously felt distanced from control over their circumstances. Youth, culture and leisure were central to the agenda of the Popular Front coalition. The government encouraged workers to enjoy leisure activities, such as the newly gained paid vacations, sports and youth hostels, some of which were solely for young women. The Popular Front was united by antifascism but had a broader range of goals. Rather than remaining on the fringes, the PCF and SFIO were able to direct policy. Their supporters, who had previously felt excluded from formal politics, had an opportunity, under the Popular Front, to be involved in the changes made by their government. Engaging women as part of the movement towards a Popular Front was one such example. A focus on building new

⁴⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁶ See John Hellman, 'French "Left-Catholics" and Communism in the Nineteen-Thirties,' *Church History*, 45: 4 (December, 1976): 507-523; Francis J. Murphy, *Communists and Catholics in France, 1936-1939: the politics of the Outstretched Hand*, Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1989.

forms of public engagement was also an important model for the resistance. During occupation it was necessary to court support and action in new ways in order to protect resisters and foster resistance. The PCF learnt the valuable lesson from its experience in the Popular Front that through unity and cooperation, it could win votes and drive change.

iii) Political opportunities for women and the initiatives of communist women leaders

During the era of the Popular Front, women had the opportunity to become more involved in French politics than ever before. Women's experiences of the Popular Front and the anti-fascist struggle defined women's pre-war communist activism. Through the inclusive new policy of the PCF, women members of the party were given the opportunity to be part of a broad-based political movement. This proved to be valuable training for communist women who remained active during the war.

One significant aspect of Blum's government was the appointment of three women as undersecretaries of state. Irène Joliot-Curie (1897-1956) was named Under-Secretary for Scientific Research. She was the daughter of Pierre and Marie Curie and had jointly won the Nobel Prize with her husband for the discovery of how to make ordinary substances radioactive. Suzanne Lacore (1875-1975) and Cécile Brunschvicg (1877-1946) were both assigned to the Ministry of Education. A retired teacher and socialist activist, Lacore became Under-Secretary for Child Welfare while Brunschvicg, President of the Union Française pour le Suffrage des Femmes, was named as Under-Secretary for Education. These three women also represented the coalition of the Popular Front: Joliot-Curie was close to the PCF, Lacore was a socialist veteran and Brunschvicg was involved with the Radical Party. Despite their limited control over policy, the significance of their appointment must not be overlooked. Naming women as government representatives of any kind was an important step in adjusting societal norms to accept women in the formal political process. Sian Reynolds notes: 'Co-opted, patronised, stereotyped, marginalised or cold-shouldered they may have been, and little though the episode did in the short term for the cause of suffrage, the few women parachuted into office were setting precedents, puncturing the all-male line-up of political personnel.'⁴⁷

All three women pushed the traditional boundaries of what was expected of women at the time. Reynolds continues that '[t]he favourable, indeed warm reaction of

⁴⁷ Reynolds, *France Between the Wars*, 162.

the press and public opinion to their appointment, and the courtesy shown by most parliamentarians to them, indicates that some symbolic barriers were crumbling.⁴⁸ None of the three women pushed for female suffrage, seemingly taking Blum's view that this was not the moment to raise the issue. Reynolds concludes: 'Responsibility without power maybe, but even minimum responsibility for political decision-making had previously been denied to women.'⁴⁹ This is the crux of the issue. These three women may have had little power but they were in government, which was more direct political power than French women had been given before. Women's role in public life was gradually being accepted in this albeit limited way.

It was the formation of an all-female branch in 1936 that really allowed unique opportunities for women within the PCF. Women had been accepted as communist activists from the inception of the PCF, but they had never before been a focus of communist activity. We will also see in the next chapter that creating a women's branch of the PCF provided the framework and future contacts for the extensive communist women's resistance network. Casanova was the one who suggested forming a female branch separate to the Jeunesses Communistes (JC). Casanova had moved to Paris from her native Corsica in late 1927 in order to continue her studies in dentistry. Soon after arriving in France she became an activist in the newly founded Union Fédérale des Étudiants (UFE). She was the representative for dentistry students and as a member of the UFE she took part in political discussions and was involved in producing the group's paper. In 1928 she joined the JC and took on the role of group secretary for the Faculty of Medicine.

Due to the rise of fascism in the 1930s, there were ever-increasing opportunities to become involved in the anti-fascist struggle before the war began. In the 1930s, Casanova was well-known in the communist rank-and-file and was chosen to be one of its representatives for more than one international conference. In February 1934 she was elected to the direction of the JC which grew rapidly over the next two years so that, by the end of 1935, it had 30,000 members.⁵⁰ In 1935 she was one of the French delegates sent to Moscow for the Congrès de l'Internationale Communiste des Jeunes which renewed her enthusiasm for the possibilities of communism. In 1936 she attended the

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Durand, *Danielle Casanova*, 57.

World Youth Congress (WYC) in Geneva as a representative of the communist youth movement. A total of 700 delegates from 25 countries attended the first WYC in Geneva. In 1938, Casanova attended the second WYC held in New York. The WYC participants signed a peace pact that condemned all wars of aggression. The pact called for all delegates to influence their governments by engaging in joint action to avoid conflict, to assist victims of aggression or to refuse any form of aid, material or financial, to aggressors themselves.⁵¹ It will become clear that the increased political engagement of women, particularly in the late 1930s as part of the anti-fascist struggle, provided an important precedent for the involvement of so many women in the French communist resistance.

The creation of the Union des Jeunes Filles de France (UJFF) changed how women were able to engage with the PCF and its activities. In March 1936, the eighth congress of the JC was held in Marseilles. More than 3,000 people attended, including the 442 delegates, 73 of whom were women.⁵² Due to the growing appeal of the PCF, and the subsequent growth of its membership, it was decided at this meeting to form three new separate groups for student, country and female supporters. Each was to have their own dedicated organisation which would focus on issues specific to their members. Women had been welcome to join the JC, which many did, but the majority felt excluded from the political agenda of a group that was geared towards its male members. Women were often given gendered jobs, such as secretary or treasurer, and were left to clean and organise the kitchen.⁵³ In other words, women were treated differently within the JC because they were women. As it was a mixed-gender group, many girls also had trouble convincing their parents to allow them to attend meetings and spend evenings at the JC premises. Casanova believed that to be gender inclusive it was necessary to form an all-female group that would have a wider appeal and address issues specific to young politically minded women.

Casanova realised that the only way to encourage women to join the PCF was to address their concerns and frame communism in a way that directly related to women. In her report on women members at the JC congress in March 1936, Casanova argued that 'the Federation of Young Communists could not call itself a mass organisation without

⁵¹ Ibid., 56.

⁵² Durand, *Danielle Casanova*, 57.

⁵³ Whitney, *Mobilising Youth*, 197.

having large numbers of female members'.⁵⁴ She explained that 'the stakes were high ... for both the movement and French young women. If the JC failed, young women would fall prey to fascist demagoguery; if fascism came to power in France, women would be delivered into even worse slavery than they already faced in capitalist France.'⁵⁵ Casanova wanted not merely to attract young women to communism but also to anti-fascism. Through the UJFF, women had the opportunity to learn the dangers of fascism and join the anti-fascist struggle. Susan Whitney writes about communist and Catholic youth organisations during the interwar decades. According to Whitney, 'Casanova made clear that Communists intended to build a mass organisation for young women by pursuing a gender-specific approach to Marxist-Leninist education and political activism'.⁵⁶

The UJFF thus provided opportunities to women who wanted a greater level of political engagement. Casanova had begun to approach and organise women of the JC before the congress in 1936. She had discussed the idea with Thorez in late 1935 and there were already 42 semi-organised girls' groups made up of JC members, ten of which were in Paris.⁵⁷ Once the initiative became official in 1936, the female organisers were named as follows: Casanova as secretary general, Jeannette Vermeersch (1910-2001) as education secretary, Claudine Chomat (1915-1995) as organisational secretary and Yvette Sémard (1912-2000) as fourth in the line of leadership.⁵⁸ Vermeersch married Thorez and spent the war in the Soviet Union alongside her husband, but the others went on to become members of the communist resistance. The first members of the UJFF were those who had been members of the JC. Many of these women needed convincing that it was sensible to cancel the mixed gender group and separate women into their own organisation. Some were concerned that it would be a waste of time or that the group would no longer focus on political issues. Others predicted it would turn into a glorified sewing group. Vaillant-Couturier 'at first thought the idea absurd', others called it 'idiotic'.⁵⁹ Once they were members of the UJFF, the sceptics quickly changed their minds as it became evident the group was committed to the political education of its members.

The UJFF was essential in the development of the anti-fascist campaign waged by French women. While the male leadership was not involved in the formation of the UJFF,

⁵⁴ Casanova quoted in Whitney, *ibid.*, 196.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Whitney, *ibid.*

⁵⁷ Durand, *Danielle Casanova*, 59.

⁵⁸ Whitney, *Mobilising Youth*, 196.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 197.

it did encourage women to develop the initiative for an all-female group. Women were responsible for all aspects of the UJFF. A one-day conference was held to give young women the chance to discuss the potential goals and desired organisation of the group. The first official UJFF congress was held in December 1936 in Paris. There were special guests, all prominent communist women, and Casanova gave the opening report. In this address she emphasised the centrality of the anti-fascist struggle to the women of the UJFF. She said:

To put one's work and one's intelligence in the service of the community is our destiny. We are all each other's sisters, friends, confidantes. ... We say to all our antifascist sisters, to all the friends of liberty and peace, that we are ready to put our forces to the service of a common task, to combine them in an organisation which shall be shared by all.⁶⁰

The UJFF was intentionally designed to appeal to the target audience of young anti-fascist women and to differ substantially from the JC so as to attract a large female following to the PCF. The first step in this process was to address the problems mentioned above that female members had identified with the JC. The results were promising. As noted, parents' discomfort with mixed gender JC meetings was one of the reasons there were not more female members. To address this issue, the leadership undertook to reassure parents that the UJFF was a safe and nurturing environment for their daughters. For example, young women were often walked home in the evenings. Furthermore, a number of local groups included mothers in their activities, allowing them to participate in meetings as a means of recommending the group for their daughters.⁶¹ As women ran the UJFF, their relegation to 'feminine' tasks was no longer a problem. The number of UJFF adherents swelled to reach 20,000 by December 1937.⁶² This was a significant achievement given that it was only slightly over a year old. In 1935 the JC had 30,000 members.

The French socialist women's organisation was never as popular as the UJFF. While attempts were made as early as 1928 to form a women's section of the socialist party, the women who took the initiative never aimed to attract members from outside the party. The German and Austrian socialist movements, like the French communists,

⁶⁰ Casanova quoted in Durand, *Danielle Casanova*, 60.

⁶¹ See *ibid.*

⁶² Whitney, *Mobilising Youth*, 208.

were able to form successful women's groups because they recruited women who were not necessarily socialists. In France, socialist women were concerned that broadening recruitment would turn it into a feminist organisation that would differentiate between the sexes when what they wanted was equality of the sexes. Charles Sowerwine, in his study of women and socialism, emphasises that French socialist women constantly lamented the fact that they were unable to mobilise more women to join the party or be more involved in party activities.⁶³ In March 1937 the number of women registered with the party in all of France was 6,648,⁶⁴ a low figure compared with the 20,000 UJFF members recorded in December of that year mentioned above. The success of the communists, regarding the inclusion of women, was that they were prepared to address and engage women separately from men in an attempt to create parallel but complementary arms of the party. This policy increased pre-war PCF membership and created a precedent for the engagement of women in the communist resistance.

iv) What unites also divides: the undoing of the Popular Front government

The different reactions of the coalition members to international events from 1936-1938 brought the divisions between the Radicals, socialists and communists to the fore and rendered the Popular Front government unstable. The ongoing fight against fascism led to the disintegration of the Blum ministry after only 13 months. Tension arose between coalition members because the communists prioritised the fight against fascism but the socialists prioritised their anti-war campaign. Blum was a pacifist and a self-proclaimed idealist. He wrote an article for a British journal, published in 1933, in which he articulated his agenda for peace in Europe.⁶⁵ Blum considered that cooperative action, based on an agreed policy of disarmament, was the key to peace. He acknowledged that this was difficult for European countries, even France, to embrace because all countries were concerned for their national security. Blum's was an idealistic plan that was not realistic in inter-war Europe.

The difference of opinion over the French government's reaction to the Spanish Civil War was the first sign of division within the Popular Front. In July 1936, General Francisco Franco led a military coup to overthrow the elected Spanish Popular Front

⁶³ Charles Sowerwine, *Sisters or Citizens? Women and socialism in France since 1876*, Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁶⁵ Léon Blum, 'Public Opinion in France,' *The Political Quarterly*, (1933): 58-67.

government, thereby initiating the Spanish Civil war. French communists were willing to become involved in the war in Spain because they prioritised the fight against fascism. The socialists and Radicals, however, prioritised their pursuit of peace over their commitment to anti-fascism. Blum's first response aligned with that of the communists, who felt that it was important to support the Spanish Popular Front and respond favourably to its request for arms. After a meeting with the British, the closest military ally of France, and the uproar of the French Right against providing aid to the Spanish Republicans, Blum, however, altered his decision and opted for a policy of non-intervention.⁶⁶ The communists criticised the change of policy. The French communists wanted to send arms to their Spanish comrades in order to help them resist the coup. Almost 9,000 French communist militants joined the fighting in Spain as members of the International Brigades.⁶⁷ Daniel Hucker focuses on the complicated nature of the pacifist debate during the interwar years in France. He draws attention to the fear of war, classifying the sentiment of the majority of the population as one of 'next war anxiety' rather than a complete refusal to resort to war. French people were still recovering from the physical, material and psychological experiences of the Great War and were inclined to want to avoid war if it was at all possible.⁶⁸ The campaign run by the Popular Front in France was not sufficient to hold the communists and socialists together in a time of international uncertainty.

The Spanish Civil War also had significance as a defining experience for French women committed to the anti-fascist struggle. The civil war in Spain was seen by anti-fascists as a turning point. The American journalist Martha Gellhorn (1908-1998) said: 'We knew, we just *knew*, that Spain was the place to stop Fascism. This was it. It was one of those moments in history when there was no doubt.'⁶⁹ Women from all over the world, prompted by the 'loathing of fascism, dread of war and belief in democracy',⁷⁰ volunteered for the International Brigades on the side of the Spanish Republicans. Women from Australia, New Zealand, Britain, the US and Europe volunteered as nurses, teachers, aid workers, reporters and on rare occasions, fighters. Female engagement in

⁶⁶ See: Large, *Between Two Fires*, 238-239.

⁶⁷ Antony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain: the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2006.

⁶⁸ Daniel Hucker, 'French Public Attitudes Towards the Prospect of War in 1938-1939: 'Pacifism' or 'War Anxiety'?', *French History*, 21: 4 (December, 2007): 431-449.

⁶⁹ Gellhorn quoted in Large, *Between Two Fires*, 243. Emphasis in the original.

⁷⁰ Sally Alexander, 'Introduction,' in *Women's Voices from the Spanish Civil War*, eds. Jim Fyrth and Sally Alexander, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1991, 14.

Spain set a precedent for women's varied and direct involvement in an armed anti-fascist battle. Large writes that many of the volunteers, both women and men, 'were exiles from European Fascist or authoritarian regimes who saw the Spanish war as an opportunity to strike a blow at fascism and thereby begin a crusade that might lead to the liberation of their own countries'.⁷¹ Though women were rarely fighters, militiawomen did feature in communist accounts of the conflict. Due to their minority status, militiawomen, usually of Spanish origin, became martyrs and role models for the strength of the anti-fascist campaign. The most famous was Dolores Ibárruri, known as La Pasionaria, who fought for the Republicans. Large notes that the 'first English volunteer to die ... was a woman: the painter Felicia Browne.'⁷² During the Spanish Civil War, women experienced the consequences and importance of their commitment to the anti-fascist struggle. They also gained experience in how their participation could contribute to the international campaign.

When faced with the Munich crisis, the French communists once again favoured a show of strength against fascist aggression, while the socialists and Radicals continued to explore possibilities that would avoid war. The French Popular Front coalition no longer agreed on their core uniting principles. Due to their position over the handling of the Spanish Civil War, the communists abstained from a vote of confidence in December 1936. In June 1937, Blum's cabinet fell apart and by January 1938 the socialists had reduced their participation in the government.⁷³ In March 1938, Hitler annexed Austria by sending troops to Vienna to place Nazi sympathisers in charge of the government. After the resignation of Chautemps, Blum was returned as leader of the French government. It was too late for him, though, to influence the course of international events. After yet another change of cabinet in September 1938, the newly formed Radical government, headed by Daladier, was faced with the Munich crisis. Neville Chamberlain, then Prime Minister of Britain, had been in talks with Hitler to prevent the German army from entering Czechoslovakia. After Hitler made negotiations difficult, Chamberlain suggested meeting again with France, Germany, Italy and Britain in attendance in order to solve the Czech crisis. On 29 September 1938, the Munich Agreement was signed. This accord

⁷¹ Large, *Between Two Fires*, 242.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ See Jackson, *The Popular Front*, 12-13.

allowed for the evacuation of Czech citizens and the Nazi military occupation of the ethnic German territories.

Appeasement was rejected by the communists, who believed that a united anti-fascist front was all that could stop the triumph of fascism. The headline of the 30 September edition of *L'Humanité* illustrates the unfavourable opinion of the PCF. It read: 'In Munich the 'Four' decide the fate of Czechoslovakia in her absence.'⁷⁴ Owing to the communists' clear position against fascism, which suffered a setback in August 1939 as we shall see in the next chapter, they were convinced that the only way to deal with Nazi Germany was to oppose it. Jackson emphasises that '[o]nly the Communists opposed the agreement unanimously; the rest of the French political class was agonisingly divided'.⁷⁵ There was no longer agreement in how to oppose fascism. The PCF's persistent adherence to the anti-fascist campaign was preparation for their resistance during World War II. It also established, for the Nazis, that the French communists were their clear ideological opponents.

New opportunities for women despite lingering restrictions

The status of women in French society remained ambiguous throughout the 1930s. Women increasingly entered public life, but in a manner that remained gendered. We will see that this ambiguity was important in shaping the nature of women's roles in the communist resistance. Women continued to be marginalised and excluded throughout the 1930s even as the range of opportunities available to French women expanded. Angela Kershaw and Angela Kimyongür argue that the most accurate studies of women in the aftermath of World War I concentrate on the contradictions and the complexities of the situation of French women. The important point they underline is that both 'progressive and regressive definitions of femininity existed simultaneously during the interwar period'.⁷⁶ This is a trend evident in communist-run organisations as well. The example of the three female undersecretaries highlights the dichotomy during the 1930s. The appointment of Joliot-Curie, Lacore and Brunschvicg was progressive in that they were the first women to be appointed to such posts. However, their appointment did not change the status of women within French politics overall. Although political roles

⁷⁴ *L'Humanité*, 30 September 1938, 1.

⁷⁵ Jackson, *The Popular Front*, 13.

⁷⁶ Angela Kershaw and Angela Kimyongür eds., 'Introduction', in *Women in Europe between the Wars: politics, culture and society*, Hampshire, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2007, 6.

available to women remained limited, the Popular Front era was full of promise for women wishing to be politically engaged. Despite the collapse of the Popular Front coalition, women's inclusion as political actors remained as a legacy of the Popular Front era.

The status of women in France in the 1930s provides essential context for my thesis. Their standing in French society defined and influenced women's choices and experiences both in the pre-war era and during the war. Kershaw and Kimyongür argue that some worried that women's growing independence meant that they would forget their responsibility to domestic duties. Kershaw and Kimyongür note that the

desire to ensure that women's dedication to their traditional domestic destinies did not waver manifested itself in a public preoccupation with the public and private conduct of women, with their appearance, with their clothes and hair, with their adoption of such unfeminine habits as drinking and smoking.⁷⁷

The changing status of women in the 1930s gave them more choices when determining the direction of their lives but also made them susceptible to criticisms of unfeminine behaviour. I argue that the widespread participation of women in the communist resistance was heavily influenced by two key factors during the 1930s. The first was the wider social trend towards the increased engagement of women in public life. The second was their experience of united front politics based on a platform of anti-fascism. Both these factors were influenced by the evolving status of women in France. The greater inclusion of women in the PCF was one aspect of the widening social and political engagement of French women during the 1930s.

There remained significant limitations on women despite the increased options they had in 1930s France. Kershaw and Kimyongür emphasise that the 'coexistence of constraints and freedoms is striking: on the one hand, inter-war women could begin to take advantage of new opportunities, whilst on the other, they still had to resist the limitations which continued to be placed around their sphere of activity'.⁷⁸ Women's involvement in the public sphere continued to be constrained, but the 1930s was an important decade for the expansion of women's prospects. The range of occupations available to women increased greatly over the course of the Third Republic. This was

⁷⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 6.

usually due either to the changing nature of the professions themselves or the efforts of pioneering women who wished to enter fields previously dominated by men. A number of general changes also occurred that fostered the inclusion of women in more varied professions: girls' education improved, the *baccalauréat* was opened to females in 1924, and it was becoming more necessary than before for women to adopt a profession in order to provide for themselves.

Women's expanding employment outside the home provides a useful indication of the changes in women's social and legal status in general during the 1930s. Juliette Rennes stresses the importance of professionalisation on women's greater employment opportunities. In her article concerned with women's professional work in the Third Republic, Rennes explains that it became necessary for men and women to have a professional qualification in order to obtain work in a growing number of fields. This development made the recruitment process more equitable and available to more women.⁷⁹ Rennes also notes that when women applied to enter training to become doctors, lawyers and engineers they stirred up debates that ultimately opened the way to other women in these professions. This technique, however, did not always break barriers for women's inclusion in new professions. For example, after one woman had been accepted into psychiatry, the admission requirements were altered to include political citizenship, thereby excluding women. The Ministry of Finance allowed women to enter the department as clerks, but prohibited their promotion to tax-collector using a stipulation that all applicants had to 'supply written proof of their status in regard to military law'.⁸⁰ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also blocked women from becoming diplomats, once again with a clause that required applicants have political citizenship. A contributor to the feminist weekly *La Française* wrote that 'where the door had seemed to open, somebody made sure it was in fact only slightly ajar'.⁸¹

The few professions dominated by women were those to which women were believed to be best suited due to their assumed 'natural' affinity for work that involved caring for others. Women were readily accepted as nurses, especially after flourishing in this profession during World War I. The majority of primary school, and a large proportion

⁷⁹ Juliette Rennes, 'The French Republic and Women's Access to Professional Work: issues and controversies in France from the 1870s to the 1930s,' *Gender and History*, 23: 2 (August, 2011): 341-366.

⁸⁰ 'Nos campagnes: les femmes dans les trésoreries et les recettes générales,' *La Française*, 2 April 1909, quoted in Rennes, *ibid.*, 358.

⁸¹ 'Les injustices de l'état masculin,' *La Française*, 15 February 1930, quoted in Rennes, *ibid.*

of secondary school teachers, were female. Female teachers received equal pay and were able to continue working after they were married.⁸² Such professional equality was significant in an era in which women had unequal legal and political status. Women had worked in factories and *ateliers* in France since before World War I. During the 1930s, when welfare work increased, women were employed as welfare supervisors, *surintendantes*, responsible for women workers' health and welfare at the factory.⁸³ The appearance of more women in the workforce, albeit at first only in certain professions, was ultimately positive for the cause of women's rights.

The ambiguity of the position of women in French society allowed women to carve out new spaces for themselves in the public sphere. Just as female communist militants had to take the initiative for organising their own women's groups, women often had to force their way into professions. New technologies often fostered new professional opportunities for women. Aviation was a growing industry both for leisure and commerce during the interwar years. Reynolds writes of one program that was available only to women. It was called '*l'aviation sanitaire* – a privately organised flying ambulance service, associated with the Red Cross, which recruited and trained women nurses: the idea was that they would serve and if necessary be parachuted into areas of need from planes flown by women pilots'.⁸⁴ (This program never went ahead as a military operation.) The typewriter was another invention that seemingly offered professional opportunities to women. Women were trained to use the typewriter alongside men after its invention in the 1880s. As a result, both women and men were hired as secretaries. Men tended to be promoted, however, while women were not. Radio and cinema, both relatively new technologies, gave women new opportunities with no obvious restrictions.⁸⁵ The difficulty for women was that there were increasing contradictions within French society between women's political and civil rights, their assumed abilities and affinities, and their actual willingness and capabilities. Women's opportunities were curtailed by stereotypes of feminine competencies. A double standard had emerged in French society because the formal definition of women's status had not been revised in order to reflect accurately the greater informal engagement of women in political and social life in 1930s France. This double standard is at the heart of the woman question during the interwar decades.

⁸² Reynolds, *France Between the Wars*, 98.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

Women's choices, and the consequences of their actions, continued to be informed by this double standard throughout the occupation.

The contradictions regarding the status of women in France became more problematic as women continued to push the boundaries of what was expected of them. Women's increased civic engagement clearly illustrates that women were indeed citizens without formal citizenship. Their involvement in domestic and international anti-fascist and/or peace groups was the largest aspect of women's growing civic engagement during the 1930s. Women's commitment to anti-fascism in the pre-war era directly informed their attitude towards the outbreak of war and the occupation of France. Two international peace conferences heralded the expansion of the anti-fascist movement. The first was held in Amsterdam in 1932, the second in Paris in 1933 at the Salle Pleyel. Two communist intellectuals and novelists, Romain Rolland and Henri Barbusse, both of whom had protested against World War I, sponsored these conferences which were the beginnings of the larger movement that came to be known as the Amsterdam-Pleyel movement.

Women's anti-fascist and anti-war campaigns were taking on new-found significance in the tense political setting of the 1930s. Many women-only groups were founded as part of the anti-fascist struggle. One example was the Comité Mondiale des Femmes Contre la Guerre et le Fascisme (CMFCGF) which was born in the wake of the violence of February 1934. Informally aligned with the communist party, with close ties to the Amsterdam-Pleyel movement, its goal was to coordinate various campaigns that were of direct interest to women. Dell quotes one of the leaders of the CMFCGF, Gabrielle Duchêne, explaining the aim of the group in the first issue of their paper, *Les Femmes dans l'Action Mondiale*: 'the committee was a "mobilisation of all feminine forces ... brought about to combat war, to combat fascism and, in general, to resist all attacks on the material and moral condition of women"'.⁸⁶ Dell expands on Duchêne's description in order to underline the point that, like other anti-fascist groups, the CMFCGF linked the anti-fascist struggle with other struggles against oppression, in this case the feminist struggle. Dell concludes that the success of the committee can be seen in its 1936 membership figure of 600,000.⁸⁷ It provided women with contacts of like-minded individuals and the opportunity to campaign on all issues that concerned women, not just

⁸⁶ Dell, *The Image of the Popular Front*, 52. Ellipses in the original.

⁸⁷ Ibid. Same figure given in Reynolds, *France Between the Wars*, 197.

the anti-fascist struggle. Women's involvement in political campaigns during the 1930s gave them invaluable experience before they were faced with a series of difficult decisions during the war.

The balance of femininity and political engagement in the UJFF

The organ of the UJFF depicted their female members as remaining within the established gender stereotypes even as they pushed the boundaries of what was expected of French women. To the UJFF these were not mutually exclusive categories. The coexistence of traditional and modern values of womanhood is a characteristic of the 1930s. The monthly paper created by the UJFF in May 1936 was titled *Jeunes Filles de France*. The first edition contained an editorial by Casanova in which she wrote of French girls united in their vision of a positive future for France. Her only allusion to communism was praise of the Soviet Union, while her references to politics remained limited to her endorsement of the recent electoral triumph of the Popular Front. Casanova even addressed parents' expectations: 'Parents will read [*Jeunes filles de France*] to their children because it is an honest paper of social and cultural education that will make of their daughters true daughters of France.'⁸⁸ Her vision of the UJFF clearly established that it was an organisation designed to educate and engage young women with progressive social and political ideals within the framework of what was considered acceptable behaviour for women in 1930s France.

The magazine consistently included articles about political life and education, but on the whole the content resembled far more traditional women's magazines such as *Marie Claire*. All articles in the *Jeunes Filles de France* were clearly directed towards female readers and interests. The publication was not openly tied to communist ideologies. Instead, the majority of articles concerned fashion, sewing patterns, cooking, make-up, culture, employment, health and home-making. Advice was provided on a regular basis concerning unemployment, the treatment of illnesses such as tuberculosis, and childcare. The paper also addressed more 'frivolous' female interests with featured photographs, articles on the cinema, fashion and romance. In May 1937, the publication introduced a letters-to-the-editor section, allowing women to write in with their problems or opinions. The communist deputy Jacques Duclos (1896-1975), also responsible for party propaganda, promoted the publication because he supported the

⁸⁸ Casanova quoted in Durand, *Danielle Casanova*, 62.

idea that producing a popular women's magazine would encourage more women members by 'engaging with the diverse preoccupations of female readers'.⁸⁹ He stated: 'Yes, women comrades, members of the Communist Party, just because you are Communists does not mean you should not concern yourselves with fashion and the questions of love and psychology which interest your sisters.'⁹⁰ Women of the UJFF were encouraged both to adhere to gender stereotypes, and to break free of them.

Jeunes Filles de France perpetuated a traditional view of personal relationships and the family. The UJFF publication encouraged women to send in their ideas about love for a special series. Casanova herself introduced a series of articles titled 'The song of love'. She wrote:

At the threshold of love, sometimes anxious, [young girls] wonder about the future, think of their fellow traveller with whom, by joint effort, they will find joy, happiness ... Is it too much to ask that the path of our life follow our modest and delightful dreams? We do not think so and we are convinced that we will together, shoulder to shoulder, work to construct our homes with good foundations.⁹¹

Adhering further to traditional gender norms, the magazine also focused on marriage and motherhood. Whitney writes that '[p]hotographs of babies and mothers with children dotted the pages of *Jeunes Filles de France*, with one capturing Maurice Thorez and Jeannette Vermeersch, the first couple of French communism, gazing warmly down at the cradle, doll, and baby clothes'⁹² that formed part of a display at the UJFF's 'Exhibition of Works by Young Women'. It is hardly necessary to mention that the JC did not focus on fatherhood or the search for true love as the UJFF did. The UJFF was clearly not merely a female version of the JC but, instead, a distinctive group that was designed to guide women in all aspects of life, both political and personal. Consequently, French communism was reimagined through the activities and interests of French girls and their families. The new approach of French communists towards gender in the 1930s impacted on the involvement of women in the communist resistance.

Through the UJFF, the PCF was able to mobilise communist women both in its political campaigns and its endeavour to reinvent the image of the party. The gendered

⁸⁹ Duclos quoted in Whitney, *Mobilising Youth*, 200.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 201. From his speech to the party congress in July 1936.

⁹¹ Casanova quoted in Durand, *Danielle Casanova*, 63.

⁹² Whitney, *Mobilising Youth*, 203.

focus of the UJFF on family and marriage allowed the PCF the opportunity to promote their newly adopted family policies. The women's group garnered support for the PCF's proposal for interest-free loans of 5,000 francs for young married couples. In this instance, women were directly involved in a policy campaign in order to attract widespread support on a scale that would not have been possible had the PCF solely addressed men. The perception of the PCF as a devoted campaigner for the French family further aided its goal of becoming a mainstream political alternative. In her discussion of *Jeunes filles de France*, Whitney analyses a number of articles. She discusses examples which encouraged women to remove hair from their arms and legs, described how to do the latest style of make-up and listed the best techniques for creating a perfect tan. Anti-communism of the 1920s and 1930s had attacked the unfeminine look of female communists and claimed that the masculine style of these women was symbolic of the destructive potential of communist ideology.⁹³ Restyling the modern communist woman as attractive and fashionable was important to the rehabilitation of the PCF in order to allow a new acceptance of communist ideology in France.

Young women were singled out to receive a tailored education and specific opportunities for involvement in communist activities by the UJFF. Whitney notes that the communist leaders of the UJFF had to 'create a gender-specific approach that educated young women in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism' by, in Casanova's words, 'taking into account the distinctiveness, the character, and the aspirations and needs of young women'.⁹⁴ At the December 1936 UJFF congress, Casanova argued that it was no longer possible for women to be uninterested in the political, economic or social problems that had arisen during the 1930s: 'The conquest of happiness is, for women, linked to their freedom to thrive in society, this thriving is a necessary condition of the development of social progress.'⁹⁵ Casanova believed that in order for society to develop as a whole, women's status had to improve. This would only be possible if women became involved in the functioning of the society they wished to change. The UJFF allowed women to be interested in beauty, cooking and sewing whilst at the same time encouraging them to have an interest in politics and professional occupations. The PCF

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁹⁵ Casanova quoted in Durand, *Danielle Casanova*, 63.

had begun to engage women as a group that could be mobilised differently from men but towards the same goal.

French women had limited political influence during the 1930s but their inclusion in the activities of the UJFF and the PCF empowered female communist supporters and encouraged women to be more involved in political campaigns. The UJFF magazine encouraged women to involve themselves in strike action, demonstrations and trade unions. Gender equality was another focus of the political education of UJFF members. Fascist ideas about women and their inferiority were criticised while the Soviet Union was depicted as a leading advocate of gender equality. In the USSR, schools and classes were mixed, women worked in the same jobs as men, and they were no longer economically or legally dependent on male members of their families, whether husbands or fathers. Significantly, all UJFF organisers were women.⁹⁶ This was an important aspect of the UJFF as it allowed women to develop their own initiatives, a point that will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Four.

The UJFF leadership encouraged women to be political activists. Their campaign during the Spanish Civil War is an excellent example of how their activities were separate from, and yet connected to, those of the PCF. As we have seen, the Spanish Civil War was especially important because it set a precedent for women's involvement in a broad-based political and social campaign. Individuals' participation in support of the Spanish republicans, either as guerrilla fighters or humanitarians, was later noted in the personal files prepared by the police in 1939 and 1940 as evidence of militant activities, as we shall see in Chapter Two. The UJFF organised a campaign for a collection of milk for the Spanish children 'who were being starved under the bombs'.⁹⁷ The aim was to encourage French *marraines*, literally meaning godmothers, to donate money and milk to support Spanish children and their struggling mothers. This was a woman's traditional care-giving role in the context of a political event which also had political ramifications. Casanova herself went to Spain to deliver the first tonnes of milk collected by the UJFF for Spanish mothers. Durand writes that the 'horror of the conflict deeply moved her'.⁹⁸ Male members of the PCF went to fight, while the women were involved in separate, but connected, humanitarian campaigns.

⁹⁶ See Durand, *Danielle Casanova* and Whitney, *Mobilising Youth*.

⁹⁷ Durand, *Danielle Casanova*, 65.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

As members of the UJFF, women were also involved in social campaigns that had a political impact. Whitney lists a number of activities undertaken by UJFF members that illustrate how they were able to engage in local politics through their social campaigns. She notes that UJFF members ‘collected and distributed gifts to young women confined to sanatoria; knitted and sewed for local families hit by unemployment; and sponsored fundraising efforts to aid the disadvantaged of all ages.’⁹⁹ The focus of their support was young women, but families also benefited from the work of the UJFF. Similar forms of charitable social work were undertaken by women’s groups throughout the war in order to support clandestine resisters, arrested activists and their families. The UJFF assisted unemployed youth by organising group meetings, clothing drives and visiting those who were unable to receive unemployment insurance. These activities fostered communities within working-class areas and helped to continue the process of changing the perception of the PCF. The changes the PCF had made to their approach to popular engagement allowed female leaders to develop their knowledge of group management and campaigning. This was invaluable experience for operations they would undertake as resisters. Whitney concludes:

Communist antifascist youth politics had evolved considerably since their beginnings in 1933. From an approach that privileged revolutionary political struggle and violence and was resolutely male, Communists adopted one that abandoned revolutionary politics in favour of support for the Third Republic, national defence, the family, and more conventional notions of femininity.¹⁰⁰

The change of approach allowed women to become more involved in the political agenda of the PCF. Women’s direct involvement was necessary for mass appeal and popular activism. The UJFF succeeded in engaging women in politics by using informal methods of activism and by focusing on the social implications of political action.

From this discussion of the UJFF, it is clear that communist women were politically engaged in the 1930s despite entrenched gender barriers. The ideal woman of the UJFF was one who was emancipated from her role as second-in-command of the family, but she was nonetheless expected to marry and have a family. She had greater choice of occupations and was entitled to the same pay and benefits as men for the same work.

⁹⁹ Whitney, *Mobilising Youth*, 205.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 207-208.

She was politically engaged and active, but still without suffrage. She was a citizen who deserved equal rights but always remained ‘feminine’ in behaviour and appearance. Geoff Read, writing of women in the CdF, makes an important observation. He argues that even the ‘properly feminine’ roles within the CdF ‘provided right-wing women with an opportunity to become politically involved and to have their own role in a political endeavour validated’.¹⁰¹ It was the same for women involved in the PCF through participation in the UJFF. They were expected to be occupied with ‘feminine’ interests, but through these groups women, nevertheless, had their political activities validated and tied to a widespread political movement.

UJFF members were targeted through campaigns that acknowledged how they were different from men. The UJFF marked a new era for women’s political engagement. UJFF women militants were given gender-specific activities that were intended to complement and broaden the effects and activities of the PCF and its other campaigns. As part of the UJFF, women were given the opportunity to be informally involved in politics and the antifascist struggle. In the process, female UJFF members had a practical opportunity to understand and influence domestic and international politics. Many of the women involved in organising and running the UJFF became leaders of the communist resistance. Many of the rank-and-file members of the UJFF also became members of the communist resistance. As we shall see, the development of women’s political activism during the 1930s informed their choices to join the resistance. The UJFF gave women experience in organised political activity.

Conclusion

The anti-fascist struggle of the 1930s determined not only the policies adopted by the PCF, but also the increased engagement of communist activists. The lessons learnt from its experience as a member of the Popular Front coalition were invaluable at the outbreak of war. In particular, we will see that Popular Front tactics had a great impact on how the communists approached forming a resistance network. Even while French communists struggled with the ramifications of their connection to the Comintern at the outbreak of war, their commitment to domestic anti-fascism helped the PCF to define their stance. All

¹⁰¹ Geoff Read , ‘Was there a fascist femininity?: gender and French fascism in political context,’ in *The French Right between the Wars: political and intellectual movements from conservatism to fascism*, eds. Samuel Kalman and Sean Kennedy, New York: Berghahn Books, 2014, 134.

resistance networks suffered ideological divisions at different times during the war. We know it occurred, but overall the ideological difficulties experienced by the communists did not prevent them from organising successful resistance after the original confusion caused by the Nazi-Soviet pact. During the 1930s, the communists learned what policies did and did not work and were subsequently able to apply their experience when it came to their resistance movement. The PCF response to occupation was rooted in the Popular Front tactics of the late 1930s.

Women's status remained ambiguous throughout the 1930s. Women's involvement in the PCF was no exception to this general rule. They were able to participate in PCF campaigns in a way that remained gendered, but nevertheless empowered young women. Women's engagement in the PCF was one aspect of the widening social and political engagement of women during the 1930s. Women's experiences of the Popular Front and the anti-fascist struggle defined women's communist activism during the 1930s. In the following chapter, we will see the importance for female resisters of their experiences in the Popular Front. This chapter has established the opportunities that communism gave French women.

Chapter Two

The Transition from Legal Party to *Illégale* Organisation to Resistance Network, 1939-1941

All of Europe felt the threat of war increasing throughout 1939. The worsening of international relations was mirrored in the increased tension of domestic politics. September 1939 saw the invasion of Poland by Germany and the beginning of World War II. For the French communists, 1939 signified the signing of the non-aggression pact between Hitler and Stalin and the banning of the PCF. A large part of France was occupied from June 1940. The French people had to come to terms with military occupation and its consequences. The years 1940 and 1941 were problematic for the underground PCF. They operated in opposition to the Vichy regime and yet could not undertake overt resistance activities against the Nazis due to the non-aggression pact. From the beginning of the occupation of France through to the collapse of the Nazi-Soviet pact, however, the PCF was able to build its underground network and develop valuable clandestine tactics.

This chapter makes three points that contribute to the argument of my thesis. Firstly, it provides early examples of female resistance to illustrate how the PCF was able to exploit traditional gender roles for the benefit of its clandestine organisation. We will observe that women had an essential role in re-forming the communist party underground in 1939. As a consequence of gender stereotypes and accepted gender norms, women were able to perform certain resistance tasks more freely than men. Secondly, I draw attention to the unique advantages and drawbacks of occupied Paris as a location for resistance. Aspects of daily life in a large city such as Paris impacted on the choices and organisation of the communist resistance. Thirdly, this chapter examines the details of the Vichy regime's policies that specifically targeted women so as to explain the status of women within French society during this time of complicated domestic politics.

Rising tensions with the approach of war, 1939

During the course of 1938 and 1939, international events continued to escalate until war became unavoidable. French society was still recovering economically, demographically

and psychologically from the war that was once believed would end all wars. The *Anschluss* in March 1938 and the Munich agreement in September of that year, illustrated the increased likelihood of war. In February 1939, the French government recognised Franco and his fascist followers as the legitimate Spanish government. Known to be sympathetic to the fascist government, Marshal Philippe Pétain was named the French Ambassador to Spain. Pétain was revered as a war hero, the 'Saviour of Verdun'. He later came to show the extent of his fascist sympathies as leader of the Vichy regime from 1940-1944. In early 1939, the PCF strongly advocated an alliance with the Soviet Union. After initial talks, France and Britain were too slow to commit to an agreement and lost their opportunity to establish a multilateral treaty. In Moscow, on 22 August 1939, a mutual non-aggression pact was signed by Germany and the USSR. It became clear that Hitler expected to go to war for his beliefs.

The PCF was unsure how to react to the signing of the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact. The French communists were unquestionably taken by surprise. The announcement came while the leaders of the party were away from Paris during their summer break. Three days later the party released a statement from Thorez which supported the pact, but also made it clear that the PCF remained resolutely anti-fascist. Its statement presented the non-aggression pact as a further effort to encourage peace, similar to the Munich agreement. The PCF leaders immediately recognised that their connection to the Nazi-Soviet pact through the Comintern would cause problems for them in their domestic politics. The statement addressed this concern by emphasising that the French communists remained loyal to the French nation despite allegiances to their ideological mentor: 'if despite all, Hitler begins war, let him be in no doubt that he will find before him the people of France, the communists in the front line, defending the security of the country'.¹ Ronald Tiersky accounts for the potentially conflicting assertions of the statement as 'evidence of the French Communist reluctance to believe the former antifascist posture was relaxed, and that the Comintern line was to be somersaulted in a way that left France directly in the path of German expansionism'.²

The PCF was confused by the policy 'somersault' and did not abandon its commitment to anti-fascism that had popularised and expanded the party. However, the good faith and legitimacy of the PCF were questioned in France as a consequence of the

¹ In Tiersky, *French Communism*, 98-99.

² *Ibid.*, 98.

signing of the pact, just as the leadership had feared. Daladier's government left no time for the PCF to define its position. The communist daily newspapers, *L'Humanité* and *Ce Soir*, were banned on 25 August. The French government reasoned that they were concerned about printed material that could undermine national defence or morale and did not want to risk the publication of opinions that could divide the country internally. Interestingly, the front page headline of the next edition of *L'Humanité* was to have read: 'Union of the French Nation against the Hitlerien aggressor'.³ The article did discuss the positive aspects of the Nazi-Soviet pact as expected, but it also reminded readers of the Franco-Soviet pact in place since 1934, and emphasised the importance of French unity against fascist aggression. The French government did not pause to assess the subtleties of the position of the PCF. The isolation of the PCF had begun.

The Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact had a number of consequences for the PCF and its future. War against Germany was declared by Britain and France on 3 September. The minimal tolerance that remained for the PCF was shattered towards the end of that month. Most likely after receiving directives from the USSR, the PCF adjusted its stance to adhere completely to that of the Comintern. Once the Red Army joined Nazi forces entering Poland, the Soviet Union had officially entered the war as an enemy of France. The PCF then criticised the French government for declaring war on Germany without an agreement in parliament. The French communists argued that it was an imperialist war being waged by capitalist forces in which France should not be involved. The Daladier government responded by banning the PCF and all its affiliates on 27 September 1939. All communist mayors, deputies and supporters had to stand down and any individual was prohibited from following directives of the Third International.⁴ The PCF was now illegal in France. As a consequence, the party and its militants were pushed underground. Thorez, who had re-joined his army unit at the beginning of hostilities, fled to the Soviet Union where he stayed for the remainder of the conflict. Jacques Duclos, a communist deputy, and Benoît Frachon (1893-1975), a leading syndicalist, took on the responsibility of directing the clandestine network. Male militants known to the police had to keep a low profile in order to avoid arrest. Communist women, on the other hand, were rarely

³ *L'Humanité*, 26 August 1939, in *L'Humanité clandestine, 1939-1944*, under the direction of Germaine Willard, Paris: Éditions sociales/Institut Maurice Thorez, 1975, 43.

⁴ Tiersky, *French Communism*.

known to authorities and were able to take on many responsibilities during the early months of the formation of the clandestine PCF.

Women's invisibility: preparing the underground PCF during the Phoney War

The *drôle de guerre*, or phoney war, was a difficult episode of inactivity for the population of France. French people soon came to realise that the war begun in 1939 was going to be different from the Great War. French military leaders and politicians initially hoped it would simply be a war of defence. They believed that they had learnt the lessons of the last war and had constructed an impregnable line of defence – the Maginot line – that would avoid the deadlock of trench warfare. Trench warfare, however, was not to be the challenge of this war. Work on the Maginot Line had begun in 1930 and the structure had been extended in 1934. It was a defensive line of fortifications that reassured French civilians and politicians to a surprising degree. David Clay Large draws attention to the ‘antiquated and top-heavy officer corps – a military leadership determined to fight the next war according to the defensive tactics used at Verdun’. He continues that ‘[t]his, more than any other military factor, would propel France to her “strange defeat” in the spring of 1940.’⁵ General Charles de Gaulle was one of the few who spoke out against this policy. He believed that tanks should form the basis on which to develop updated military tactics. De Gaulle followed his own advice but the majority of the French army prepared to defend France in the case of an attack from the Germans. French soldiers were forced to wait months before a Nazi attack. During the phoney war, the western front was relatively quiet and stationary.

The lack of defined roles for women during wartime did not halt women's contribution to wartime activities. Despite women's heavy participation during World War I, the general role of women in war was still unclear. However, women's engagement in 1914-1918 did set a precedent for World War II. Susan Grayzel writes that during World War I ‘[n]ew means of waging war helped to change the perception of civilians' relationship to warfare’.⁶ Civilians became more closely connected to war as they became potential targets and daily life changed dramatically due to the sheer number of combatants who were mobilised. Grayzel further notes that ‘[t]he scale of the First World

⁵ Large, *Between Two Fires*, 362.

⁶ Susan Grayzel, ‘“The Souls of Soldiers”: civilians under fire in First World War France,’ *The Journal of Modern History*, 78: 3 (September, 2006), 589.

War increased the importance of non-combatants, and particularly women, in the affairs of nations at war'.⁷ Women adopted roles, both paid and as volunteers, that were recognised to be essential in the waging of the war. Grayzel argues that '[w]hile the First World War created the concept of the "home front", it never stabilised the boundaries separating war from home'.⁸ Women's contribution to warfare remained separated from that of men. Grayzel emphasises that 'the idea of separate fronts helped to maintain the status quo of gender identities and enabled the reinterpretation of popular assumptions about the appropriate roles of men and women during the war without threatening the social order'.⁹ Women remained connected to social work and humanitarian aid – caring responsibilities that removed them from the violence of the front line. There was no set role for women to adopt at the beginning of World War II. In part, this helped women to allay suspicion as communist activists.

A factor that further complicated the roles of women in wartime was the symbolic power that was held by women during war. It was necessary for the home front to remain a familiar and comforting place for the morale of a nation's soldiers. As a result, women's status in society did not change greatly during wartime. Margaret Darrow comments that 'World War I had done nothing to clarify a relationship between women and war'.¹⁰ She argues that volunteer nurses presented the best chance at developing a discourse on women in war as they had the least ambiguous role and motivations. Other common roles assumed by women were less straightforward. *Munitionettes*, for example, were perceived as potential profiteers. While war widows' excessive mourning was seen to undermine morale. The Red Cross made an effort to keep issues of war work and women in the public eye. Darrow explains: 'From this effort began to emerge a vision of women's war service. It was to be patriotic, it was to be national, and it was to call forth devotion and self-sacrifice equivalent to men's. But it was to be feminine: supportive and non-violent'.¹¹

Despite the inaction at the front lines, women joined the war effort as soon as war broke out. Hélène Fouré wrote an article for the May 1940 edition of *The French Review*

⁷ Susan R. Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: gender, motherhood, and politics in Britain and France during the First World War*, Chapel Hill, NC and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999, 10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁰ Margaret H. Darrow, 'French Volunteer Nursing and the Myth of War Experience in World War I,' *American Historical Review*, 101: 1 (February, 1996), 80.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

in which she described the changes French women were making as a consequence of the war.¹² The paper was published in America for French school teachers and allowed Francophiles to be informed of developing events in France. It is clear that Fouré wished to portray the impressive engagement of women in the changed circumstances brought about by the war. Fouré focused on how women immediately set to work to keep the country functioning. Women in the country, for example, took over running and working family farms. Fouré also mentioned women who worked directly for the war effort, such as nurses. Many women continued to run family businesses after the mobilisation of their husbands or sons. Fouré cited the example of a *garagiste's* wife who took over the petrol pump and chatted to customers. Sarah Fishman, in her detailed study of the wives of prisoners-of-war, makes reference to women whose husband's employers asked them to take on their husband's job. Monique Peletier learned to drive on the request of her husband's employer. For five years she delivered goods to the market depot in Chatellerault. Fishman also singled out Francine Louvet, whose husband had been a judicial bailiff at the Bank of France. Louvet collected documents at the request of the bank director, at first by car, then by bicycle.¹³

Women were able to adopt roles related to the war effort so long as they were seen to coincide with their natural abilities as caregivers who should be protected from committing or witnessing violence. One area where progressive social changes had to be made, however, was concerning the family. French law and policy still recognised men as the head of the family. After they were mobilised, women had to keep the family running at least temporarily, if not permanently as widows. Referring to World War I, Susan Pedersen notes that 'wartime innovations reconfigured family structures while challenging accepted ideals of domesticity and family life; new arrangements of work and welfare temporarily altered relations of dependence and maintenance between the sexes.'¹⁴ These changes were temporary and did not alter women's legal status. As we shall see later in this chapter, the lack of clear guidelines for women's role in wartime was not always a disadvantage. Women resisters benefited from the blurred lines of what was, and what was not, expected of women in wartime.

¹² Hélène Fouré, 'La Femme Française Pendant la Guerre,' *The French Review*, 13: 6 (May, 1940) : 488-491.

¹³ Sarah Fishman, *We Will Wait: wives of French Prisoners of War, 1940-1945*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991, 58.

¹⁴ Pedersen, *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State*, 80.

It was only because of its female members that the PCF was able to re-establish itself in such a timely and efficient manner. After it was banned, the PCF first tried to rename itself and continue to hold meetings. It soon became clear, however, that the safest course of action, especially for well-known activists, was to adopt a life of clandestinity. Vaillant-Couturier emphasised that, once the PCF was banned and male activists began to be arrested and go underground, it was the women and girls who were left as the above-ground militants. Male leaders were in hiding and many male members had been mobilised as soldiers. The majority of female party members had been 'invisible' activists and so were in a better position to adopt above ground roles, such as becoming liaison agents, in order to re-form the party. The women who took on the most responsibility were those who had either been working with influential male activists before the war, or who had experience in leadership roles.¹⁵ An unforeseen consequence of forcing the PCF to operate underground was that it had already begun to organise itself as a clandestine network before France was occupied. This gave communists valuable time to develop underground tactics.

Communist women were able to keep active during the phoney war because they were less visible to the police as political activists. Vaillant-Couturier described a meeting of women that was organised roughly a month after the war began. She, Casanova, Vermeersch-Thorez, Chomat, Georgette Cadras (1912-1994) and Rose Guérin (1915-1998) met with about 50 female militants in the Square de Montreuil, outside of the ring route of Paris to the east of the 20th *arrondissement*, in order to discuss the progress of events and their options as communist women.¹⁶ The crowd of women activists divided up into six groups, each led by one of the female militants mentioned above. The purpose of this one-off meeting was to discuss recent events, answer questions, and give advice on the appropriate course of action to follow in the immediate future. It was bold for the women to meet in public to discuss their party and their strategy. The focus of the conversation was the non-aggression pact and whether the war was a just war that deserved their support. The women leaders advised their groups to wait until they could be moved into clandestinity before any action could be taken, and insisted that it was essential to keep contact with their fellow militants.¹⁷ Thus, from October 1939 communist women

¹⁵ See: D. Durand, *Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier*; Pierre Durand, *Danielle Casanova*; Lise London, *Souvenirs de résistance*.

¹⁶ Durand, *Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier*, 122.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

organised themselves and prepared for the clandestine work with the party that was to come.

The women's initiative to hold a meeting illustrates their commitment to establishing a clandestine network from the outset. The phoney war was a confusing and unstable time for France and also for the PCF. Women's experience of communist activism in the 1930s was invaluable after the PCF was banned. Through their existing contacts, communist members were able to develop an underground network of trusted activists. Women in leadership roles during the pre-war era once again took the initiative and directed their fellow female militants. Female communists were able to contribute to clandestine PCF activities as soon as the war began.

The difficulties and advantages of activism in the occupied capital

After months of the phoney war that tested everybody's nerves, hostilities had intensified at an alarming pace. In May 1940, Pétain had joined the struggling cabinet of Paul Reynaud and become leader of a growing faction that wished to bring an end to hostilities. Just one month later, on 18 June, without knowing Germany's response or reaction, Pétain made a public announcement over the radio that France was to cease fighting. A brief ten months after the declaration of war, France's army was defeated. Pétain, now acting as the representative of France, signed the Armistice on 22 June 1940. The Armistice meant that not only was Paris saved from the destruction of war, but France would not suffer the same fate as Poland during the early Nazi campaign in the east. In June 1940, public opinion was behind Pétain and his choice to protect France from another prolonged war.

After the Armistice, the Nazis divided France into different zones with different governing authorities. The Nazi occupying authorities based their French operations in Paris. Policy was decided in Germany, but enforced from the French capital city. The southern third of France was known as the unoccupied zone. Pétain and his ministers moved south, to the spa town of Vichy, where the French government (known as the Vichy government) remained for the duration of the war. Alsace and Lorraine were annexed to Germany. The Nazi military headquarters in Brussels took responsibility for the departments of the Nord and Pas-de-Calais. A narrow western strip was passed to Mussolini in Italy. The remaining central northern area of France remained in the control of the Nazis because it was of strategic importance. The greater part of France's industry

was located within the occupied zone which made it easier for the occupiers to control it. Three-quarters of the French population inhabited the area under occupation. As such, it was easier for Nazi authorities to police the majority of the French population.

Even within the occupied zone, French authorities and Vichy directives exerted their influence. It was crucial for the Nazi command to establish cooperation with the French police. Allan Mitchell writes that, according to a memo of October 1940, there were 26,010 French municipal police and rural gendarmes within an estimated population of 6,785,000 civilians. The German police in the whole of France numbered around 3,000 and did not ever grow far beyond that number.¹⁸ In order to have sufficient manpower to present a realistic show of force and control, the Germans had to utilise the French police force. The three investigations that are the focus of Chapter Three will provide good examples of the extensive role of the Paris police in curbing resistance activities. The role of the French police in arresting and deporting Jews in 1942 was a key moment that turned public opinion against the Vichy regime, as we shall see.

Unlike the majority of other cities in France, Paris underwent immediate changes as soon as the occupiers arrived. German signs and German soldiers were suddenly all over Paris, including in cafes and fashionable hotels which they commandeered as department headquarters. Swastikas and Nazi banners now hung from familiar buildings.¹⁹ Henri Michel writes that the defeat and occupation of France were particularly difficult for Parisians because they were exposed to the presence of the Nazi occupiers to a greater extent than the rest of the French population. Paris remained the functioning capital of France throughout the occupation and, as a result, Nazi soldiers were a constant presence. Elsewhere in France, especially in the unoccupied zone or smaller villages, Nazi soldiers were an infrequent sight.

The conditions of the occupation of Paris defined the tactics adopted by Parisian resistance networks. With little fuel available, motor cars became too expensive and conspicuous to run. Bicycles became the common mode of transport. There were fewer buses because of the lack of fuel, so more commuters turned to the metro. Metro passengers increased by 25 percent, to over two million per day during the war.²⁰ Resistance networks used the increased crowds on the metro as cover for their members

¹⁸ Allan Mitchell, *Nazi Paris: the history of an occupation 1940-1944*, New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008, 4.

¹⁹ Henri Michel, *Paris Allemand*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1981.

²⁰ Mitchell, *Nazi Paris*, 13.

attending a rendezvous. Platforms and stations were ideal for one-on-one meetings because resisters could blend in with the crowd. Stations also made a quick getaway easier, either on a train, or back out of the station and into the crowd. Remaining inconspicuous was easier in a city with a denser population. Moving to new lodgings, adopting a false identity alongside a legal identity, adopting a disguise or becoming a clandestine resister was also easier in a large city with multiple separate neighbourhoods. It was easier to distribute resistance propaganda in a big city as well because it was much more difficult to trace who could have delivered or produced it. Renée Poznanski points out that the 'anonymity essential for resistance activity' was 'favoured by the conditions of urban life'.²¹ Tactics were developed by resistance networks operating in Paris to make the most of the anonymity of a populated city.

Whilst operating as a resister in France's largest city had its advantages, it also had its difficulties. Food scarcity, which will be discussed in greater detail below, was a major problem of life in Paris during the war. It was difficult to source sufficient food rations in the city compared to the country, not least because there was more competition for the provisions available. The large population of the city also put resisters in close proximity to their neighbours. Apartment living meant that it was imperative to be especially careful of what neighbours or concierges could see or hear. The cooperation of the Paris police with Nazi authorities was another serious problem for resisters. The Paris police were merciless in their investigations to track down resisters, communist resisters in particular. Despite the difficulties presented to resisters in Paris, it remained the home of the operational leadership of the PCF for the duration of the war. There were benefits and drawbacks to organising resistance in the capital. We will see that the key was to exploit the benefits to the maximum advantage of the network, and to be mindful of the drawbacks in order to protect individual resisters and the network as a whole.

Ongoing struggles to retain a quality of life in Paris during the war impacted greatly on the relationship between the population and the occupiers. Inconveniences and difficulties of day-to-day life affected everyone. The Nazi hierarchy and the Vichy government were concerned with changes in public opinion even when resistance was minimal soon after defeat. Drawing on German reports written by various officials, Mitchell argues that the occupiers understood the need to address the growing

²¹ Renée Poznanski, 'The Geopolitics of Jewish Resistance in France,' *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 15: 2 (2001), 249.

dissatisfaction of the occupied population. He acknowledges that '[u]nless authorities could resolve the bedrock economic issues of jobs, wages, and supplies, any attempt at persuasion of the occupied populace through propaganda would be futile'.²² As long as the population was struggling with ongoing difficulties of day-to-day life, there was a chance that resistance to occupation would increase. Resistance networks also realised the importance of public opinion for the potential recruitment of new members. Women's groups especially used the day-to-day grievances of the female population to recruit resisters and inspire resistance.

Food scarcity was a problem for the government of France from the early months of the war. The Vichy government introduced rationing in September 1940, barely three months after occupation, 'in order to help fulfil German requisitions and to redistribute basic necessities among all French residents'.²³ Decrees which prohibited the sale or consumption of particular foods, however, had been introduced from December 1939. During the phoney war, for example, pastry, confectionery, and chocolate shops were to be closed Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays. The sale of certain cuts of meat was also restricted. French residents had to register for ration cards by 1 April 1940, two months before France was occupied.²⁴ The amount of bread served in restaurants as well as the type of bread produced was also controlled. Shannon Fogg notes that '[e]ventually closings extended to bakeries, which were only permitted to sell day-old bread starting in July 1940 in the attempt to encourage the French to eat less of this staple item. People violating this decree were threatened with fines and forced shop closings.'²⁵ The rationing of bread was particularly contentious because it was eaten at every meal. Even during World War I bread was only rationed in 1918.²⁶ In World War II, by contrast, French adults were rationed to 350 grams of bread per day from September 1940 and in March 1941 that ration was reduced by a further 20 percent.²⁷ Fogg writes that rationing provided 1,800 calories a day per average adult 'although the League of Nations estimated that the average adult needed 2,400 to 2,800 daily calories'.²⁸ Fogg further notes that the 'number

²² Mitchell, *Nazi Paris*, 24.

²³ Fogg, *The Politics of Everyday Life in Vichy France*, 5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

of calories provided by ration cards fell to 1,700 by 1942 and went as low as 900 calories per day for adults as shortages worsened over the course of the war'.²⁹

Gradually the quality of life deteriorated throughout France, particularly in Paris, as rations continued to be lowered and people began to struggle to even find what their meagre rations allowed them. Winters proved to be particularly difficult as fuel for heating was scarce. The winter of 1940-1941 was extremely cold. Train lines into Paris froze, reducing the number of incoming provisions, including fuels such as coal. Caroline Moorehead writes that the lack of provisions affected the management of the city: 'the very fabric of [Paris] was crumbling, its tramlines torn up for iron, its wooden paving ... taken for fuel, its sewers no longer properly maintained. Because there was no petrol for the lorries, rubbish piled up.'³⁰ The occupiers were blamed for food shortages, rising prices, increasing unemployment and lack of available fuel for heating. By 1942, as we shall see in Chapter Four, requisitioning for the Germans and the Allied blockade of imported supplies were taking their toll on French public opinion.

The difficulty of sourcing provisions provided a platform for women to voice their concerns over the deteriorating situation. The daily task of collecting food and supplies for the home was most often a woman's job. Rural communities had the advantage of growing their own produce or sharing that of their neighbours. In fact, country residents received a lesser ration precisely because they were expected to provide for themselves off their land.³¹ City dwellers sometimes made trips to the country to buy produce from farmers but this was an unreliable and technically illegal method of procuring food. Women in Paris thus spent hours every day queuing outside shops and marketplaces for provisions needed for their families. Paula Schwartz has focused on the political implications of the struggle to find food. She stresses the importance of the queue in occupied Paris: 'The queue was always, it was everywhere, and it was long.'³² Due to the fact that demand far exceeded supply, people often waited hours in line but returned home with nothing to put on the table. Jane Slaughter's work on Italian women and resistance touches on this point. She writes that, despite not having defined political views, women often joined the resistance after discussions with other discontented, like-

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Moorehead, *A Train in Winter*, 81.

³¹ Fogg, *The Politics of Everyday Life in Vichy France*, 5.

³² Paula Schwartz, 'The Politics of Food and Gender in Occupied Paris,' *Modern & Contemporary France* 7: 1 (1999), 36.

minded women. The ideal ground for these discussions was in queues. Slaughter quotes a resister: 'Propaganda work could be done best in the lines in front of the shops. There we talked, discussed and began to understand that it was fascism that wanted war and now we should end it.'³³

The police and government departments responsible for food supply, distribution and rationing recognised that shoppers in queues were frustrated and angry, which could lead to protest, or even violence. Police charged with patrolling shopping areas and queues were required to note comments overheard in lines, or any public disturbances, as a way to monitor public opinion. Schwartz states that 'throughout the Occupation, food remained scarce; the authorities closely monitored markets and queues, which they continued to describe as volatile; and protests, whether individual or collective, spontaneous or organised, were frequent.'³⁴ Women were frustrated and dissatisfied due to their inability to feed their families. Fogg makes the point that survival tactics, such as gardening, raising rabbits or chickens, bartering, purchasing items on the black market or trips to the country, 'challenged the government's authority on a daily basis'.³⁵ These alternatives to the rationing system indicated that the Vichy government could not provide for its people. Women were encouraged to protest and petition mayors about the lack of food and supplies as a specific tactic that encouraged housewives and mothers to join resistance activities.

Food scarcity became a foundation for women's popular communist resistance activity. Schwartz writes that '[f]ood issues during the Second World War, as always, were everyone's business, but market protest in neighbourhoods and streets was women's work'.³⁶ The communist resistance movement recognised the opportunity that the groups of frustrated women presented for a very specific form of resistance activity. Male workers were called on to demand better rations, but only as part of their demands for better pay and working hours. To protest food scarcity alone on behalf of their families was specifically a woman's form of protest. Communist networks aimed to encourage the protest of all sections of society in order to achieve popular resistance. Female resisters were integral to this strategy. Resistance leaders recognised that women who waited in vain in queues for food were sympathetic to protest action because they were frustrated.

³³ Benissone Costa quoted in Jane Slaughter, *Women and the Italian Resistance*, 45.

³⁴ Schwartz, 'The Politics of Food and Gender,' 38-39.

³⁵ Fogg, *The Politics of Everyday Life in Vichy France*, 5-6.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

The sourcing of food was essentially a private affair, but the extra control of the government in wartime over what and when people could purchase provisions ensured that it became an issue that could be politicised for the purposes of the resistance. The shortage of rations in Paris impacted to a great extent on resistance and its evolution in the capital.

The beginnings of communist resistance

Despite its anti-fascist commitment, communist resistance was first born out of a need to preserve the party and protect its members. It took time for resistance to develop to such an extent that the Nazis were forced to recognise the networks for what they were. Mitchell writes that it took until February 1941 for a French 'Resistance movement' to be referred to as such in a German police report. The first examples of communist resistance occurred before this date but were not straightforward or consistent. The French communists were ideological enemies of both the Nazis and the ultra-right-wing politicians who became leaders of the Vichy government, before either gained power in France. Communists were targeted by the French police from the time the PCF was banned in September 1939. This prompted an immediate reaction from communist activists who, in the face of adversity, united to resurrect and strengthen the party. Sarah Farmer explains that the communists began the war 'in a state of political disgrace and disarray'³⁷ and that their

opposition might well have remained passive for some time had not the Vichy police stepped up a campaign of anti-Communist harassment ... Scrambling to save the party, Communists gained experience operating underground before any identifiable resistance movement began. Acting on their political reflex to save the party, Communist militants built clandestine networks which they later used to fight the German occupation.³⁸

John Sweets notes that the 'disproportionate attention' paid by Vichy and Nazi authorities to the communist resistance may have also had the unintended consequence of prompting the 'eventual development of a security system in the Communist movements that was superior to that of the non-Communist organisations'. He argues

³⁷ Sarah Farmer, 'The Communist Resistance in the Haute-Vienne,' *French Historical Studies*, 14: 1 (1985), 89.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 94.

that their tightened security was either 'because they had had prior experience in clandestine activities or because they were forced to be more careful in view of the special attention they received from the police'.³⁹ Thus, being forced underground by the Daladier government, and then mercilessly targeted by the Vichy-directed police, meant that the communists were driven to form an underground party and gain experience in clandestine activity before they had planned to commit to resistance against the occupation.

The Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact meant that the communists were unable to act against the Nazis without going against Comintern directives. After the PCF was banned, the communists were in a state of flux and there was no clear path forward. The prompt targeting of communist activists was both a disadvantage and an advantage to the development of the communist resistance. It was difficult for the party to have its ideological leaders arrested at such a confusing time. The speed with which the communists needed to form a clandestine movement was, however, ultimately an advantage to their organisation of resistance. In order to protect the PCF and its members, it was necessary to form their clandestine movement relatively quickly. I will illustrate that the early effectiveness of the PCF as a resistance movement was, in part, due to the pre-organised contacts and modes of clandestine communication developed by communist militants to re-form their party.

The significance of the pre-war antagonism between the authorities and communists is made even clearer when considering the biographical information compiled by the Ivry police concerning communist activists. This collection contains three boxes that are full of details of known communists. One box contains information concerning those militants who had not been arrested, the second holds files of militants who had been arrested, and the third box contains details of local militants who were known to be living underground due to their communist affiliation.⁴⁰ The first two boxes have similar sheets of information that appear to have been created at the same time and then separated into 'arrested' and 'not arrested' categories during the war. Each card contains the name, address, relatives (if known), a short description of the militants' particular activities and their histories within the party. They are classified either as a

³⁹ John F. Sweets, *Choices in Vichy France*, 205-206.

⁴⁰ MRN: Fonds de Commissariat de police – Ivry. Carton no. 1: fiches/recherche des militants non arrêtés. Carton no. 2: fiches/recherche des militants arrêtés. Carton no. 3: fiches/recherche des militants.

militant, a propagandist, or a supporter. Attached to a large number of the cards are small photos of the individuals in question. The majority of these cards relate to men but more than a third relate to women. There are cards detailing 168 women who were not arrested and 59 who were arrested.⁴¹ The third box contains sheets for 43 women, less than half the number of those for men. On each individual's sheet is a photo, their name, date of birth, address, profession, past activity within the PCF, including their formal position, and whether they had been involved in the Spanish Civil War.⁴² The sheets are preceded by a note from the director of the Police de Sûreté (security police)⁴³ in which he explained that the boxes contained the information collected concerning the more well-known communist elements living in clandestinity.

Regardless of the fact that the communists were considered to be opponents of both the Nazis and the Vichy regime, the PCF was not seen as an active resistance movement until months after their first acts of resistance. This was due to the conflicting agenda of the PCF while the non-aggression pact restricted their activities. Mitchell writes that early acts of communist resistance included 'minor acts of sabotage – such as cutting electric cables and phone lines, spreading glass and sharp metal objects near German installations, and sometimes causing the derailment of train cars'.⁴⁴ Yet, he continues, 'German records betrayed no sign of undue alarm. The Communists were thought incapable of mounting any serious resistance in Paris, and their propaganda was considered "confused"'.⁴⁵ Due to the Hitler-Stalin pact, the PCF targeted the Vichy regime but avoided discussion of the foremost fascist threat: the Nazi occupiers.

During this early stage of the war, the communists also opposed de Gaulle, whom they saw as a British lackey. In a flyer distributed in August 1940, the French communists called for 'Union of the French Nation, not as a British Commonwealth realm!, nor as a German Protectorate!'.⁴⁶ The opposition of the communists to the Vichy regime was immediately evident in their propaganda. The 12 October 1940 clandestine edition of *L'Humanité* lists the negative aspects of the Vichy regime as seen by the communists. The

⁴¹ MRN: Fonds de Commissariat de police – Ivry. Carton no. 1: fiches/recherche des militants non arrêtés. Carton no. 2: fiches/recherche des militants arrêtés.

⁴² MRN: Fonds de Commissariat de police – Ivry. Carton no. 3: fiches/recherche des militants.

⁴³ MRN: Fonds de Commissariat de police – Ivry. Carton no. 3: fiches/recherche des militants. Directeur des Services de la Police de Sûreté, Vichy to M. le Commissaire Divisionnaire Chef du Service Régional de Police de Sûreté, Limoges, 8 April 1943.

⁴⁴ Mitchell, *Nazi Paris*, 36.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Flyer from August 1940, in *L'Humanité clandestine, 1939-1944*, 216.

lead article describes Vichy as a government that was not French, a government that was working in the service of oppressors, capitalists, trusts, big property owners and those responsible for starving the population, *affameurs*. The only mention of the Nazi occupiers was made to undermine further the authority of the Vichy regime: 'The Government which is not a French government but a government of puppets in foreign hands knows that its politics are not approved by the People.'⁴⁷ The message of the PCF may have been confused during this early phase of occupation, but its early acts of resistance and production of propaganda signified two things. Firstly, that it was committed to some form of resistance and, secondly, that it was in the process of developing early clandestine techniques.

Despite the implications of the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact, the communist resistance is now recognised by historians as one of the earliest and most organised resistance movements in France. It cannot be denied, however, that the anti-fascist policy of the French communists faltered in the early months of the war. They made concessions to their previous uncompromising anti-fascist attitude in order to align with the stance of the Comintern. Individuals and small groups performed some acts of sabotage against the Nazi occupiers and the Vichy regime in the north of France during the early months of occupation, but these were activists operating without the official sanction of the party.⁴⁸ The underground press and the efforts of the French communists to re-form the party in clandestinity were, however, approved by the Comintern before June 1941. It should be remembered that the early stance of many resistance movements was selective. Dominique Veillon draws attention to the fact that

[a]lthough a number of those who led the fight against the occupier were quick to condemn both the Germans and the Vichy regime in the same breath, such resisters were very much a minority. Others were certainly anti-Nazi and/or anti-German and committed to fighting the enemy, but had a generally favourable attitude toward Pétain.⁴⁹

The communists took the opposite stance and stood against Vichy, whilst trying to ignore the Nazis in their propaganda.

⁴⁷ *L'Humanité*, 12 October 1940, 2, in *ibid.*, 266.

⁴⁸ See: Roland Gaucher, *Histoire Secrète du Parti Communiste Français*, 331, 333-345; Stéphane Courtois, *Le PCF dans la guerre*; David Wingeate Pike, 'Between the Junes,' 480; Mitchell, *Nazi Paris*.

⁴⁹ Dominique Veillon, 'The Resistance and Vichy,' in *France at War: Vichy and the historians*, eds. Sarah Fishman et al., Oxford and New York: Berg, 2000, 161.

The ideological conflict that limited communist resistance in the first year of occupation did not halt the clandestine activities of the PCF. As mentioned above, women played a vital role in establishing the clandestine PCF in the early months of the war and occupation. Women known for their pre-war commitment to communist activities were relied upon to reconnect the PCF leadership and its members. Casanova is one example of how women, particularly those who had been active before the war, were able to re-establish the PCF. She was at the centre of communist activity at the outbreak of the war, and she had multiple contacts through her engagement in the pre-war period of the PCF. After the initial confusion which followed the outbreak of war, Casanova became a clandestine activist. She changed her appearance considerably, not only to disguise her identity, but also to appear as an unlikely communist suspect to police. She had already lost weight due to an illness so once she began to dress smartly, wear her hair in a formal style and wear make-up, she was almost unrecognisable even to those who knew her. Well-dressed women were less likely to draw the attention of the police. Juliette Pattinson writes that, for women resisters, there was 'the investment of glamour to signify respectability'.⁵⁰ Casanova used this to her advantage. She had the responsibility of organising the underground Jeunesses Communistes (JC) and the continued publication of their paper, *L'Avant-Garde*. Cécile Ouzoulias-Romagon, a communist resister, mentioned Casanova's involvement in recruiting her husband, Albert Ouzoulias, as leader of the Bataillons de la Jeunesse (the armed group of the JC).⁵¹ In addition, she was entrusted with the task of establishing lines of contact between the direction of the PCF and communist intellectuals in order to form an intellectual branch of the communist resistance movement.

Casanova was crucial in ensuring the continuation of communist activities and in establishing new aspects of communist activism during wartime. Charlotte Delbo, a fellow communist resister, wrote that Casanova became part of the clandestine leadership of the party as soon as it was outlawed in 1939. Delbo summarised Casanova's various activities as follows:

⁵⁰ Juliette Pattinson, "'Playing the Daft Lassie with Them": gender, captivity and the Special Operations Executive during the Second World War,' *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 13: 2 (June, 2006), 285.

⁵¹ See: Cécile Ouzoulias Romagon, *J'étais Agent de Liaison FTPF*, Paris: Éditions Messidor, 1988, 92.

She edited *La Voix des Femmes*, led women against the occupation, and formed cells that would evolve into the Union of French Women. She also played an important role in the University branch of the National Front and in the Young Communists. Her husband was a prisoner of war. She lived in Paris under a false identity.⁵²

Casanova also focused on the plight of the wives of prisoners-of-war who needed more rations and community support. She began an underground paper titled *Le Trait d'Union* directed at these families specifically. Sarah Fishman writes that '[p]risoners' wives refused to remain passive clients of the state and public agencies or victims of the hardships of daily life. Instead they overcame their isolation and eased their burdens through solidarity.'⁵³ Wives of prisoners-of-war, similar to women standing in queues, presented a potential recruiting ground that it was possible to mobilise because they had specific grievances and wished to do something about them. There were many formal organisations for the wives of POWs but, through the underground press, isolated women could likewise find support and solidarity. Casanova also began to organise general women's committees to be formed around Paris with the help of her female contacts from her days in the UJFF. They immediately set to work to organise demonstrations for more rations and supplies for children, particularly for the *rentrée*, the beginning of the school year. She was involved in the publication of early editions of *L'Humanité de la Femme* and helped other resisters set up the production of localised papers directed at women and students. Casanova was an important member of the early communist resistance network.

Vaillant-Couturier played a different role in early communist resistance activities. When the Nazi-Soviet pact was signed, she was working on various communist papers as a photo-journalist and assisting Casanova with the organisation of the UJFF magazine, *Jeunes Filles de France*. She was therefore without a job once communist publications were banned. She promptly began to work as a photographer taking portraits of the children of rich families. This work went some way to providing cover for her underground activities.⁵⁴ She was living in her mother's apartment near the Champs Elysées at the outbreak of the war. Casanova and Chomat used the apartment to burn

⁵² Charlotte Delbo, *Convoy to Auschwitz: women of the French Resistance*, trans. Carol Cosman, Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1997, 43.

⁵³ Fishman, *We Will Wait*, 99.

⁵⁴ Durand, *Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier*, 122-123.

UJFF papers in Vaillant-Couturier's fireplace in order to protect members' identities and to prevent the discovery of their own activities.

After the Sérol decree of 9 April 1940, which announced that the death penalty could be handed down to those found guilty of publishing communist propaganda, Vaillant-Couturier decided to become a clandestine activist.⁵⁵ She was typing documents in the early months of the war for Pierre Villon, a leading communist militant, who was also her partner. A friend prepared false identity papers for her under the name of Mavet and she moved to the apartment Villon had rented for the two of them and his young son. In addition to typing up documents, Vaillant-Couturier transported a range of documents for Villon. He had the responsibility – since 1938 – of coordinating the publishing house and the periodicals of the party. Vaillant-Couturier transported many kinds of materials as a result of Villon's numerous contacts: tracts, underground papers and reviews. She also drove Villon to various meetings in her car after the party was banned, but before cars became conspicuous and too expensive to run during occupation.⁵⁶ After war broke out, Villon was given the responsibility of publishing the clandestine editions of *L'Humanité*.⁵⁷

The role women adopted in the communist resistance was determined to a large extent on their particular pre-war activities. France Bloch-Sérazin (1913-1943), for example, due to her expertise as a chemist, became a member of one of the first Parisian Francs-Tireurs et Partisans Français (usually referred to simply as FTP) units, the armed cells of the communist resistance.⁵⁸ Her husband, also a communist militant, had been mobilised and then recalled as a factory worker. He resumed his communist activities and was arrested under the anti-communist legislation of the Daladier government before France was occupied. After the Armistice was signed he was moved from camp to camp which made it difficult for Bloch-Sérazin to visit or keep regular contact with him. Despite the advice of her friends, she remained in Paris and continued to work to support herself and her infant son. It was a risk for her to remain in the city not only because she was communist but because she was also Jewish. Bloch-Sérazin left her job at a chemical laboratory for fear that her research would be used by the Germans and began teaching

⁵⁵ Ibid., 125.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 123.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 124.

⁵⁸ MRN: Fonds de L'Union des Femmes Françaises, carton no. 6. *France Bloch-Sérazin, Héroïnes d'hier et d'aujourd'hui*, Paris: Éditions de l'Union des Femmes Françaises, 1945.

instead. Anti-Semitic legislation that prohibited Jews from teaching meant that she once again had to change profession. She began work as a tutor, taking pupils one-on-one. It was only after she later returned to work in a laboratory that she was able to contribute to an FTP unit.

Unlike Casanova and Vaillant-Couturier, Bloch-Sérazin had not been a leading party member during the 1930s and was not close to male members of the party leadership. This difference in pre-war engagement explains why Bloch-Sérazin only joined resistance activities once the units were organised. From the outbreak of war, she had committed to the prospect of resistance by painting slogans on walls, sticking up leaflets and distributing propaganda material. However, she did not have the organisational experience or contacts to coordinate a unit. Though it did not enable her to organise underground activities, Bloch-Sérazin's pre-war experience in the PCF prepared her to commit to resistance.

Early communist resistance was limited, but it was organised. Over the course of 1941, communist underground activities in Paris multiplied to such an extent that the presence of the communist resistance movement became known to the general population. Michel notes that the communist party organised itself underground in clandestinity but to the knowledge of everyone.⁵⁹ The clandestine PCF managed to establish its underground press as an early feature of its resistance. Although the stigma of the non-aggression treaty remained tied to the PCF, the

communists had a considerable impact on the Parisian population, because, firstly, they knew how to find the accents and arguments that were necessary to speak of the insurmountable difficulties of daily existence and, secondly, they displayed, in the face of the general apathy of the first months of occupation, surprising activity.⁶⁰

During the first period of the occupation, the communists produced a multitude of underground papers with articles concerning the daily life and difficulties of the Parisian population. The papers denounced the insufficiencies of provisioning, demanded higher rations for the unemployed and prisoners' wives, protested the increased cost of living and lack of wages, and accused various government departments of incompetence. Michel writes: 'contrasting with the silence of the authorised press, the communist

⁵⁹ Henri Michel, *Paris Résistant*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1982, 36.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

clandestine press, the only important example until 1942, expressed and support[ed] the popular demands, and on these points received the agreement of a large number [of Parisians]'.⁶¹ He goes on to argue that the communists continued to organise committees related to particular groups, such as the unemployed or workers, and to produce their numerous editions of the clandestine press despite multiple arrests and police seizures of printing materials.

The dissolution of the Nazi-Soviet pact resulted in a dramatic change in the methods of communist resistance. On 22 June 1941, the German army invaded the USSR and the Nazi-Soviet pact became null and void. The PCF was now able to adopt an uninhibited strategy of resistance against both the fascist occupiers and the collaborating Vichy regime. From the middle of May, the communists had been preparing to form a Front National (FN) with the goal of uniting all workers, including, unrealistically, German soldiers as an oppressed people who wished to rise up against their oppressors. Stéphane Courtois writes that it was at this time that the communists began to develop their rhetoric to articulate more decisively the need for anti-fascist resistance in order to liberate France.⁶² It cannot be denied that the early difficulties of the PCF undermined their status as committed anti-fascists, but it must be emphasised that it was the early months of the occupation that allowed the PCF to develop and expand their underground activities. The fact that communist resistance was an 'open secret' in Paris illustrates the effectiveness and scale of the communists' early resistance methods. At the time of the dissolution of the Nazi-Soviet pact, it was a matter of the escalation of communist resistance, not the beginning of communist resistance. The long-term and vigorous anti-fascist stance of the PCF was an important aspect to the communists' resistance rhetoric and preparation for their commitment to resistance.

The communist resistance developed a more aggressive and violent aspect to their resistance after the collapse of the non-aggression pact. After the annulment of the Nazi-Soviet pact the communists organised armed units as a part of their resistance movement. The Organisation Spéciale (OS) was formed in June 1941 and later became known as the FTP, mentioned above.⁶³ It was also in September 1941 that the FN was

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Courtois, *Le PCF dans la guerre*, 190.

⁶³ In September 1941, the Front National (FN) was formed in order to attract party outsiders to join resistance activities. The UFF was technically part of the application of the FN agenda. The OS became the FTP also to attract a wider membership.

formed in order to attract party outsiders to their resistance activities. Not long afterwards, in August 1941, the Youth Battalions were officially organised in order to 'respond in kind to German executions'.⁶⁴ Between them, these armed units were responsible for protecting militants, punishing traitors and informers, collecting weapons and undertaking sabotage and execution operations. As a security precaution, three-person cells were formed so that each member would know only two other names at a time. Gildea emphasises that '[t]o attack German personnel was beyond the imagination of any resister until Germany invaded the Soviet Union ... and communist resistance became serious'.⁶⁵ Gildea underlines the significance of the arrest of two young communist men who had participated in an anti-German demonstration that took place on 13 August 1941. Six days later these two men were executed 'and an operation to avenge their deaths was set in motion'.⁶⁶ In retaliation, the communist resistance organised the execution of a Nazi soldier at a metro station. Alfons Moser, a German naval warrant officer, was shot in the back twice and died instantly on 21 August 1941.

Communist resisters, then, were responsible for the first death of a Nazi soldier in occupied France. Gildea underlines:

The killing of ... Moser had a huge impact. ... It was a spectacular gesture that exiated the guilt that had weighed on them under the Nazi-Soviet Pact and propelled them to the forefront of resistance activity. Unfortunately it also triggered the mechanism of collective reprisals against hostages that the Germans had put in place precisely for this eventuality.⁶⁷

The killing of hostages defined, to a large extent, the experience of communist resistance in France, as already mentioned in the Introduction. After Moser's death, six communists were executed immediately. By the end of September, 58 had been executed in retaliation for the murder of this one Nazi soldier.⁶⁸ The communists were now publicly committed to resistance. The invasion of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Nazi-Soviet pact had an immediate effect on the communists in France, both in terms of their own action and the subsequent repression. Within a month after the invasion of the USSR

⁶⁴ Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, 88.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

there were 3,052 arrests recorded in Paris and 22 French citizens were sentenced to death. The Germans recorded 3,250 acts of sabotage in Paris by the end of August, only two months after the conflict began on the Eastern front.⁶⁹ Not all of those arrested were communist resisters nor were all the acts of sabotage made by communist activists, but the statistics are indicative of the early organisation and effectiveness of the French communist resistance. Mitchell states that 600 suspected communists were taken into custody in Paris alone in the week after the Soviet Union was invaded. The targeting of communists made it hard for the communist resisters, but their resistance movement continued to grow even as more and more of their militants were killed.

Capitalising on the complementary role of women

The development of communist women's resistance groups must be placed in the context of the attitude of the Vichy regime towards women. The concept of concurrent and conflicting progressive and regressive ideas of femininity discussed in Chapter One continued into the 1940s and impacted greatly on how women undertook resistance. The traditional ideals of Vichy helped to keep regressive ideas of femininity applicable throughout the war years when, in reality, women were adopting a multitude of progressive roles. During occupation, women were engaged in a war as well as an ideological battle. The UJFF succeeded in engaging women in politics by using informal methods of activism and by focusing on the political implications of social action. The communist resistance continued to engage women as resisters in political action disguised as social action.

In French society, women's role was believed to be complementary to that of men. Women were perceived to be important to the functioning of society, but in a restricted way that was specific to women. The role of women as seen by French society was important for how the communist resistance called on women to resist and for how Vichy valued women. The communist resistance used the complementarity of women's roles to expand their resistance activities. The Vichy regime, on the other hand, like the extreme Right leagues, used women's perceived complementarity to try and limit women solely to motherhood and the nurturing 'feminine' roles. The corresponding nature of female resistance is a theme that recurs throughout my thesis. As mentioned in Chapter One, communist women's groups were formed to be parallel but inter-connected arms of

⁶⁹ Mitchell, *Nazi Paris*, 48.

the PCF in the 1930s. This technique was used again in the communist resistance movement.

The belief that women occupied a role that was complementary to that of men pervaded the political spectrum in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1799, French theorist Charles Thérémin published a treatise on the situation of women in society. Karen Offen notes that ‘Thérémin laid out a plan of complementary equality, but with separate spheres for each sex to make its respective contributions. This was effectively a “familial” or “relational” feminism – a version of “equality-in-difference”.’⁷⁰ In 1849, Ernest Legouvé once again presented the concept of ‘equality-in-difference’ in his lectures and book concerning the potential for women’s emancipation under the Republic. Offen writes that Legouvé ‘insisted as well on the necessity for separate but equal – or parallel – tracks for women and men, linked through the institution of monogamous marriage’.⁷¹ While the approach to the ‘woman question’ was similar on both the Left and the Right, there were key differences between how the communists perceived the status of women and how the extreme Right constructed their views on gender. These differences played a vital role for women in the communist resistance and the policies of the Vichy government. Victoria de Grazia argues that ‘Latin feminists saw difference as meaning complementarity and collaboration between men and women, whereas fascist men understood it to mean sexual hierarchy and female subordination’.⁷² The attitude of the communists to the complementarity of gender roles aligned with feminist ideas of gender equality. Their attitude was not based on an idea of gender ‘sameness’, but on the progressive idea that women were equal but different from men. They were entitled to ‘equal opportunities, equal voice, and autonomous control of and authority over their own lives’.⁷³

The Vichy regime was the only domestic government of an occupied country that aimed to implement policies and reforms beyond what was required by the Nazi occupiers. Apart from its policies for political and economic collaboration, the Vichy

⁷⁰ See Karen Offen, ‘Feminism and the Republic,’ in *The French Republic: history, values, debates*, eds. Edward Berenson, Vincent Duclert and Christophe Prochasson, New York: Cornell University Press, 2011, 291.

⁷¹ Karen Offen, *European Feminism 1700-1950: a political history*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000, 117.

⁷² Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992, 238.

⁷³ Offen, ‘Feminism and the Republic,’ 289.

regime sought to apply an all-encompassing social reform program to achieve ‘total national regeneration’. Debbie Lackerstein writes:

Collaboration was also a means of pursuing a separate but inextricably linked connected aim: to establish an authoritarian new order that would repair the degenerative effects of parliamentary democracy and liberal society. The Vichy government aimed to reform national institutions, social structures and individual values in order to restore traditional, essentially French strengths. It named this project the National Revolution.⁷⁴

The interwar period – and particularly the period of the Popular Front – was seen by the Vichy government as decadent and to blame for the swift defeat of France and moral and social degeneration. The ministers of the Vichy regime used their arbitrary appointment to power to address the problems they perceived in policy changes of the Popular Front era, with the hope of instituting a regeneration of the guiding morals and values of French society. In order to regenerate France, right-wing politicians believed it was necessary to effect change in French homes as well as French politics. In order to do this, it was necessary to blur the lines between the public and private spheres, between politics and family. Women were believed to be fundamental to the success of Vichy’s social program.

The program of regeneration, known as the National Revolution, initiated by the Vichy government during the war had a defined agenda for French women. Women were seen by Vichy as political actors within the home who could, if mobilised correctly, return morality to the French home and, in turn, French society as a whole. Miranda Pollard focuses on gender in Vichy France in her important book published in 1998. She argues that gender was integral to Vichy’s National Revolution because women

represented an opportunity for radical change, for an innovative political mobilisation that focused on the “apolitical,” *le foyer*, motherhood, and the family. In these arenas, Vichy could generate and institutionalise its vision of a New France: patriarchal, authoritarian, hierarchical. Women were key actors. They had to be addressed in ways that circumscribed and delimited their action and their active participation.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Debbie Lackerstein, *National Regeneration in Vichy France: ideas and policies, 1930-1944*, Surrey, GB: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2012, 3.

⁷⁵ Miranda Pollard, *Reign of Virtue: mobilising gender in Vichy France*, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1998, 6.

The National Revolution took as its slogan *Travail, Famille, Patrie* (Work, Family, Nation). After the Popular Front government disbanded the extreme Right leagues in 1936, the CdF re-formed as a legitimate political party, the Parti Social Français (PSF).⁷⁶ This slogan was originally used by the PSF in the late 1930s. The triptych of the National Revolution was proclaimed to represent the three building blocks of French society that were essential to restore a robust and traditional France that would once again become a world leader. Women's central role within the family is why they received so much attention in Vichy rhetoric and policies. Before the war, the leagues believed women were the symbol of the family and represented the 'moral underpinning for France'.⁷⁷ They framed women as the untouched section of society who could provide the momentum of a moral regeneration. The parallels between the leagues of the 1930s and Vichy in the 1940s were not lost on the communists.

The Vichy regime deemed women most able to uphold the regeneration of France because, as mothers, the home was their space of influence. The home was consequently given importance by the Vichy regime as the space to foster a moral regeneration, while the family was seen as the unit that would protect French culture through maintaining traditions. Daniella Sarnoff writes: 'The family was so central to fascist groups that it would be impossible for them to ignore the "power" of mothers and women ... They wanted mothers and families to be exalted'.⁷⁸ The feminist concept of 'equality-in-difference' recognised 'women's physiological, mental, and emotional differences from men, and especially in their vital social role as mothers'.⁷⁹ Offen claims that feminists in France differed from feminists in other countries because of the importance they placed on 'their unique public role as mothers – mothers of future French citizens and citizen-mothers active in civil society if not in government as such'.⁸⁰ The ability to adopt the role of 'mother' made women especially important under the Vichy regime, and consequently in communist resistance rhetoric. In Chapter Four, we will see how effectively the communist resistance exploited Vichy's preoccupation with women as mothers.

⁷⁶ See Kevin Passmore, ' "Planting the Tricolour in the Citadels of Communism": women's social action in the Croix de Feu and Parti Social Français,' *The Journal of Modern History*, 71 (December, 1991): 814-851.

⁷⁷ Daniella Sarnoff, 'Interwar Fascism and the Franchise: women's suffrage and the Liges,' *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques*, 34: 2 Beyond Left and Right: New Perspectives on the Politics of the Third Republic (Summer, 2008), 113.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 130-131.

⁷⁹ Offen, *European Feminism 1700-1950*, 117.

⁸⁰ Offen, 'Feminism and the Republic,' 289-290.

The Vichy regime passed reforms that illustrated its desire to limit women's participation in the public sphere but exalt their role in the private sphere. Francine Muel-Dreyfus, another influential historian of women in the Vichy era, draws attention to the concept of the 'eternal feminine' in her study of gender under the Vichy regime.⁸¹ The phrase 'eternal feminine', she explains, was understood to be a feminine nature or essence that was eternal and unchangeable. Women deviating from their destined path, for example communist women, were looked on with disapproval. As such, after they were caught, women resisters were not protected from severe consequences because of their gender. The Vichy regime considered the acceptance of female students in secondary and higher education in the 1930s, identical primary schooling programs for girls and boys and the increase in women in professional occupations previously held by middle class men as some of the key causes 'of the social "degeneration" that led to chaos and defeat'.⁸² Muel-Dreyfus mentions that, from July 1940, reforms were made regarding family and health policy, women's work, girls' schooling and education in order to restore their desired values. Jane Jenson writes that 'the education of young girls was redesigned to prepare them not for a profession but for motherhood'.⁸³ Mothers were respected by the Vichy government and had to be recruited for the success of the social revolution.

The full extent of Vichy's program, even in regard to female education and employment, was not achieved due to the specificities of the situation of occupation. Both Pollard and Muel-Dreyfus argue that the National Revolution was designed to return France to an idealised past that was no longer viable. Due to the war, women often did not have control over their way of life in the home. While Vichy tried to dictate how women should structure their lives, the problems of provisioning, the absence of POWs and the need for women to work in order to support either industry or their families meant that Vichy's ideal of the home could not be realised. The mobilisation of men, the need to earn money as the sole breadwinner, the scarcity of provisions and the changing needs of a society in wartime, all made Vichy's plan for French women impractical.

⁸¹ Francine Muel-Dreyfus, *Vichy and the Eternal Feminine: a contribution to a political sociology of gender*, trans. Kathleen A. Johnson, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001, 208.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 207-208.

⁸³ Jane Jenson, 'The Liberation and New Rights for French Women,' in *Behind the Lines: gender and the two World Wars*, ed. Margaret Randolph Higonnet et al., New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1987, 276.

The status of women constructed by Vichy is important when analysing communist resistance for two reasons. The first is that resistance networks were able to use the stereotypes of women in order to protect their female resistance members. Vichy policy and propaganda helped to reinforce the pre-war image of the French apolitical woman who was absorbed by the politics of the home. Discounted as political figures, women were less readily suspected to be resisters. Marie-Louise Coudert quoted H  l  ne Mabile, a resister, who noted that ‘women were less easily suspected than men: it was normal that they would have a hand bag, whereas men, at that time, went around with hands in their pockets and were immediately noticeable if they were carrying a parcel’.⁸⁴ Women had more freedom to move around in public without suspicion falling on them. Women were particularly useful as liaison agents and couriers because of their greater freedom of movement. Mothers were able to hide underground papers they were distributing under the expanded base of their baby’s pram. Working women were able to steal documents, paper or official stamps because secretaries were not watched as closely as men in a position of influence. Women were less likely to be searched and caught because they were less likely to be suspected. A woman could plausibly plead ignorance or naivety when asked to account for her behaviour. Slaughter writes that ‘gender differences often served useful purposes during the Resistance, as customary activities like food shopping and child care and feminine stereotypes of weakness and flirtation either hid or supported partisan activity’.⁸⁵ It was important for the survival of any resistance network to recognise the instances that gender could be used to protect their activists.

The second reason that the status of women in Vichy was important for communist resisters was that it allowed them to develop specific types of resistance performed only by women. The failure of Vichy to provide the necessary provisions and monetary support for women to be solely mothers and provide for their home meant that the communist resistance was able to use Vichy rhetoric against itself. Women were able to conceal public demonstrations against the regime solely as an act undertaken by mothers concerned for the wellbeing of their families. The communist resistance movement used gender differences to promote a women’s underground press. Through

⁸⁴ Coudert, *Elles, la r  sistance*, 94-95.

⁸⁵ Slaughter, *Women and the Italian Resistance*, 53.

its multiple editions, women were encouraged to contribute to the resistance in a way specific to their gender.

Female resistance depicted in early editions of the women's underground press

The underground press was a significant aspect of communist resistance activity. While the message of the early communist clandestine press may have been inconsistent, the press itself was organised and productive. Each of the different groups of the communist movement had their own paper to contact like-minded potential resisters and to communicate their ideas. Chapter Four focuses solely on newspapers produced by the communist women's underground press in 1942 and 1943. The remainder of this chapter focuses on a smaller range of women's papers that were printed in 1940 and 1941.

The early women's newspapers were written by local committees of the Union des Femmes Françaises (UFF), the women's branch of the communist resistance. Each edition normally comprised a double-sided sheet with several articles concerning the impact of the war on daily life and French families. Ania Francos quoted Lise Ricol (1916-2012), a communist resister who will feature in Chapter Three, who explained that, 'like a certain number of women, I asked myself: why 'feminine' committees? In fact it was the only way to mobilise women against Vichy and the occupying forces, starting with the real problems of everyday life.'⁸⁶ The following discussion will be divided into two themes that recur in the early editions of the women's clandestine press. They are Vichy as the villain, and the role of women's groups and delegations. These themes illustrate how communist groups engaged women as women to contribute to their resistance movement in a way that was specific to their gender.

i) Vichy as the villain

The stance of the communist women's underground press aligned with the attitude adopted by the PCF and the Comintern. French fascists, in the form of the Vichy regime, were targeted as the enemy. Little was written about the Nazis. The October 1940 edition of *Jeunes Filles de France* focused on Pétain and Pierre Laval (1883-1945), a 1930s conservative politician who was made a minister in 1940 and was leader of the Vichy government from 1942 to 1944. The main article, titled 'Action for our Rights!', focused on the repression of women by Vichy. The article noted that Vichy unreasonably wanted

⁸⁶ Francos, *Il était des femmes dans la Résistance*, 121.

women to return to the home: 'The tyrants of Vichy even want to forbid young women from adopting a profession, which will leave them without a weapon in life and will make them lose all independence.'⁸⁷ Young women were called to unite with young men behind the communist party to fight for a government 'of the people, for the people'. The article goes on to denounce low wages of women workers, the requisitioning of food allowed by Vichy and the imprisonment of communists. Women readers were encouraged to reject the Vichy regime, the cause of their suffering, and join resistance activities.

The communists raised different issues in the underground press of different social groups in order to inspire multiple forms of resistance towards a common goal. The communists used this tactic to good effect. In November 1940, the first edition of *Bibendum*, a publication aimed at workers, was distributed. One article criticised the Pétain-Laval government. They were dubbed the 'pirates' of Vichy because they were profiting from the war and from the people while using Hitler to retain power. Adhering to the Comintern stance, the article rejected the motives of both Berlin and London and argued that it was a war between imperialist forces which the people did not choose or want. The paper stated that only 'the Communist Party raises the flag for the fight for Peace, Liberty and Independence'.⁸⁸ Even at this early stage in the war, this article illustrates that the language of resistance and anti-fascism was used to criticise the Vichy regime directly. The article blamed Vichy for the lack of food, for unemployment and for the requisitioning of supplies.

Engaging in resistance could be dangerous and the consequences were not hidden from readers. Articles reporting the arrest of female or male activists aimed to elicit outrage from their readers. The March 1941 edition of *Jeunes Filles de France* contains an article about women who had been arrested. They were arrested, the article stated, for fighting against the imperialist war, fighting against national oppression and demanding peace. Thousands of men and women, young and old, were reported to have already been arrested by the French police and the Gestapo. The article exhorted its readers to act: 'Young women with generous hearts, unite so that those responsible for the war will

⁸⁷ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/26. *Jeunes Filles de France*: édité par la Fédération des Jeunesses Communistes de France, no. spécial, October 1940, 1.

⁸⁸ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/5. *Bibendum*: organe de défense des ouvriers et ouvrières édité par la section communiste Michelin, no. 1, November 1940, 1.

be punished!’⁸⁹ This is an early reference not only to the Gestapo but to the dangers of becoming a resister. Women were asked to risk their own safety in order to protest the unfair treatment of their fellow resisters. The aim was to encourage and unite resisters against an enemy that treated them badly. The March 1941 edition of *L’Humanité de la Femme* mentioned some specific sentences that were passed down for female and male communists. In this example, the female communist was sentenced to one year, the male militant to three years and a young activist to six months in prison.⁹⁰

It was important in the underground press to identify the enemy in order to unite the population in a struggle against that enemy. Women readers were appealed to through their common interests and grievances as a way to unite them specifically as female activists. In January 1941 *L’Humanité de la Femme*, a special women’s edition of the underground communist newspaper, aimed to direct public opinion away from the Vichy regime. One article called the government ‘liars’ and drew attention to how few prisoners-of-war had returned despite the promises of the government. The May 1941 edition of *Nous, les Femmes* illustrated the tactics of the communist women’s underground press. Mothers’ Day was made a national holiday in May 1941 with huge propaganda appeals to celebrate French mothers and the importance of their role in the regeneration of France. Mothers’ Day was a significant event for the Vichy regime and the women’s press of the communist resistance used this to their advantage. The main article referenced the many speeches in which Vichy politicians called for women to return to the home and have many children. But, the article argued, it was not possible for women to build a family when there was nothing to feed them.⁹¹ Both of these articles used Vichy statements regarding families against the regime and in order to demand more rations for French families. These articles did not call the female readers to join them as communists, but instead focused on the common goals shared by all women. This tactic was used in the women’s underground press for the remainder of the war and was important in creating a widespread protest movement.

⁸⁹ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/26. *Jeunes Filles de France*: supplément à “l’Avant-Garde”, organe central de la Fédération des Jeunesses Communistes de France, no. spécial, March 1941, 2.

⁹⁰ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/25. *L’Humanité de la Femme*, édition spéciale de *L’Humanité*: Organe Central du Parti Communiste Français (S.F.I.C.), March 1941, 1- 2.

⁹¹ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/31. *Nous les Femmes*: journal des femmes communistes du canton de Villejuif, no. 4, May 1941, 1. See also: MRN: 85AJ 1/1/26. *Jeunes Filles de France*: supplément à “l’Avant-Garde” édité par les Jeunesses Communistes de France, May 1941, 2.

ii) *The role of women's groups and delegations*

Roger Bourderon and Germaine Willard argue that the call to form popular committees was one of the most regular directions given in publications of the PCF. They stress that these instructions were 'not general and vague, but a concrete recommendation' supported by examples in order to organise the masses based on their immediate concerns.⁹² A circular printed between August and December 1940 entitled *Pour un large mouvement féminin* (chosen by Bourderon and Willard to be reprinted in the book *Front Populaire, Antifascisme, Résistance: Le PCF (1938-1941)*, 1983) illustrates how and why communist women were engaged in resistance. Three types of committees are mentioned: the popular women's committees, committees for the aid of families of prisoners-of-war, and a committee for the aid of political prisoners. The circular listed the types of action that each committee could perform and even included examples of initial groups who had been successful.

A general note after the descriptions of the committees drew the readers' attention to the importance of propaganda. The circular gave details of the internal structure of the women's groups. It was recommended that the committees 'comprise a secretary, a treasurer, a person responsible for publishing material. Regions have their own political secretaries in constant contact with the Party, plus their secretary responsible for propaganda and the organisation of Committees.'⁹³ This circular shows how the organisation of the PCF envisioned the women's committees and their contribution. The French communists knew from the beginning of the occupation that their women members had a valuable role to play in their underground network. The circular ended with some general conclusions: 'All communist women must move towards this mass work and by so doing win the trust that the Party has for them to accomplish this great work.'⁹⁴

In January 1941, *Propagande Féminine* discussed the newly formed *comités féminins*, their goals and their activities. The UFF was mentioned in the January 1941

⁹² Roger Bourderon, and Germaine Willard 'Documents communistes,' in *Front Populaire, Antifascisme, Résistance: Le PCF (1938-1941)*, n° 14 spécial, ed. Roger Bourderon, Paris: Cahiers d'histoire de l'Institut de recherches marxistes, 1983, 173.

⁹³ *Pour un large mouvement féminin*, printed in *ibid.*, 195.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

edition of *Femmes*.⁹⁵ Under the headline ‘Women wait for the Action of our Committees’, the possibilities and the focus of these committees was explained:

The current task of our committees is to seize the housewives’ great anger and direct it towards important protest movements. Great possibilities open themselves to us. In each locality protests, delegations, petitions organised or spontaneous must take place and we will lead by amplifying them.⁹⁶

The above statement is significant because it identifies the desire of communist women organisers to use the anger of women to direct them into a protest movement early in the war. Again in January 1941, *L’Humanité de la Femme* also discussed using women’s anger to direct their activities: ‘Housewives, your anger is legitimate. During the interminable queues, do not let yourselves be divided by quarrelling. Turn your unhappiness against those who are truly responsible: those of Vichy, protectors of the hoarders, of those who starve the people.’⁹⁷ This edition acknowledged women’s grievances and encouraged women to channel their understandable anger and to act in unison. Readers were advised to protest at markets and to nominate delegations of women to visit the offices of various state authority figures, including the Commission of Provisions. The article concluded: ‘By your action and your union, you will save your children, your homes. In this struggle, communist women are with you.’⁹⁸

The communist resistance used the perception of French women as apolitical protesters in order to expand female resistance activities. A 1941 edition of *La Propagande Féminine* listed a range of activities performed by women’s committees all over France. A mention of the 450 political prisoners’ wives in Paris who had demanded visitor rights for the camps in France was included.⁹⁹ *Femmes* of April 1941 included an article that reported that a delegation of 1,300 women of Vitry had visited both the German embassy and the French embassy to demand the liberation of the political prisoners who had been punished because they did not want war or defeat.¹⁰⁰ As noted by Schwartz, it was important for resisters to identify the concerns that motivated and

⁹⁵ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/15. *Femmes*: édité par les femmes communistes de Vitry, January 1941, 3.

⁹⁶ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/35. *Propagande Féminine*, January 1941, 2. Emphasis in the original.

⁹⁷ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/25. *L’Humanité de la Femme, Édition spéciale de l’Humanité: organe central du Parti Communiste Français (S.F.I.C.)*, January 1941, 1.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/35. *La Propagande Féminine*, no. 3, 1941, 2.

¹⁰⁰ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/15. *Femmes*: édité par les femmes communistes de Vitry, April 1941, 3.

united women in order to encourage them to join resistance activities. In March 1941, *Nous, les Femmes* devoted the whole first page of the edition to the campaign for better rations. The rest of the edition focused on the black market, the wives of prisoners-of-war and a group of 300 women who went to visit Jean Achard, government minister responsible for provisioning, to demand more rations. Rationing was a topic that preoccupied all of France, but the responsibility of finding food or making do with what was available fell to women. Requisitioning remained a focus of female resistance activity throughout the occupation.

Despite the fact that *Nous, les Femmes* was produced by the communist women of the canton de Villejuif, the female readers were not asked to join the communist party. The success of gender equality for women in the Soviet Union was the subject of one article, but still women were not expected to become communists. The priority was to promote action on common issues, not to convert women to communism. The aim of communist women's groups was to persuade women to join communist resistance activities and this was only possible if their newspapers established the common agenda of communist women and non-communist women. The May 1941 edition of *Nous, les Femmes* contained an article that reported the protest of 300 women outside of their local town hall demanding more bread. The Mayor refused to see the delegation at which point the police intervened and one woman was physically assaulted by a named policeman.¹⁰¹

The underground press mentioned those resisters who had been treated badly in an attempt to highlight for their readers the unjust actions of the authorities. These reports often encouraged readers to unite to support each other against authorities who were prepared to punish patriots for fighting for the future of France. In an article titled 'Mutual Social Assistance', women were asked to support those who had been arrested as well as their families as a part of the wider social campaign to help all those in need in society. The article called on young women and girls to provide social assistance for unemployed youth and prisoners. Members of the UJFF in the 1930s were cited as the example to follow. Young women were directed to collect money and clothes and protest against the lack of supplies. They were also encouraged to organise delegations to demand supplementary rations of bread and milk for the poorer families, shoes for

¹⁰¹ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/31. *Nous les Femmes*: journal des femmes communistes du canton de Villejuif, no. 4, May 1941, 2.

unemployed youth and extra food and clothing for prisoners.¹⁰² This particular article appeared in the paper of the JC which focused mainly on male members. It is a similar call to action to that of the papers aimed solely at women, but in this case women's action was situated within the wider resistance network. In this male-dominated paper the women's action is framed less in terms of a resistance struggle against Vichy policy, and more as a form of philanthropic work similar to that of the pre-war era. It was the women's newspapers and the female organisers that directly called for women to be involved in resistance activities as a part of the national struggle for liberation.

Conclusion

Despite the ideological difficulties presented by the Nazi-Soviet pact, the French communists remained committed to the anti-fascist campaign, devoted themselves to reforming their party and began to foster clandestine subversive activities as soon as France was defeated. While communist resistance may have been confused in the first year of occupation, it nevertheless did occur. The first two years of the war not only gave French communists valuable experience in clandestine operations, but also gave them the time to develop the tactics necessary for successful resistance campaigns.

This chapter has illustrated three points that are fundamental in the development of the argument of my thesis. Firstly, it has shown that the communist resistance movement was able to exploit gender differences to the benefit of its organisation. A characteristic of the communist resistance was the interconnectedness of its different units and the complementary nature of its seemingly independent operations. Communist women's resistance committees continuously developed as a part of the communist resistance movement in order to better complement other aspects of communist resistance. Female groups also performed valuable resistance actions that no other group could, such as protests and demonstrations. Secondly, Chapter Two has examined the drawbacks and benefits of Paris as a location for resistance activity. Both the landscape and anonymity of Paris benefited resistance networks. A major drawback of the city, however, was the number of police and their attitude towards communist resisters, as we shall see in Chapter Three. Thirdly, this chapter has discussed the policies of Vichy that directly affected women, and subsequently affected female communist

¹⁰² MRN: 85AJ 1/1/31. *Notre Jeunesse*: organe central d'éducation et d'organisation de la Fédération des Jeunesses Communistes de France, deuxième trimestre 1941, no. 2, 10.

resistance and the roles adopted by women resisters. The women's underground newspapers featured in this chapter highlight not only women's early commitment to resistance but also the gendered aspects of their resistance that was integral to the strategy of the communist resistance movement.

Chapter Three

The Consequences of Activism, 1942: police investigations and the treatment of women resisters

The year 1942 was particularly difficult for the French Resistance. French police were honing their investigative skills and decimating resistance networks through large-scale investigations and mass arrests. Despite being cautious, communist activists suffered greatly at the hands of zealous and anti-communist police units. This chapter explores the development of female resistance through a study of how women suspects were treated by French and German police. The consequences suffered by female resisters were a part of women's experience of resistance and so must be central to a discussion of women in the communist resistance movement. Three police investigations into communist resistance activity that were undertaken in the early months of 1942 provide the basis for this discussion.

In this chapter, the focus is on three points that are fundamental to my thesis. Firstly, the chapter provides an analysis of the consequences suffered by female communist resisters. In order to do this it is first essential to note how closely communist activists were monitored in order to establish the high risk of being implicated in the activities of the communist resistance movement. Such an analysis confirms my argument about the interconnectedness of communist resistance. Female resisters suffered serious consequences for their resistance activities because they were recognised as members of the communist resistance movement. Secondly, the examples featured in this chapter expand on the discussion of the extent of women's involvement in communist networks during the war. Thirdly, the analysis of police investigations provides examples of how the resistance exploited traditional gender roles to further its cause and protect resisters.

The consequences for women arrested for resistance were different from those for men, but no less harsh. Women received heavy sentences even for so-called 'support' activities. Most often, the individual task a person performed did not determine the consequences an individual suffered. The combined activities of the network to which an

individual was connected were of the utmost importance to investigating authorities. Just because women were rarely executed does not mean that investigators were not aware of the importance of the role of female resisters. It was women's gender, rather than their particular crime, that shaped the consequences they suffered for resistance. The consequences suffered by women are complicated to analyse. Rather than execution, women were sentenced to serve long prison sentences. However, once French prisons became unmanageably overcrowded, the Nazis began deporting internees to camps in Germany. In this chapter, I draw on police reports, surveillance logs, interview transcripts and post-war comments made by women of their experiences. The documents produced by the police provide a starting point in understanding how the police perceived the gendered division of labour in resistance networks. The focus on multiple investigations concerning women activists allows the detailed exploration of the complicated implementation of punishments for female resisters.

The investigations featured in this chapter all relate to different aspects of communist resistance activity. *Affaire 'Claudia'* concerns the identification of a woman known to be supplying armed communist units with explosives and medicines. The investigation into the real identity of the woman arrested as Jeanne Dessart resulted in the police uncovering a 'solidarity' branch of the communist resistance. *Affaire Pican* was one of the largest investigations undertaken by the French police in Paris. The target was those engaged in the production and distribution of clandestine issues of *L'Humanité*. The investigations into the rue de Buci and rue Daguerre food protests are also mentioned in this chapter. France Bloch-Sérazin, Mounette Dutilleul, Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier, Danielle Casanova, Madeleine Marzin and Lise London figure in the investigations featured in this chapter. All were arrested for different crimes connected to the communist resistance. Dutilleul, Vaillant-Couturier, Marzin and London survived the war. Bloch-Sérazin was executed in Germany and Casanova died in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

The impact of re-structuring Paris police units

Policing the resistance involved detailed and long-term investigations by newly formed Paris police units. These units worked independently, but in cooperation with, the Nazi authorities. While the resistance was a new threat, communists were old enemies of the police force. Simon Kitson comments that the 'police had long tracked down communists. Hostility was bitter, particularly in the wake of bloody street fights between police officers

and militants beginning in 1925.¹ Jean-Marc Berlière and Franck Liaigre argue that the communists and French police viewed each other as enemies. Even the Popular Front era had not 'put an end to permanent frictions, or daily incidents'.² After the PCF was banned, the police had official authorisation to monitor communist activity. Berlière and Liaigre emphasise that the Nazi-Soviet pact and banning of the PCF 'permitted the settling of old scores'.³ Police departments were formed in Paris, and throughout France, expressly to track communist activity and militants. In Paris, within the Renseignements Généraux (RG), the intelligence service of the French police, a '*brigade spéciale anticommuniste*' (BS) was formed in March 1940, before the defeat. Originally its task was to detect 'violations of the decree of the dissolution of the PCF by the Daladier government (26 September 1939)',⁴ but the scheme was abandoned after France was occupied. The BS was reactivated in August 1941, however, in order to investigate communist 'terrorists' once the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact was broken.

During the course of the occupation, anti-communism took on a new meaning. While the long-standing resentment between the French police and communist activists had an impact on communist resisters, now the communists were also faced with the Nazis, a second ideological enemy that had authority in France. Communist resisters were more vulnerable simply because they were communist. Stéphane Courtois writes that 'during the second semester of 1941, the French and German police had literally gone through the departments "with a fine tooth comb" in order to detain, as a preventive measure, a very large number of pre-war militants, depriving the Party of a vast reserve of its leaders'.⁵ From November 1941, there were a large number of arrests of communist resisters. According to Courtois, worse than the arrests of its members was the fact that the police were on the trail of the central organisation which, by February 1942, was practically dismantled.⁶ The arrests culminated in three large trials that involved the

¹ Simon Kitson, 'From Enthusiasm to Disenchantment: the French police and the Vichy Regime, 1940-1944.' *Contemporary European History*, 11: 3 (August, 2002), 378.

² Jean-Marc Berlière and Franck Liaigre, *Liquider les Traîtres: la face cachée du PCF 1941-1943*, Paris: Robert Laffont, 2007, 180.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Jacques Delarue, 'La Police,' in *Le Régime de Vichy et les Français*, ed. Jean-Pierre Azéma et al., Paris: Fayard, 1992, 306.

⁵ Courtois, *Le PCF dans la guerre*, 241.

⁶ Ibid.

majority of the activists who had been arrested from the end of 1941 onwards. The trials were held on 4 March, 15 April and 24 August.⁷

The French police were also involved in enforcing two collaborationist policies of the Vichy regime beyond targeting resisters. The first related to sending French workers to Germany. The second concerned the deportation of Jews. After Laval returned to the government in April 1942, he encouraged an escalation of French-German cooperation. Laval adopted the responsibility for the Relève program in June 1942, the Service Civil National du Travail (SCNT) in September and the Service du Travail Obligatoire (STO) in February 1943. All three programs required sending French workers to Germany, at first on a voluntary basis, and then as a compulsory measure. The Relève initiative required sending French workers who volunteered to Germany in exchange for the return of French POWs at the ratio one POW for every three workers. This program was a failure. Those men who were drafted for the compulsory STO but refused to leave to work in Germany had to adopt a life of clandestinity and became known as *réfractaires*. Some joined maquis resistance units living in the country.

The anti-Semitism of Vichy evidenced in the extensive round-ups of Jewish men, women and children in France in July 1942, shocked the general population of France. The fact that French police had arrested 12,884 Jews in the occupied zone alone on 16 and 17 July pushed many to reject the Vichy regime due to its similarities with the Nazi occupiers. Pierre Laborie argues that, after July 1942, public opinion more closely tied the actions of the Vichy government to those of the Nazis. He writes that opposition to the persecution of the Jews became associated with resistance against the occupier and French collaboration. Laborie states that '[t]he fate reserved for Jews became one more argument in the establishment of opposition to the German presence and to the regime which lived in its shadow'.⁸ Coupled with the programs of the (failed) Relève and the STO, which were seen as other forms of deportation, 1942 marked a turning point of public opinion against Vichy. French police officers were used to enforce Vichy policy, and were expected to cooperate with the Nazi authorities. The mass arrests by French police officers over the summer of 1942 made this clear to the French population.

The French police remained a particular problem for communist resisters in Paris for the duration of the occupation. Simon Kitson argues that the majority of the French

⁷ Ibid., 253.

⁸ Pierre Laborie, *L'Opinion Française sous Vichy*, Paris: Seuil, 1990, 279.

police force became gradually less reliable as agents of the Vichy government over the course of the war. He asserts that *gendarmes* were not especially cooperative with the Vichy or Nazi authorities. Instead, he suggests that they were conflicted when asked to arrest French civilians and hand them over to Nazi authorities. Kitson notes, however, that there were two exceptions to this general rule. The first was the continued pursuit of communist militants over the duration of the war. The second was the zealous nature of specific police units operating in Paris. Kitson writes that, although the French police in general cooperated far less after 1942, 'the torture and handing over of large numbers of communists continued into 1944'.⁹ John Sweets makes a similar observation: 'The Communists were the chief targets of police repression during the first years of the occupation. Many police authorities at Clermont-Ferrand and elsewhere considered Gaullist resisters to be misguided patriots, but were unwilling to extend such "tolerance" to the Communists.'¹⁰ The communists in France were targeted as a clearly defined active opposition movement by the Vichy regime and the Nazi occupiers. The cooperation and re-organisation of the Paris police impacted greatly on the consequences experienced by the communist resistance.

The directors of the RG and BS were representative of the ruthless and zealous reputation the BS quickly developed. Lucien Rottée, director of the RG, also oversaw the recruitment, tactics and growth of the BS. On 31 December 1941, Rottée finally managed to convince the Prefect of Police that anti-terrorist investigations required techniques that differed from those of the regular police force, and so was granted a second BS unit. BSI focused on communist activities specifically, while BSII investigated resistance networks generally. Combined, the BS units operated with 19 inspectors, under the direction of two senior deputy inspectors and a brigadier. Berlière and Liaigre describe Rottée as '[t]all and thin, slender, always dressed with care in three piece suits with matching tie and shoes, reserved and haughty, always accompanied by a large dog, the man [was] arrogant, brusque and authoritative'.¹¹ Rottée also despised communists because of what he saw as their anti-patriotism, anti-militarism, deference to a foreign power, their violent demonstrations, anti-police attitude and their betrayal during the Nazi-Soviet pact.¹² A protégé of Rottée, Fernand David, was assigned to supervise BSI.

⁹ Kitson, 'The French Police and the Vichy Regime,' 390.

¹⁰ Sweets, *Choices in Vichy France*, 205.

¹¹ Berlière and Liaigre, *Liquider les Traîtres*, 192.

¹² *Ibid.*

Moorehead describes David as arrogant and extremely ambitious, soon to become known as the 'patriots' executioner'.¹³ Rottée gave his nephew René (Jean) Hénoque the leadership of BSII. After a seemingly slow start to his career in the police, Hénoque flourished as head of the BSII.

The thorough techniques and dedication displayed by the officers of the BS resulted in the success of their investigations and the arrest of thousands of resisters. To ensure their dedication and commitment to new investigative techniques, BS officers were not chosen at random. Both Kitson and Durand describe the personnel of these brigades as atypical officers who were specifically selected to perform the intensive investigations that were the focus of the BS. Durand explains that they were ambitious *gardiens de la paix* who were promised the status of *inspecteurs spéciaux*. They were generally young policemen who were known for their xenophobic, anti-Semitic and anti-communist prejudices.¹⁴ Soon, BS officers were seen as an elite group. They were given professional, financial, material and personal privileges. These included rapid promotions, bicycles and supplies, generous ration classifications, access to canteens that served decent food at affordable prices, and the opportunity to have a parent released from a POW camp.¹⁵ Inspectors who showed particular promise were invited to receptions with the Prefect of Police.

The investigations examined in this chapter depended upon certain techniques and extended training of the BS recruits. Many of the men were accepted into the BS because they had shown skill as interrogators or because they had detailed knowledge of communist activists and their networks. New recruits were taught about surveillance, letter drops, safe houses, and how to distinguish suspicious behaviour so they could identify those in hiding. Rottée was proud of his BS units. At times he even called his inspectors his *enfants chéris*, cherished children.¹⁶ The reason the investigations of the BS involved the arrest of so many suspects was the meticulous techniques developed by the officers. Moorehead goes into detail:

What Rottée had quickly understood was that everything depended on surveillance. His men worked in shifts, returning to the office to write up detailed reports. He taught them to develop their memory, to study

¹³ Moorehead, *A Train in Winter*, 72-73.

¹⁴ Durand, *Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier*, 165.

¹⁵ Berlière and Liaigre, *Liquider les Traîtres*, 219.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 192.

minutely faces and gestures and clothes and to write down precisely what they observed.¹⁷

Berlière and Liaigre explain that the inspectors of the BS knew the evasive techniques of their suspects and planned accordingly. Techniques such as quick changes of direction, crossing streets only to cross back minutes later, entering metro stations and leaving without catching a train, changing metro lines, changing to trains going back in the direction from where a suspect had just come, or trips to the terminus were recognised by BS investigators as suspicious behaviour. Tailing suspects unnoticed soon became a specialty of the BS that they 'mastered to perfection and which prompted the admiration of the Germans'.¹⁸

We shall see in the discussion of the investigations below just how persistent and skilled the BS inspectors became. Sometimes the investigations would last months and result in the arrest of dozens of suspects. Surveillance was the key to their investigative work. All the women discussed below were arrested due to tailing and the officers' attention to detail. The direction of the RG gave their employees shoes with leather soles so they would be able to walk kilometres in a day shadowing suspects. Leather shoes were a rare and valuable commodity during the occupation. The majority of the population had no choice but to wear wooden shoes. The other benefit to soft soles was that they were silent compared to wooden soles, which echoed on the streets now void of traffic noise.¹⁹ Detailed charts of an organisation were drawn up using information gathered while tailing suspects. New suspects were identified by an aspect of their appearance or the place where they were first spotted. Thorough descriptions were written down and given to other investigators. Berlière and Liaigre note that the descriptions were succinct, but exhaustive. They write that inspectors included details of a suspect's 'clothes, hat, particular marks, gait, walk, how they held themselves ... everything which would permit them to be recognised by another tail'.²⁰ The aim of BS investigations was to gather as much information as possible on as many suspects as possible before making a move to arrest any individual. BS officers aimed to apprehend all members of a network in order to prevent future resistance. They knew that it would be a relatively simple task for resistance networks to replace a single operative and

¹⁷ Moorehead, *A Train in Winter*, 73.

¹⁸ Berlière and Liaigre, *Liquider les Traîtres*, 199.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 202.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 202-203. Ellipses in the original.

continue their subversive activities. If they removed the majority of a network, however, it would be difficult for that network to continue in the future.

The scale of arrests of communist activists was only possible with the cooperation of the Paris police force. The BS, and the RG, worked closely with the Germans, as is evident in the number of reports written by David for his Nazi counterparts. Rottée held twice-daily meetings in his office with his three heads of service and representatives from the SIPO-SD (SIPO was the Nazi security police, a branch of the SS, while the SD was the intelligence agency of the SS). The French inspectors included Georges Labaume as head of the 1^{re} Section of the RG (the department that included the two BS units), David for BSI and Hénocque for BSII.²¹ Durand writes that BS officers were given relative autonomy by the Germans but remained in constant contact with them and, after the initial arrest and interrogation, handed suspects over to the German authorities. He continues that

[t]he two special brigades, under the respective authority of Commissaire David and Commissaire Hénocque collectively apprehended, from July 1940 to 1944 close to 3200 people who, for the most part, were handed over to the Germans. The head of BSI was accused, after the war, of being directly responsible for the arrest of 116 people 46 of whom were shot and the rest deported.²²

However, the majority of police officers were not obedient German henchmen. Durand notes that ‘all the police officers present at the Préfecture de police did not have the same repressive zeal or the same attitude’.²³ Even the officers of the BS were motivated by personal reasons rather than an allegiance to the Nazi war effort. Two of the women to be discussed in this chapter, while suffering at the hands of some of the most dedicated officers, also benefited from the choice of others to be sympathetic to their situation. The officers of the BS, however, were chosen or volunteered because they were driven, ruthless and, if not openly anti-communist, then supporters of the far Right.

The extent of *Affaire ‘CLAUDIA’*

The investigation of Bloch-Sérazin and her associates is a good example of the resources and hours the BS was willing to dedicate to pursuing communist units. *Affaire ‘Claudia’* is

²¹ Ibid., 193.

²² Durand, *Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier*, 166.

²³ Ibid., 166.

a significant example for my thesis as it was an investigation that revolved around a woman. The BS knew that women were heavily involved in communist resistance and so investigated them accordingly. Bloch-Sérazin was a prime target of the BS because she supplied soldiers of the resistance with weapons. The investigation that began with the desire to identify 'Claudia' resulted in the arrest of 68 suspects after a three-month-long intelligence-gathering assignment. Françoise 'France' Bloch-Sérazin, codename 'Claudia', was married with a two-year-old son and working as a chemist when she was arrested in May 1942. She had worked at the Institute of Chemistry conducting physical chemistry research since 1934 but, as we learnt in Chapter Two, she resigned in 1940 because she did not want her research to be appropriated by the Nazis.²⁴ Her decision to resume work in another laboratory was the result of her choice to join a Francs-Tireurs et Partisans (FTP) combat unit of the communist resistance. Bloch-Sérazin was put in charge of making explosives. With her long-time friend, Marie-Elisa Nordmann, who was also Jewish and also a chemical engineer, Bloch-Sérazin made bombs and grenades. She had a laboratory in the 19th *arrondissement* where she manufactured the explosives and kept medicines and vaccines for members of the resistance. Nordmann stole mercury from her research institute and others provided metal tubes from car factories which allowed the two women to make explosives used by the communist resistance to blow up railway lines and depots.²⁵

Affaire 'Claudia' was a success in that the BS arrested 'Claudia' and the network of her contacts, discovered her true identity and sentenced her to death for her 'terrorist' actions. The BS became aware of Bloch-Sérazin after the arrest and interrogation of one of her resistance contacts, Miret-Muste. When threatened, he told the police the time and location of his next meeting, which allowed an officer to go in his place. The file concerning Bloch-Sérazin includes a statement from Inspector Charlot, the officer who went undercover as the arrested resister, detailing what occurred at the meeting. Inspector Charlot was sent to meet Bloch-Sérazin outside of the Quai de la Rapée metro station in the 12th *arrondissement*. He approached Bloch-Sérazin and said: 'Hello Madame, I am here on behalf of 'Lucien'.' To which she replied: 'Well, as a matter of fact

²⁴ MRN: Fonds de L'Union des Femmes Françaises, carton no. 6. *France Bloch-Sérazin, Héroïnes d'hier et d'aujourd'hui*, Paris: Éditions de l'Union des Femmes Françaises, 1945, 4-5.

²⁵ Moorehead, *A Train in Winter*, 65.

I'm waiting for him.'²⁶ Charlot explained that Lucien was not coming but that he could pass on anything she wanted to give to him. She responded that she had nothing to give him but had just wanted to let him know that she had not seen 'André' since Monday. At this point, Yves Kermen, another resister, arrived and shot Inspector Charlot, shouting out a warning that this man was a policeman. Bloch-Sérazin managed to escape in the confusion. Hénoque noted that Miret-Muste and another resister in custody, Guisco, had informed them that 'Claudia' was having regular contact with the Organisation Spéciale (OS) of the communist resistance and that she provided them with chemical and pharmaceutical products. Kermen was arrested after he shot Charlot and the police put into motion an investigation in order 'to identify a woman designated to the [OS] of the Communist Party who goes by the name of "CLAUDIA" and to define the nature of her actions'.²⁷ *Affaire 'Claudia'* was thus put into motion in early February 1942.

The investigation was centred on Bloch-Sérazin, but the aim, characteristic of the methods of the BS, was to track and arrest as many individuals as possible who were involved in the branch of the OS that she supplied. As she had managed to escape the original sting, the investigation began with the identification of 'Claudia' in order to pick up her trail. The authorities were able to do this by piecing together the bits of information they had been given by some of her acquaintances already in custody. Miret-Muste mentioned that he thought she was able to supply them with chemical products because she worked in a laboratory of the municipal police. After visiting various labs, Inspector Charlot was able to identify her as an employee of the Laboratoire de l'Identité Judiciaire connected to the Préfecture de Police.²⁸ The BS then began their trademark surveillance of Bloch-Sérazin. Hénoque wrote that his officers also began a second related surveillance investigation into Aristide Chenuil, a communist resister who, they had been told, was recruiting people to carry out acts of terrorism under the authority of the 'clandestine communist party'. Once it was discovered that there was a suspect, Douillot,

²⁶ Collection Préfecture de Police (hereafter referred to as PP): G BS2 – 10: Affaire Sérazin. Confrontation between l'Inspecteur Charlot et la femme Sérazin, 16 May 1942.

²⁷ PP: G BS2 – 10: Affaire Sérazin. Jean Hénocque, report about arrest and after of Kermen, Yves for Commissaire de Police, 14 May 1942.

²⁸ PP: G BS2 – 10: Affaire Sérazin. Mise à disposition de la née BLOCH Françoise femme SERAZIN, Le Commissaire de Police.

who met not only with Bloch-Sérazin, but also with Chenuil, the two investigations merged together.²⁹

The identification of Bloch-Sérazin, a resister at the heart of an OS group, was an opportunity that the police could not afford to squander. *Affaire 'Claudia'* coincided with multiple investigations into the leadership of the PCF. The aim was to target the leadership in order to leave the remaining members lost and ineffectual. In Bloch-Sérazin's case it made sense for the police to leave her in place in order to discover any long-term plans of her network and understand more about how these activists operated. Bloch-Sérazin was arrested after surveillance was conducted from the end of March through to the beginning of May. As the BS officers had hoped, the 68 arrested suspects played a range of different roles as members of the resistance. Hénocque wrote that some of the suspects seemed 'to play an important role in the [OS] (recruitment, transport of arms and munitions, making of explosive devices, training of subordinates, health organisation); others only appear to have "liaisons" relating to propaganda of the clandestine communist party'.³⁰ The BS knew that resistance networks needed people to perform different roles in order to be successful. Investigators also knew that women performed a range of these roles.

Due to their participation within the PCF during the interwar period, women were known to be communist activists. As a result, female contacts were put under surveillance as readily as male suspects. The surveillance report compiled during *Affaire 'Claudia'* contains many details that illustrate the thorough investigation carried out by the officers in question and underline how effectively the BS was able to put into practice the techniques which Rottée advocated. The officers' notes are comprehensive. For example, they include descriptions of physical appearance and clothing as well as the bicycle number plates of suspects. The officers followed all lines of inquiry and were determined to piece together all the available information so that no one would slip through the cracks. One man whom Bloch-Sérazin met with on 28 March 1942 was described as follows: 'approximately 35 years old, 1m70, brown hair, reasonably thin, wearing a worn

²⁹ PP: G BS2 – 10: Affaire Sérazin. Jean Hénocque, report about arrest of Kermen, Yves for Commissaire de Police, 14 May 1942.

³⁰ Ibid.

Basque beret, wearing a navy coat and walking with his feet turned out'.³¹ They called him 'Homme 2 Gares' because of the location where they met. This was the procedure followed for all those with whom Bloch-Sérazin met. The officers tailing her would split up so one could follow the new suspect. This tactic allowed the number of persons of interest to expand exponentially. Casanova and Vaillant-Couturier were both arrested because of similar surveillance operations.

Men and women in communist networks suffered because of the prejudices and anti-communism of fellow French citizens. For the French BS, the threat posed by Bloch-Sérazin and her communist associates was greater than their terrorist operations. BS officers were also concerned about the long-term goals of the PCF. The inspectors wrote in their concluding paragraphs of their report that they had 'become certain that all those mentioned were engaged in clandestine work to reorganise ... the O.S. of the clandestine Communist Party, which has as a goal the execution of attacks against the members and property of the Occupation Authorities'.³² The inspectors also made clear that they were convinced that, once the PCF was re-organised to a sufficient degree, its members would pose a longer-term threat. They suggested that the organisation had the other mission of 'the recruitment of a popular army and the taking of power by neutralising public administrations at the opportune moment'.³³ This statement seems to suggest that the French police were concerned by the future goals of these activists just as much as they were by the short-term plan of attacks to be perpetrated on them and the Nazi occupiers. Nazi officers were kept informed on the progress of the investigation by the French officers, but it was, after all, French policemen who gathered evidence and arrested suspects.

Once her identity was discovered, the politics of her family served to strengthen the case that Bloch-Sérazin was a communist activist. The BS learnt that Bloch-Sérazin had been a communist militant before the war, as were her parents, brother, husband and his family. Her dossier in the central police archives verified that she supported the

³¹ PP: G BS2 – 10: Affaire Sérazin. Surveillance report by Inspecteurs Charlot, Ageorges, Losinguez, Louis, Marche, Chabot, Besse, Brandy, Candas and Bret, for Monsieur le Commissaire de Police, Chef de la Brigade Spéciale II, 20 May 1942.

³² PP: G BS2 – 10: Affaire Sérazin. Report by les Inspecteurs Charlot, Ageorges, Losinguez, Louis, Marche, Chabot, Besse, Brandy, Candas et Bret for Monsieur le Commissaire de Police, Chef de la Brigade Spéciale II, 20 May 1942, 28.

³³ PP: G BS2 – 10: Affaire Sérazin. Report by les Inspecteurs Charlot, Ageorges, Losinguez, Louis, Marche, Chabot, Besse, Brandy, Candas et Bret for Monsieur le Commissaire de Police, Chef de la Brigade Spéciale II, 20 May 1942, p. 28.

clandestine communist party.³⁴ In the documents concerning her identity, her father and husband are mentioned. In the introductory paragraphs of the surveillance report it is noted that her husband was 'administratively detained ... at Châteaubriant'.³⁵ The police uncovered the fact that her father was the journalist and publicist Jean-Richard Bloch, a writer who was also co-director of the communist newspaper *Ce Soir*. Bloch-Sérazin's father was a fugitive because of his involvement with *L'Humanité* and *Ce Soir*.³⁶ In a later document prepared after her arrest we read that her husband, 'Sérazin Frédéric, ex-secretary of a communist cell, is actually interned in the camp de Voves (E et L)'.³⁷ The communist activity of her brother and brother-in-law was also used as evidence of her communist connections. Her brother had been placed in the military prison of Lontron (in the unoccupied zone), while her brother-in-law was on the run and wanted by the police. Bloch-Sérazin's communist family background incriminated her further.

The police did not question that Bloch-Sérazin, a woman, could be involved in OS activities. The fact that she assembled explosives determined her treatment as a suspect, at least up until the moment of her arrest. There were two moments when her gender directly affected how she was treated. The first was when BS officers came to arrest her, and the second was the sentence she received. When police officers arrived at her home she was alone with her young son Roland. She managed to convince them to wait with her for her friend, and Roland's nanny, Antoinette Triochet to arrive.³⁸ Triochet recounted that 'thanks to the complicity of police officers' Bloch-Sérazin was also able to contact her by letter almost every day.³⁹ Not all French police officers were un-sympathetic. When they came to arrest her, the BS officers were forced to acknowledge that she was a woman and mother. The knowledge of her familial role did not result in her being treated leniently, but it did delay her arrest by a couple of hours. Bloch-Sérazin received a sentence that differed from that of men who performed a similar role solely because the

³⁴ PP: G BS2 – 10: Affaire Sérazin. Mise à disposition de la née BLOCH Françoise femme SERAZIN, Le Commissaire de Police, date faded.

³⁵ PP: G BS2 – 10: Affaire Sérazin. Report by les Inspecteurs Charlot, Ageorges, Loringuez, Louis, Marche, Chabot, Besse, Brandy, Candas et Bret for Monsieur le Commissaire de Police, Chef de la Brigade Speciale II, 20 May 1942.

³⁶ PP: G BS2 – 10: Affaire Sérazin. Mise à disposition de la née BLOCH Françoise femme SERAZIN, Le Commissaire de Police, date faded.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ MRN: Fonds de L'Union des Femmes Françaises, carton no. 6. 'Souvenirs d'Antoinette Touchet qui a sauvé et élevé le petit Roland,' in *France Bloch-Sérazin, Héroïnes d'hier et d'aujourd'hui*, 15.

³⁹ Ibid.

authorities had difficulty in defining and assessing a woman's status as a quasi-soldier. The complexity of women's status will be discussed in detail below.

Jeanne Dessart: arrested but not forgotten

All the women mentioned in this chapter were pursued and punished because of their connection to the communist movement. The arrest and subsequent identification of Andrée 'Mounette' Dutilleul is a good illustration of the merciless pursuit of female communist militants by BS officers. Dutilleul was arrested on 15 May 1941 under her codename Jeanne Dessart. She had two meetings that afternoon, first with Jean Catelas, the next with Félix Cadras, both members of the party leadership. Jacques Duclos, joint leader of the clandestine party with Benoît Frachon (a figure of the trade unions before the war), had asked Dutilleul to establish a direct line between the two men, thereby facilitating operations for the Front National (FN). Dutilleul waited for Catelas outside a café for the extra ten minutes after the arranged meeting time, as was the communist practice. He did not arrive within this time so she decided to leave, thereby adhering to the safety protocol. As she was leaving, a man approached her and called her by her, then current, codename 'Simone'.⁴⁰ At first she thought it was someone that Catelas had sent in his place, but she decided to be cautious and pretended to be put out and annoyed by this man. When she continued on her way, the undercover police officers blew their whistles and three men appeared, grabbed her and arrested her.⁴¹ They identified 'Simone' as 'Jeanne Dessart' and sentenced her, under her false name, to four years in prison for 'transporting a number of tracts, brochures and dossiers concerning the clandestine activity of the ex-communist party'.⁴² Amongst the papers that she was carrying when she was arrested was a bundle of 27 hand-written biographies of possible recruits for network responsibilities.⁴³ Carrying this material was a risk. The list of potential recruits indicated that the clandestine PCF was growing and their discovery led to further arrests as part of *Affaire Catelas*.

The suspects arrested in connection with Catelas were the first defendants to be judged under the law of 7 September which set up a State Tribunal with a new

⁴⁰ *Les Mémoires de Mounette Dutilleul*, Chapter XXIV: May 1941

<http://trcamps.free.fr/Mounette%201939.html> (accessed 12 February 2016).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² PP: GB71 BS1 – 23. Georges LABAUME, report concerning Aff. c/ DUTILLEUL Andrée, alias "DESSART", Vve LALLIER, COUTURIER Marie-Claude, 30 January 1942.

⁴³ Durand, *Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier*, 157.

jurisdiction. This Tribunal was to handle the trials and sentencing of the instigators and accomplices of, as Durand writes, all ‘acts, schemes or activities “of a nature that troubles the order, interior peace, public calm, international relations or, in a general manner, harm the French people”’.⁴⁴ Most of the individuals tried along with Dutilleul were given heavy prison sentences. Catelas was sentenced to death and executed on 24 September, only three days after the trial. Dutilleul, as Dessart, was given a prison sentence to be served in a French prison. The investigation to which she was connected included central figures of the communist resistance. If the police had known Dutilleul’s true identity, she would have been tried alongside them. There may have been no consistency regarding the degree of involvement and the length of sentencing for women, or men, but someone in a leadership position or involved in armed combat was always treated more severely. Durand notes that Dutilleul was a significant arrest for the authorities, even though they did not yet know her true identity and actual role within the communist resistance. He writes that

to be the companion to Arthur Dallidet, the man closest to the direction of the party, to have gone to Moscow in January 1940 to meet the directors of l’Internationale and Maurice Thorez ... is information which, if it was known to the police or the German authorities, could have seen her decapitated in Germany.⁴⁵

She was entrusted as a liaison for the clandestine leadership because she was dependable, had pre-war connections to the men and was less recognisable to the police than the well-known male militants.

As a resister, Dutilleul transported highly confidential material and provided a link between different operating groups. These tasks were essential for the functioning of the clandestine PCF and its resistance activities. Dutilleul was detained in Rennes prison as ‘Jeanne Dessart’ until September 1942. It took the BS one year to discover and prove her true identity. Berlière and Liaigre underline that sometimes pro-Nazi French citizens preferred to send letters of denunciation to German agencies rather than the French police, whom they did not trust. It was one such letter of denunciation, passed on to the RG that revealed that the political detainee ‘Jeanne Dessart’ was in fact Andrée

⁴⁴ Ibid., 159.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 156.

Dutilleul.⁴⁶ Joseph 'Jean' Picard was assigned to investigate the claim. Picard was 'THE specialist of the PC/SFIC who knew better than anyone else, the inner workings, the mindsets, the executives, the militants'.⁴⁷ He had been an inspector of the 1^{re} Section of the RG since 1929 where he was charged specifically with the recruitment and handling of informants.⁴⁸

Picard's investigation into Dutilleul's identity once again emphasises how thoroughly the BS considered all leads concerning communist activists. Picard spent nine months scrutinising the identity and contacts of a woman who was already in prison. Picard, accompanied by a Nazi SD officer, travelled to Rennes to transfer Dutilleul to Paris and pursue the investigation into her identity. His report, dated 30 January 1942, detailed what he had been able to discover. He had learnt that Dutilleul had been very active at the heart of the pre-war PCF. Her father was Emile Dutilleul, treasurer of the PCF, and, at one point, an elected politician in the Saint-Denis area. Her personal relationship with Arthur Dallidet, a member of the party leadership, was also discovered.⁴⁹ Picard wrote in his report: 'Notably, she had been employed at the Secrétariat Européen de l'Internationale Syndicale Rouge, then within the central office of the Communist Party, where she had performed the tasks of secretary to Maurice Tréant ... currently on the run.'⁵⁰ He continued that it was in this capacity that she performed a number of 'secret missions' between the PCF and the Comintern. Picard even managed to uncover the fact that, in 1932, the PCF had sent her and her husband to the Soviet Union.⁵¹

None of the new information discovered about Dutilleul concerned her activities as a resister. Instead, it all related to her position within the PCF in the 1930s. During the war it was possible for police to discover a militant's pre-war activities from records such as those at the Ivry police station mentioned in Chapter Two. Communists suffered after their arrest because of their involvement in the party before the war. The only new information Picard managed to gather in early 1942 was that Dutilleul had lied about her identity. Picard discovered from the Services de l'Etat-civil in Lille that her false identity

⁴⁶ Berlière and Liaigre, *Liquider les traîtres*, 231-232.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 223. Emphasis in the original.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 224.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁵⁰ PP: GB71 BS1 – 23. L'Inspecteur Principal-Adjoint Picard, to Monsieur le Commissaire de Police, Chef de la 1^{ère} Section, 30 January 1942.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

card had been based upon the registered birth records of an Yvonne Dessar.⁵² Once they identified 'Dessart' as Dutilleul she was returned to Rennes prison to await deportation to Ravensbrück. Dutilleul received a more severe sentence than 'Dessart' because she was now known to have been involved in the organisation of the clandestine PCF. Once identified, Dutilleul suffered harsher consequences because of her role in the PCF during the 1930s, not because of her actions as a resister.

The dedication of Picard's investigation into those who had been in contact with Dutilleul during her time in prison did yield one result. After he had gathered as much information on her background as possible, Picard re-interviewed Dutilleul. He interrogated her on four consecutive days in early February, but Dutilleul never deviated from her story. She maintained that she was 'Jeanne Dessart' and declared that she would not give any details about her life for fear of worrying her parents. Picard wrote in his report that he had told her that 'her attitude was making the information given at the moment of her arrest look to be inaccurate and that the fact that she was continually refusing to give the necessary information about her time preceding arrest was implying that her identity was false'.⁵³ Picard managed to discover from the records of the prison that Dutilleul regularly corresponded with a widow in Paris, Alice Lallier. When questioned about Lallier, Dutilleul explained that she was an old aunt, a half-sister of her mother, whom she had entrusted with her savings so that her aunt could use the money to send care packages. Lallier's address was in the records at the prison. This was an important lead that resulted in the arrest of Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier.

The investigation that followed highlights both the ardour of the police when tracking communist activity and the structure of the support provided to communist activists that was characteristic of the underground communist movement. Back in Paris, the police took Lallier into custody and placed her home under surveillance.⁵⁴ Anyone who came to her door was apprehended and questioned. Three people were arrested using this technique. Two were deemed to have no knowledge of Lallier's activities and released, while the third, Vaillant-Couturier, was detained. Dutilleul was already in custody but there remained one loose end in the form of Lallier. The BS put in days of surveillance for the result of one more arrest. Someone in the hierarchy, either the Nazi

⁵² PP: GB71 BS1 – 23. Report concerning investigation of femme DESSART, 2 February 1942.

⁵³ PP: GB 71 BS1 – 23. L'Inspecteur Principal Adjoint Picard, to Monsieur le Commissaire de Police, Chef de la 1^{ère} section, 7 February 1942.

⁵⁴ PP: GB 71 BS1 - 23. Mise à disposition de la femme Veuve LALLIER, 7 February 1942.

or RG supervisors, also clearly thought the investigation into Dutilleul's contacts was important. Within her file in the Préfecture de Police archives, there are 20 pages of German translations of the French reports. Nazi counterparts were always kept informed by the French police but there were no German translations in any of the other files discussed in this chapter.

The communists were not naïve. The PCF leadership knew that arrested resisters posed a potential danger to the safety of their remaining militants. Under torture or threats against the safety of their family and friends, arrested resisters may have given information to their captors. As we have already seen, many did. Berlière and Liaigre comment that imprisoned militants constituted 'a precious capital which risked disappearance under the combined effects of demoralisation and hopes raised by Vichy'.⁵⁵ For this reason, one section of the FN strove to maintain a presence of the party in prisons and camps. They wanted to create some form of political control, a sense of solidarity, a link and an authority that 'no one or nothing seemed able to break'.⁵⁶ Loyal militants were promised that their families would be looked after in the case of their arrest or death. Money or provisions were provided for the families of those killed as resistance members. Communist prisoners were also given moral and material support, including parcels, letters, tracts, brochures and newspapers. Another deterrent to giving information to the authorities was the fact that this support would be withdrawn if a member betrayed the party.

Dutilleul's example illustrates how the communists provided for inmates and their families. In her interview with the police, Lallier explained how she came to know both Dutilleul and Vaillant-Couturier.⁵⁷ In July 1941, Vaillant-Couturier, using her codename 'Clairette', visited Lallier on the recommendation of a mutual friend. The friend had been a fellow member of the Comité Mondiale des Femmes Contre la Guerre et le Fascisme (which, due to its communist affiliation, had been disbanded along with the PCF in 1939). It was the political connection that prompted the communists to contact this woman and hope she would help them. 'Clairette' wanted Lallier to provide a service for a young woman serving a sentence in the Petite Roquette prison. When Lallier was inclined to refuse, 'Clairette' pleaded that it would be a 'humanitarian gesture' and so Lallier

⁵⁵ Berlière and Liaigre, *Liquider les traîtres*, 81.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ PP: GB 71 BS1 – 23. Interrogatoire de la Veuve LALLIER, 12 February 1942.

relented.⁵⁸ Lallier explained to the police that 'Clairette' later visited her and dictated the letters addressed to the judge, who needed to grant his permission for Lallier to visit 'Jeanne Dessart'. Once the judge had granted permission to Lallier and passed on the permit that allowed them to communicate, 'Clairette' continued to visit and dictate the letters sent to 'Dessart'. She also read the letters from 'Dessart' and passed over the money necessary to pay for the packages sent to the prison. Additionally, 'Clairette' gave a little extra at times to help Lallier herself survive. Lallier met Dessart for the first time in the visitors' room of the prison simply because of the link established by a third party. She supposedly knew nothing of Dessart or the reason she was imprisoned.⁵⁹ Lallier added that, when she asked why 'Clairette' could not pose as a sister, she had replied that, because of her old age, Lallier would seem more trustworthy.⁶⁰ Dutilleul would have been completely isolated without her pre-war party connections and the policy of the PCF to provide for its imprisoned members.

Dutilleul eventually admitted that she had lied about her identity. It is unclear from the reports what threats or torture she underwent before she yielded. All the reports and interview transcripts discussed in this chapter were typed. Surveillance logs were handwritten in meticulous detail. The transcripts all follow a similar template of questions and phrasing of answers. This indicates that they were produced as a formal record, rather than as a verbatim account of a suspect's responses. As one might expect, there are no descriptions of torture, physical intimidation or threats made to any suspect. Berlière and Liaigre comment on reports that imply some more information suddenly occurred to a suspect. They write that the neutral tone and purposely impassive writing give little indication that suspects' changed responses were the result of 'sometimes violent efforts or the capitulation of others'.⁶¹ Dutilleul is one such example. In Paris, the police organised for family and acquaintances of Dutilleul to identify her formally. Her neighbour, concierge and concierge's husband all positively identified 'Dessart' as Dutilleul. Her mother and sister did not identify Dutilleul. After being shown a series of photographs, her mother was reported to have said that, despite not seeing her daughter for two years, she was confident that the photos were not of her child: 'The physiognomy

⁵⁸ Ibid, 1.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 2.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 2.

⁶¹ Berlière and Liaigre, *Liquider les traîtres*, 26.

of the young woman shown in these photos is completely unknown to me.⁶² After being confronted in person with these five people, Dutilleul admitted in her interview on 14 February that she had been a member of the PCF and worked as a typist for the party leadership. She also conceded that her correspondence whilst in prison was organised by militants, but that she did not know any of the details and had not requested that any such communication be organised.⁶³ 'Dessart' had been detained in a French prison because she was involved in communist activities. Dutilleul, on the other hand, was deported because it was discovered that she had lied to the police and was a high-ranking member of the clandestine PCF leadership.

The identification of 'femme Vincennes'

Vaillant-Couturier's long-term involvement with the PCF also affected how she was viewed by the police. When Vaillant-Couturier first arrived at the Préfecture she was immediately identified as Marie-Claude Vogel, married name Couturier. She later recounted that it then took roughly ten minutes for the police to discover that she was the daughter of Lucien Vogel, who had left for America, and the widow of Paul Vaillant-Couturier, a well-known communist militant and writer who was much-loved by communist activists. Neither connection reassured the police.⁶⁴ Once her name and personal relationships were uncovered, it did not take long for the police to find that she had been involved in communist activities for a decade. David ordered a photo of Vaillant-Couturier to be published in *Le Petit Parisien* with an article asking anyone who knew this amnesiac to come forward. Vaillant-Couturier was relieved because, rather than prompting her resistance associates to contact the police as David hoped, it warned them of her arrest.⁶⁵

Picard wrote in a report dated 14 February 1942 that Vaillant-Couturier had been a member of the JC, then of the PCF, and that since the dissolution of the party she had been involved in the activities of the 'solidarity' branch of the clandestine party. He continued: 'It is in this quality that she in particular was given the role, by the leaders of the communist party, to come to the aid of imprisoned or interned militants and their

⁶² PP: GB 71 BS1 – 23. Audition de Mme DUTILLEUL, 13 February 1942.

⁶³ PP: GB 71 BS1 – 23. Nouvelle audition de la femme BAYER, née DUTILLEUL, 14 February 1942.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 161

⁶⁵ Moorehead, *A Train in Winter*, 97.

families by distributing the funds put at her disposition.⁶⁶ The PCF knew the risks involved in their underground activity and viewed the support of captured militants as a practical decision and moral obligation. Women could and were best suited to perform the role of dispensing aid as it was less suspicious for individuals to receive female visitors on a regular basis. To establish links and trust with families was also easier for a woman. This was a resistance task specific to women resisters in communist networks.

Sustaining communist resistance activities was a serious crime and so Lallier and Vaillant-Couturier were turned over to the Nazi authorities.⁶⁷ The French police did the investigative work, which included travelling to Rennes, establishing the background of any suspects, finding family members, interviewing those who were arrested, and carrying out surveillance operations, but it was the Nazi authorities who had control over the future of their suspect. Vaillant-Couturier, like Bloch-Sérazin, did come into contact, however, with police officers who were not as zealous as those in the BS. At the time of her arrest, Vaillant-Couturier benefited twice from the choices of different officers. The first instance occurred on the way to the Préfecture de Police. The only document she had that could lead the police to her apartment was a ration card with the name of the shop located in the 15th *arrondissement* where she bought milk products for Thomas, the young son of her partner, Pierre Villon. Even though she was accompanied by two policemen, she was able to throw the card into the Seine. Either these policemen were negligent, or they deliberately allowed her the opportunity to destroy incriminating evidence. The second instance occurred after arriving at the Préfecture de Police. Vaillant-Couturier was in the toilets struggling to destroy the documents that were concealed in the false bottom of her bag when a policeman walked in, saw what she was doing, but said nothing.⁶⁸ The actions of these men illustrate that not all Paris police officers pursued communists with enthusiasm.

Vaillant-Couturier received more severe treatment after she was connected to another ongoing investigation. At the time of her arrest, Vaillant-Couturier was only implicated in the case related to Dutilleul. The police knew her name but not the extent of her resistance activities. When she was arrested, Vaillant-Couturier knew that she was

⁶⁶ PP: GB 71 BS1 – 23. L'Inspecteur Principal Adjoint PICARD, to Monsieur le Commissaire de Police, chef de la 1^{ère} Section, 14 February 1942.

⁶⁷ PP: GB 71 BS1 – 23. Notes concerning REMY, Charles and LACAGE, Suzanne being released and DUTILLEUL Andrée, LARVARON, Alice and VOGEL, Marie Claude being put in custody, 14 February 1942.

⁶⁸ Durand, *Marie-Claude Vaillant Couturier*, 166-167.

fortunate to be connected only to the Dutilleul case. However, due to a chance meeting in the halls of the Préfecture de Police, her fortune did not last and she was tied to the wider-reaching *Affaire Pican*. This was an extensive ongoing investigation that had begun with André Pican, a man involved in the publication of the clandestine *L'Humanité*.⁶⁹ It is a significant investigation for this thesis as it illustrates not only the extent of BS investigations but also the national scale of the communist movement. Casanova was arrested as a part of *Affaire Pican* as well. She decided on 14 February to take some coal to her friends, George and Maï Politzer, who had no heating. Charlotte Delbo wrote that '[w]hen she knocked on the Politzers' illegal residence with her basket of coal in her arms, she found herself face to face with inspectors from the special brigades who had just arrested George and Maï. She was soon identified at General Intelligence.'⁷⁰

Affaire Pican was another investigation where close and ongoing surveillance and the meticulous training of BS officers was the key to its success. More often than not, new persons of interest could not be identified and so were given names relating to where they had been seen, what they were wearing or who they were meeting.⁷¹ Vaillant-Couturier had been dubbed 'femme Vincennes'. The officer who had followed Vaillant-Couturier from her rendezvous had subsequently lost her and so she was left as a loose end in that investigation. In the hallways of the Préfecture de Police she was led, by chance, past this same officer, who was able to identify her as 'femme Vincennes'.⁷² The memory and dedication of this officer had dire consequences for Vaillant-Couturier. On 15 February, *Affaire Pican* was pulled together and 50 militants were arrested. The police already had many of them in custody by the time that Vaillant-Couturier was recognised in the corridor. One such suspect was Madeleine Lafitte, 'femme Pyrénées', who had been at the rendezvous with Vaillant-Couturier. The authorities threatened Lafitte with the arrest of her friend, who was not involved, if she did not admit that Vaillant-Couturier and 'femme Vincennes' were one and the same person.⁷³ Vaillant-Couturier maintained that Lafitte's confirmation did not affect her case because her identification was just a formality. The officers involved already knew she was 'femme Vincennes'.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 164.

⁷⁰ Charlotte Delbo, *Convoy to Auschwitz: women of the French Resistance*, trans. Carol Cosman, Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1997, 43.

⁷¹ PP: GB 129 BS2 – 37: *Affaire Pican*.

⁷² Durand, *Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier*, 164.

⁷³ Ibid.

Affaire Pican grew to be one of the largest and most widespread of the BS investigations. The documents and contact details of those arrested in Paris implicated resisters located all over France. *Affaire Pican* illustrated that the communist resistance was indeed a national, coordinated movement. David and his men had been following a number of suspects connected to Pican for some time. After a while, the officers began to notice that their suspects were becoming more and more nervous – crossing and recrossing roads, entering metro stations only to leave again, changing directions more often than necessary – which alerted them to the fact that the network was about to disappear. Berlière and Liaigre explain that David decided to move so as not to lose those they had already identified. In the early hours of 15 February 1942 he sent 60 officers to arrest the suspects and search their homes. David advised his men to arrest suspects in the street, if possible, as this would avoid giving them the opportunity to destroy evidence.⁷⁴ To start with, ten men and nine women were arrested, all of them either leading figures in the underground PCF or their liaison agents. Many had large sums of money and a range of documents in their possession because they were preparing to disappear underground.

The investigation continued to grow as one group of suspects led to another and another. At the home of Cadras, who had been organising resistance in the south, officers found his wife attempting to throw a bag of documents out of the window. Inside the bag they found reports of resistance activities and names of resisters from all over the country. On Casanova the police found names for operatives working in the Pyrénées. In Rouen, Madeleine Dissoubray, a teacher who had helped with the derailing of a train and provided a safe house for an active operative, was approached by an undercover policeman with half a ticket that corresponded to her own. She did not give away names but, as she trusted the impersonator, ‘was very forthcoming about plans, printing presses and the way the Resistance was structured’.⁷⁵ Once the officer had learnt all he believed he could from her, he arrested Dissoubray with the help of his men. Though she tried to escape three times whilst in custody, she did not succeed and was sent to Paris. The third wave of arrests of *Affaire Pican* involved Arthur Dallidet, mentioned in Chapter Two, who was responsible for the security of the communist resistance movement. Dallidet, not previously a suspect, was arrested after meeting with a woman in a cafe by the entrance

⁷⁴ Berlière and Liaigre, *Liquider les Traîtres*, 120.

⁷⁵ Moorehead, *A Year in Winter*, 100.

to the Reuilly metro station in the 12th *arrondissement*. He gave away no information despite receiving beatings that left him unrecognisable to his friends. Dallidet's arrest, however, led to many further arrests as he was carrying a long list of names and addresses. The documents found on all the resisters connected to *Affaire Pican* clearly linked them to the nation-wide communist resistance. By 25 March 1942, 113 people, including 35 women, had been arrested from all over France as part of *Affaire Pican*.

All those arrested were treated badly at the hands of the French police and then worse by the Nazi authorities. They received severe sentences for their resistance activities. Women and men were beaten, and many of the arrested suspects were put into solitary confinement. Everyone was given very little food and insufficient bedding in the French prisons where they spent time before they were sentenced. Vaillant-Couturier was in a much worse position after being linked to *Affaire Pican*. Those involved in the printing and production of propaganda were treated severely because the material clearly illustrated their commitment to 'war' against the occupiers. Whilst the discovery of the extent of Vaillant-Couturier's and Dutilleul's activities within the communist resistance resulted in them receiving more severe sentences, for Casanova her connection to *Affaire Pican* alone was enough to result in a heavy sentence. She was never identified as a central figure in re-forming the party. Vaillant-Couturier and Casanova spent a year in various French prisons before being deported to the Birkenau concentration camp, part of the Auschwitz complex, on 24 January 1943 along with 228 other French women.

The politics of female protest

Unsurprisingly, the most severe punishments were received by persons who were identified as leaders of a resistance network or as having organised a violent attack. What is surprising, however, is how women were perceived by the police in the chain of responsibility for such attacks. One aspect of the propaganda campaign against the Vichy regime and Nazi authorities was the organisation of protests by women at markets and grocery stores. Two examples of female protests over insufficient provisions were investigated by officers of the BS after they both turned violent. Both protests resulted in resisters opening fire on police officers in order to protect the protesters. As far as the police were concerned, the shootings redefined the event. It was no longer simply a protest, an illegal activity in its own right, but a 'terrorist attack'. Berlière and Liaigre comment that after the resisters fired upon and killed police officers, those who

investigated the crimes were filled with a desire for vengeance.⁷⁶ The investigations that followed the two protests were, again, thorough and successful.

The protests took place on the rue de Buci on 31 May 1942, and the rue Daguerre on 1 August 1942. Due to the events surrounding the protests, they are the two best-known examples of women's protests in France. Madeleine Marzin (1908-1998), a school teacher and member of the communist resistance, was in charge of the rue de Buci protest. On 31 May 1942 a group of communist women and men amassed together in the 6th *arrondissement* outside a depot of provisions that were to be sent to Germany. Their aim was to protest against hunger and privations. Marzin encouraged women to help themselves to jam and sugar and began passing the supplies around. At this point, the police arrived and the male FTP members – who were there to intervene to protect the women if anything went wrong – began firing their weapons. The police fired back and managed to arrest the three FTP men, Marzin and around 20 female and male protesters.⁷⁷

Marzin was identified as the *meneuse*, leader, of the protest and as such was judged to share the responsibility of the deaths of the two police officers. She was sentenced to death along with the three armed men. In the month that followed, however, Pétain intervened, as head of the French state, and commuted her sentence to life-long forced labour. Schwartz writes, in her article concerning the repression of communist women, that condemned females were often reprieved by the head of state, so much so in fact that it had emerged as a custom during the Third Republic.⁷⁸ Women were not treated differently from men during investigations, but their sentences, or how women served their sentences, did differ. In other words, women were not treated differently during the hunt for resisters, but were treated differently from men after they were arrested. When being transferred from Fresnes prison to Rennes to await deportation to Ravensbrück, Marzin managed to escape with the help of some other women. As a result she was able to return to her resistance activities and survive the war. Schwartz highlights that Marzin's original sentence reflected the severity of the crime,

⁷⁶ Berlière and Liaigre, *Liquider les Traîtres*, 220.

⁷⁷ Paula Schwartz, 'La répression des femmes communistes (1940-1944),' *Cahier de l'IHTP* 31 'Identités féminines et violences politiques (1936-1946)', eds. François Rouquet et Danièle Voldman (October 1995) <http://www.ihtp.cnrs.fr/spip.php%3Farticle245&lang=fr.html> (accessed 07 March 2016).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

first and foremost, whilst having her sentence commuted suggested that the gender of the accused is what determined the actual punishment suffered by a resister.⁷⁹

As mentioned already, the communist resistance movement consisted of multiple branches that complemented each other. Apart from providing solidarity and support, these groups also performed acts of retaliation to alert the authorities that their members did not stand alone. The rue de Buci and rue Daguerre protests are good examples of cross-unit cooperation. The 'political' branch, in this case the protesters, was coordinated to work with the 'military' branch, the armed members of the FTP. In her memoir, Lise London (1916-2012) wrote that it was part of the PCF rules of conduct to respond and retaliate against the arrest and prosecution of its members. In order to protest against the arrest of Marzin and her fellow demonstrators, a group of communist resisters acted in retaliation. Around 100 resisters met in the street to hang an effigy of Laval from a lamp post and set it on fire. They threw tracts and brochures into the air while singing 'The Marseillaise' and managed to disperse before the police arrived.⁸⁰

London was involved in the organisation of the UFF. As such, she had the opportunity to develop her own initiatives. She was in charge of the rue Daguerre protest that ended similarly to the rue de Buci protest. London instructed one of her female contacts to notify the direction of the PCF that they were going to organise an action that would 'restore courage and demonstrate that the Resistance would not be stopped with terror tactics'.⁸¹ London and her female comrades organised the printing of the tracts to be distributed at the protest, and formulated a detailed plan for the timing of the protest and how to react if something went wrong. They chose to protest at a large grocery store on the rue Daguerre in the 14th *arrondissement*. London described the night before the protest in her memoir. She remembered her nervousness and the worries of her partner. When it came time for her to leave, he chased after her on the stairs to make sure she had her metro ticket on her person so she could not be stranded if she lost her bag. She lied to reassure him. Later she came to regret not tucking a ticket in her bra. It is clear from her description that the activists involved knew that it was dangerous. Once again, the protest did not go according to plan. The demonstration was confused from the beginning and the women had barely started before some police officers arrived. The FTP

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Lise London, *L'Écheveau du Temps, La Mégère de la rue Daguerre: souvenirs de résistance*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995, 152.

⁸¹ Ibid., 158.

intervened to protect the women and a police officer was shot and killed. London managed to escape but, through the persistent investigation of the BS, was later identified and arrested. Unlike Marzin, London was never sentenced to death. After time spent in French prisons she was deported to Ravensbrück where she spent the remainder of the war.

Gender played an important role in determining who did what on the day of the protest. As we saw in the previous chapter, the communist leadership specifically encouraged women to protest about provisions with the knowledge that women would be treated as concerned, frustrated mothers rather than as political agitators. The presence of armed FTP men shattered this perception so Marzin and London were not protected as apolitical protesters; instead they were identified as the leaders of the demonstrations. Schwartz writes that '[b]oth demonstrations were coordinated by Communist activists who assigned tasks on the basis of gender: women were to excite the crowd; men were charged with protecting the demonstrators'.⁸² The aim of the action was to prompt a reaction from the crowd. Schwartz notes that "above-ground" protests were intended to complement underground partisan activities as part of broad-based resistance movement. Communist organisers clearly recognised the market as a gendered space and fashioned their mobilisation efforts accordingly.⁸³ Women made up the majority of all grocery queues so it was also more effective to use female activists to appeal to female civilians. Marzin and London were recognised as the organisers and therefore held jointly responsible for the shootings and injuries sustained, but they were not investigated as leaders of resistance action beyond the protests.

The extent of the involvement of Marzin and London in communist activities was underestimated because they were women. French police demonstrated time and again that they knew women were resisters with differing levels of responsibility. Yet, time and again they also continued to underestimate the activities of individual women. Marzin and London were identified as communist militants who organised an act of protest that resulted in an attack against police officers. The police considered public protest to be a serious crime. Schwartz suggests that '[f]or the authorities and the 'legal' press, such disturbances in the markets of Paris represented more than just threats to the social order; they were rearguard offensives in a total war: "The second front stretches from the

⁸² Schwartz, 'The Politics of Food and Gender,' 42.

⁸³ Ibid.

rue de Buci to the rue Daguerre”, proclaimed headlines in the right-wing press that same August.⁸⁴ In a police report of 17 September 1942 concerning the rue Daguerre protest, seven detained suspects, four women and three men, are listed along with their charges. The list reads: ‘murder, attempted murder, association with *malfaiteurs*, communist activity, receiving stolen goods from culprits, use of false identity cards’.⁸⁵ Those arrested were known to have committed a broad range of crimes but the focus of the investigation remained on the shooting. The impression given in the BS files concerning both protests is that the two women were not the centre of the investigations despite the fact that both of them were at the centre of the operation.

How to classify women resisters: quasi-soldiers or civilians?

During the war, France found itself in a wartime situation that was not like a war. French citizens were often in opposition to each other and, if not, they were challenging a foreign army which was occupying their country and which had been given authority by the acting French regime. Individuals had to fight this war at home in a completely different way, one that often directly involved women. What to do with enemies of the state was a complicated issue as there was no precedent for resistance on such a scale. The attitude of the police and Nazi authorities towards female ‘terrorist’ suspects was complicated. The inconsistencies in women’s treatment reflect the complex situation of women in French society in general during this period. Women’s civil and social status had been changing throughout the 1930s, but the changes had not yet been incorporated into gender norms and expectations.

The police understood that women in so-called support roles were resisters. This is particularly interesting given that historians have often not included such women in discussions of resistance. As mentioned above, the goal of the BS was to dismantle a network completely. To achieve this goal it was necessary to target those who facilitated the functioning of a network and discourage citizens from taking on those responsibilities. Schwartz writes:

Decrees formulating sanctions against resisters did not distinguish degrees of involvement and responsibility of those implicated in so-

⁸⁴ Ibid., 42-43.

⁸⁵ PP: GB 105 BS2 – 13. Le Commissaire Principal, for Jean Hénoque, Exécution d’une Commission Rogatoire, 17 September 1942.

called “terrorist” acts. A public notice of September 22, 1941, posted in cafes, in subways, and on the streets, warned that those who lent support of any kind to parachutists and other enemy agents could expect sanctions.⁸⁶

This notice appeared in late 1941 which indicates that the police aimed to target a network in its entirety from relatively early on during occupation. The fact that suspects even facilitated the cause of resistance was seen as a threat by the authorities. The attitude of the authorities towards the punishment of particular crimes can give us an insight into how resistance networks were understood to function by outsiders at the time they were operating. Schwartz continues:

The possible consequences of support to resistance activists show that such support was deemed very much a part of a threatening opposition that the authorities were willing to repress even at the expense of further alienation of the population. The severity of such measures reflects an assessment of the value of popular support from the perspective of those to whom it posed a threat.⁸⁷

From the perspective of the authorities it was clear that those feeding, housing, sheltering and provisioning resisters were also responsible for the existence and functioning of a resistance network.

The police continued to make assumptions and underestimate women’s involvement even while they arrested women as suspects without question. Schwartz emphasises that after Fanny Dutet, a liaison agent in the FTP, was arrested, the police noted in her file that she had only taken up resistance after her husband was arrested. After multiple conversations with Dutet, Schwartz knows this report is incorrect. She writes:

Upon her arrest, Fanny alleged her innocence. Is the erroneous statement in the police report evidence that she succeeded in making a convincing case? Or, is it a gender-based assumption on the part of the police, who ascribed different roles and levels of responsibility to male and female resisters? If so, then gender-based expectations have literally been written into the official record, leaving us with a version of events that says more about the pursuers than the pursued.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Schwartz, ‘Redefining Resistance,’ 147-148.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁸⁸ Paula Schwartz, ‘Big Life, Little Death,’ *New England Review*, 36: 3 (2015), 31.

The gender-based expectations of the police affected their treatment of women and their understanding of women's resistance. Male authorities accepted that women were resisters, but their expectations of women's behaviour meant that they continued to underestimate women as politically motivated to join a violent resistance campaign.

Women arrested as resisters sometimes had the opportunity to take advantage of male officers' ingrained stereotypes of women. Juliette Pattinson, in her article on captured female SOE agents, draws attention to women's choice to protect themselves by acting as a 'daft lassie'. She suggests that '[a]cting out a vacuous femininity was one of the few options available. Women's endeavours not to reveal themselves as clandestine agents while operational were often accomplished through performances of hyper-femininity.'⁸⁹ When interrogated, arrested SOE agents pretended to feel faint or be ignorant 'as it tapped into longstanding (Nazi) assumptions that women were too emotional to be involved in political activities'.⁹⁰ Jane Slaughter also suggests that women were able to capitalise on the perceived difference between men and women. She writes that '[t]his is not to ignore the violence and brutality with which women were treated if they were suspected and discovered. Nevertheless, age-old sexual assumptions gave women a "cover" men did not have.'⁹¹ Pattinson continues that '[f]eigning innocence and naivety was a way of removing suspicion: Gestapo agents were unlikely to believe that a foolish, childlike and unsophisticated young woman was a British agent'.⁹² One of the agents Pattinson researched pretended to have joined the resistance solely because she craved fun and excitement. In this way she was able to depoliticise her resistance involvement in the eyes of her interrogators.

Was it more difficult for communist women to plead ignorance and a lack of understanding of the consequences if they were known to be communist? It would seem that the answer is, yes. Communists were dangerous to the authorities precisely because they were politically aware and motivated. The fact that they were communist and women is what impacted the most on how the female resisters discussed here were treated after their arrest. Nonetheless, the examples of the SOE women illustrate that the

⁸⁹ Juliette Pattinson, ' "Playing the Daft Lassie with Them": gender, captivity and the Special Operations Executive during the Second World War,' *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 13: 2 (June, 2006), 275-276.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 277.

⁹¹ Slaughter, *Women in the Italian Resistance*, 63.

⁹² Pattinson, 'Gender, Captivity and the Special Operations Executive,' 278.

preconceptions of women's nature held by male officers did affect how women were treated after they were arrested. Communist women could not escape consequences after they were tied to the communist movement, but they could play into gender stereotypes and succeed in hiding the extent of their activities from the police.

After Dutilleul was discovered to have been involved in the organisation of the underground network her enemy status changed and therefore so did her sentence. The severity of her sentence illustrates the attitude of the police towards the functioning of a network. Organising resistance was a more serious crime as far as the occupation authorities were concerned, so it was necessary to deport her rather than leave her in a French prison. As we have seen, however, no new information came to light on Dutilleul's activities during the occupation. What was discovered was that she was involved in PCF activities before communist membership was illegal. Deportation seems disproportionate given the new information that was uncovered. No matter what role women occupied as resisters, they suffered the consequences as 'terrorists'. Sentences did differ depending on their level of involvement and contribution to the organisation of a network, but even those performing what have traditionally been referred to as 'support' tasks suffered harsh consequences. Would Dutilleul have been executed if she was a man implicated as a leader of communist resistance? Dutilleul's case underscores two points regarding the consequences suffered by female resisters. The first is that women suffered harsh consequences for performing roles that have been subsequently trivialised in the historiography. Secondly, there was a lack of consistency in women's sentencing compared to men's.

From 1942, Nazi authorities began deporting French political prisoners to Germany. Vaillant-Couturier was not tortured by Nazi officers. She refused to answer their questions by continuously claiming that she had amnesia. One Nazi asked her to sign a declaration that did not accurately reflect what she had said. When he threatened her, she replied that she was not afraid of death or being shot, but he responded that they had worse ways of killing people than shooting. At this point, Vaillant-Couturier had not allowed the authorities to know she spoke German and so there was an interpreter there with her and the Nazi officer. The interpreter told her that she was going to be sent to a German concentration camp 'from which no one ever returned'.⁹³ Agnès Humbert also recounted the moment she learnt that she was to be deported for her involvement with

⁹³ Durand, *Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier*, 176.

the resistance. After her arrest, her mother had hired her an elegant female lawyer recommended by friends. From the moment they met, it became clear to Humbert that this woman was not going to work hard to save her. Humbert wrote that her lawyer came to see her in November 1941, only days after her arrest, in the Prison de la Santé where she was now being held to await trial. Humbert recollected the conversation:

With a peal of laughter she tells me that she has seen the prosecuting lawyer, and that he intends to demand the death penalty for me. "But we don't need to fuss about *that*," she adds condescendingly, "as they never execute women: they'll just send you to Germany, nothing more than that." I reply that I have done nothing to deserve such a heavy sentence, but my lovely lawyer suddenly adopts a severe expression and demands to know what on earth I thought I was doing in compromising myself by association with such people.⁹⁴

The inconsistencies in how women were treated after their arrest make for interesting analysis. The convoy that transported both Casanova and Vaillant-Couturier to Auschwitz was a convoy solely comprising women internees. The convoy of 230 women included 119 women from communist networks. Moorehead describes the vast range of roles played by the women who made up the convoy. Some were responsible for sheltering resisters, writing and copying out anti-German pamphlets, transporting hidden weapons and performing acts of sabotage. Others were *passeurs* who had guided people across the demarcation line. The convoy included those women arrested as part of *Affaire Pican*, such as Casanova and Vaillant-Couturier. A few were printers and technicians tied to the communist underground press, while a handful had had very little to do with the resistance beyond ill-judged remarks or personal relationships with resisters.⁹⁵ Let us not forget either that Marzin and London, who had been directly involved in operations that turned violent, and resulted in one death, received similar sentences to those women in *Affaire Pican* and *Affaire Dutilleul* who had been arrested for spreading subversive propaganda. As Schwartz points out, there were often no distinguishable degrees of involvement.

When it came to the investigation and arrest of women militants, conditions were much the same between male and female suspects. Women family members were interviewed as potential leads and expected to have knowledge of family members'

⁹⁴ Humbert, *Résistance*, 89.

⁹⁵ Moorehead, *A Train in Winter*, 176.

resistance activities. Women who met with known suspects were given their own police tail. Women were beaten, though less brutally than their male comrades, and received just as poor treatment whilst in prison. Yet, women received sentences that differed from men. When women were sentenced, they were considered in a different category from men even when tried as part of one large investigation. Male activists were most often sentenced to be executed by firing squad or kept as hostages to be killed in retaliation for attacks on German personnel. Female activists were rarely sentenced to death. Schwartz notes that 'women resisters were not executed by firing squad: they were tortured, beheaded in German prisons, or died slow or violent deaths in concentration camps'.⁹⁶ Why this distinction? I argue that it is because men could be executed as soldiers, whereas women could not. Whilst resisters were defined by the Vichy and Nazi authorities as terrorists or criminals, male resisters were executed by firing squad which was the method used to execute soldiers.

The investigations featured in this chapter emphasise the difficulty police had in defining women in relation to war. Pattinson writes that there existed an 'ambiguity of captured women's dual identities of "soldier" and "woman"'.⁹⁷ Apart from in the Soviet Union, women did not perform combat roles in Europe's regular armies. The French army barred women from combat roles to the point that they would not even train them to be dropped back into France as members of the Free French forces. (It is for this reason that some French women who had escaped to England chose to join the SOE instead of de Gaulle's army.) In the vast majority of cases, men were the resisters who used weapons, carried out violent operations and attacked individual Nazis. Men's punishment for such action was execution by firing squad, a sentence appropriate for a soldier. Women, on the other hand, were punished as 'quasi-soldiers' because they occupied a space between civilian and soldier. Women were sentenced as civilians for crimes perpetrated during wartime. After Bloch-Sérain was sentenced to death, she spent eleven months in prison before she was transferred to Hamburg and beheaded on 12 February 1943.⁹⁸ Friends tried to have Bloch-Sérain's sentence commuted, but to no avail. Women were treated differently to men when they were sentenced due to the ingrained divisions of gender roles held by both Vichy France and the Nazis. On the rare occasion women were

⁹⁶ Schwartz, 'Big Life,' 32.

⁹⁷ Pattinson, 'Gender, Captivity and the Special Operations Executive,' 273.

⁹⁸ MRN: Fonds de L'Union des Femmes Françaises, carton no. 6. *France Bloch-Sérain, Héroïnes d'hier et d'aujourd'hui*.

executed it was not by firing squad (the punishment of a soldier) but by beheading (the punishment for a civilian murderer). The authorities were able to stretch their traditional perceptions of women to recognise them as resisters, but could not treat them as soldiers.

Conclusion

The police investigated women as resisters who were heavily involved in communist activities. Women, however, were singled out because of their gender when it came to sentencing and serving their sentence. Female communist militants were more vulnerable than many Gaullist resisters because of their political connections. The communist movement used gender to protect female operatives to an extent, but once the police discovered that women were connected to communist resistance their gender did not protect them from harsh consequences. The investigations featured in this chapter illustrate that women were arrested and sentenced for a range of resistance activities with varying levels of responsibility. Female activists posed a number of problems and contradictions to the authorities. Women had no formal political rights and yet were politically active and motivated in the resistance. They were engaged in activities against the state, but they were not soldiers. The police during the 1940s continued to see women both as uninterested in politics, and yet capable of being involved in resistance activities. Their gender has impacted greatly on the treatment of women in resistance histories. Their gender affected the roles they adopted as female resisters, as well as the sentences they received as female operatives. The difference of women's experiences during the war should be acknowledged, as they have been, but not treated as less significant just because they were different. The French police and the PCF leadership understood that women were integral to the communist resistance movement.

Chapter Four

Underground Newspapers, 1942-1943: a platform for women's mass resistance

The women's underground press was a significant aspect of women's involvement in the communist resistance movement. It was essential that resistance networks communicate their ideology, including their goals and reasons for resistance. It was only by doing this, that networks could garner support from the French population at large. Approaching the population through written material allowed the resistance to explain why resistance was necessary and to incite readers to perform acts of resistance. The communist resistance aimed to reach as many people as possible. Separate units published newspapers aimed at party leaders and militants, youths, intellectuals, workers, *paysans* and, of course, women. The women's underground newspapers were written for women by local all-female committees. These committees were also responsible for the production and distribution of their newspapers. This chapter focuses on 32 titles produced in 1942 and 1943 available at the Musée de la Résistance Nationale (MRN). An in-depth discussion of the range of papers and their content gives us a unique insight into the engagement of women in communist resistance networks. The discussion of women's newspapers allows the opportunity to analyse women's resistance through the words and actions of female communist resisters at the time they were involved in the resistance struggle.

In this chapter I will argue four points that contribute to the overall argument of my thesis. Firstly, women within communist networks had the opportunity to develop their own initiatives. I have identified this as one of the reasons women were particularly active in the communist resistance movement. Secondly, communist women were motivated to develop their own initiatives because they were more politically aware and mobilised than the majority of French women during the 1930s and 1940s. Women's experience in PCF activities in the 1930s impacted on how they viewed resistance and the role they could play as resisters, an idea that will be developed further in Chapter Five. Thirdly, women's roles within the communist resistance movement were complementary and cooperative. While at first glance it may seem that numerous women's roles could be

defined as support tasks, with closer examination it becomes clear that women's performance of these roles was essential to the structure and continuation of resistance. Finally, women resisters performed a wide range of functions within the communist resistance. The women's underground press gives a valuable insight into women's activities and concerns during the war. The newspapers expressed the interests of their female readers in order to suggest action to address particular difficulties of life in occupied France. The calls to action also clearly demonstrate the development of female resistance as perceived by female resistance leaders. All the newspapers continuously mention what women did, and what they wanted to achieve as female resisters in the communist resistance movement.

Targeting women through the underground press and communist ideology

The majority of the population of France were removed from the activities of any resistance network. The clandestine press provided a platform for resistance networks to present an alternative to collaboration. To be engaged in resistance activities was dangerous and lonely. One of the goals of established networks was to publish material that indicated that readers were not alone in the struggle against occupation. Reporting the success of particular acts of resistance was one technique. The work of the resistance had to be portrayed as urgent in order to emphasise that hoping for the best was not an option. Jacques Sémelin focuses on the importance of public opinion in motivating the clandestine press. He writes: 'The more that resistance can rally opinion, the more it will guarantee the conditions of its existence and growth. That is why propaganda work played such an important role during the war, through radio broadcasts and underground paper distribution.'¹

Resistance propaganda constituted a direct attack against the Vichy regime and the Nazi authorities. As a result, it was treated as a serious crime. The consequences of being involved in the publication and distribution of clandestine newspapers differed depending on the particular task that an individual performed. The authorities perceived a difference between being responsible for writing or publishing propaganda, and facilitating the circulation of propaganda. Those found responsible for distribution were sometimes treated more leniently than those sentenced for the production of editions of the clandestine press.

¹ Sémelin, *Unarmed Against Hitler*, 105.

In her chapter on women and the underground press, Corinna von List writes of the sentences received by a group of women who were arrested and found to be connected to the local Union des Femmes Françaises (UFF) committee paper, *Les Ménagères du Nord*. Madeleine Porquet was a communist activist and member of the Comité Mondiale des Femmes Contre la Guerre et le Fascisme (CMFCGF) in the 1930s. During the war, Porquet was made coordinator of the local UFF committee of the Nord department. Von List writes that Porquet's work consisted of 'writing articles according to the directives of the leadership of the PCF, compiling and distributing the tracts herself throughout the region and progressively building the clandestine structures that would help her to assume these tasks'.² Her organisational role within the resistance made her vulnerable. Porquet was arrested in October 1941. In the months after her arrest, 24 other women were detained due to their connection to the production and distribution of *Les Ménagères du Nord*. Still others were arrested because they had also been collecting funds for *secours populaires* and the *comités populaires*. (These were two social assistance branches of the communist resistance movement that ensured the collection of funds and provisions to support resistance members.) Porquet was sentenced in January 1943 to five years in prison, while the others responsible for production and distribution received sentences ranging from ten to eighteen months.³ Some of the women arrested were not charged at all. Porquet was sent to Ravensbrück in May 1944 and returned to France after the war.

The French police and Nazi authorities recognised that the clandestine press was a subversive activity that threatened their legitimacy and so treated harshly all those who were involved in its production. The Musée de l'Homme resistance group was one of the earliest networks. In September 1940 it decided to become involved in resistance through the production of a clandestine tract. The group was formed by colleagues who worked at the museum as ethnographers and anthropologists. Their main resistance activity was the production of underground papers, including *Résistance*. Agnès Humbert, a member of the group, mentioned in Chapter Three, was arrested in April 1941 and in January 1942 was put on trial with her colleagues charged with the "offence" of writing, printing and distributing the anti-German newspaper *Résistance*, and of the crime of espionage'.⁴ One

² Von List, *Résistantes*, 152.

³ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁴ Humbert, *Résistance*, 96.

man received a three-year sentence, Humbert and another man were sentenced to five years, while the remaining three women and seven men were sentenced to death.⁵ Humbert was deported to Ravensbrück to serve her sentence performing forced labour. She managed to survive the war and return to France.

The press produced by the communist resistance movement was important in occupied France for two reasons. The first is the sheer range of titles produced. The second is the involvement of so many people in the production of newspapers aimed at varying readerships. Von List draws attention to the ground-breaking participation of women in the communist clandestine press. She writes that the printing and diffusion of papers specifically targeted at women indicates the highest level of feminisation of all the French resistance movements.⁶ No other resistance movement targeted women in France as the communists did. Von List notes three features of the communist underground press that differentiated it from that of Gaullist movements. Firstly, the underground PCF had developed structures for the production, storage and distribution of clandestine material from 1939, when the party was outlawed, before France was occupied. Secondly, von List emphasises that, through its *comités féminins*, the communist resistance was the only network to ensure the local and regional distribution of a women's press that dealt with day-to-day problems relating to families and the supply of provisions. Lastly, von List remarks that the PCF readily employed women to print and distribute tracts from the moment it was outlawed.⁷ It is significant that von List underlines the inclusion of women both in terms of the process and the intended reception of the papers. Women were particularly active in the communist resistance because they were engaged in a more direct and gendered way than women in non-communist networks.

The women's underground press was viewed as an essential platform for engaging women resisters. Robert Gildea writes that in Paris, particularly in the working-class suburbs on the outskirts of the city, communist '[w]omen set up "patriotic committees" that offered aid to hard-pressed families and whipped up support to pressurise the authorities to negotiate the release of POWs and increase food supplies.'⁸ These committees were the local committees of the UFF. The local committees were

⁵ Ibid., 102.

⁶ Von List, *Résistantes*, 131.

⁷ Ibid., 124- 125.

⁸ Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, 139.

responsible for organising their members, for specific actions and for the publication and distribution of their own newspapers. Most editions of the women's underground press were a double-sided page divided into columns or boxes that were crammed with two lengthy articles and three or more short articles. The majority of the articles were written by the women of the local committees. On occasion, featured articles would be received from the communist leadership. The local committees had the support of the organising committee of the UFF who sometimes contributed articles or found contacts who would provide paper or print their editions. As mentioned, in October 1943, Lucienne Maertens was put in charge of organising the UFF in five regions around Paris. In a number of her personal journal entries, Maertens noted that she had found printers to print UFF notebooks or editions of the underground newspapers, and even some who were prepared to give them blank paper.⁹ She also mentioned writing articles for different editions of the clandestine press.

The purpose of targeting different social groups through numerous titles of the communist press was to engage and encourage multiple forms of resistance. This can definitely be seen in the editions of women's newspapers. Every article in these editions related to women and every call to action was addressed specifically to women. It is important to note that resistance, with the goal of liberation, was the underlying focus of the newspapers. In 1943 there was no end in sight for those under occupation. As far as resisters were concerned, the only phenomenon that would turn the tide of the war was a commitment of the majority to the rejection of the Vichy regime and the Nazi occupiers. Though most of the newspapers featured here were produced in the greater Paris area, the local campaigns of women were always connected to the national movement of resistance and the importance of individual action for the future of France as a whole.

It was the structure of the movement that allowed communist resistance to be so widespread. The communist movement was dependent upon the combination of the activities of all its members. Women's groups developed their own initiatives, committees, and programs that were crucial to the structure of the communist resistance movement. Schwartz and Mouré stress that women's newspapers were a call to action. They write: 'Communist women created a network of women's committees and a vigorous, clandestine women's press. Clandestine broadsheets and flyers that were

⁹ MRN: Fonds de Famille Maertens. Don de Jean Maertens, NE 2052 bis. 1943-1944, Cahier of Lucienne Maertens, 7, 8, 12, 13.

distributed anonymously in mailboxes, shoved into shopping baskets, or thrown in packets by bicyclists, were calls to arms.’¹⁰ In most articles, a common feeling of discontent was established and then women were called to act to change the status quo. Women were called to perform gendered resistance as wives, mothers and patriots. In all editions it remained clear that the women’s activities were part of a broad-based resistance movement. Women were not acting in a separate movement from men, but in a complementary way that encouraged wider resistance through different tactics.

Detailed analysis of the women’s underground press draws attention to the priorities and exploits of French women in resistance. The production of these newspapers is one of the most active areas of women’s involvement in the communist resistance movement. It is difficult to know who was reading this material or how many people read a particular newspaper. Some newspapers that are held in the archives show signs of wear, such as visible folds and discolouration from use, which indicates they were carried around for lengths of time. As was the case in the 1930s UJFF magazine, *Jeunes Filles de France*, women’s underground newspapers portrayed the contemporary French woman as politically minded and connected to the wider world whilst also being, as a wife and mother, the protector of the home. Women’s papers addressed female readers as occupying traditional roles, but also expected them to act and adopt non-traditional roles. In order to engage female supporters, particularly those without political experience, it was necessary to approach women through topics which readers had in common and about which they felt strongly. Leaders of the UFF believed that these issues would be most likely to mobilise the greatest number of women, regardless of whether or not they were communist. The worsening living conditions, the failure of Vichy to secure the return of prisoners-of-war (there remained over 900,000 French POWs) and increased deprivations all contributed to the willingness of women to take action as part of the French Resistance.

A detailed discussion of the subjects and content of the articles of these papers allows for an understanding of what issues were used to mobilise women. The articles also provide an insight into a number of the roles performed by women within these networks. The vast majority of newspapers included in this chapter were produced in and around Paris with a few having been produced in departments further north. The

¹⁰ Paula Schwartz and Kenneth Mouré, ‘On vit mal: food shortages and popular culture in occupied France, 1940-1944,’ *Food, Culture and Society*, 10: 2 (2007), 286.

examples featured in this chapter are not a random selection. They are arbitrary in that these are the editions that survived the war, but there are nevertheless enough titles to allow me to make generalisations about women resisters and female tactics of resistance. I have identified eight themes around which I have structured the following detailed analysis of the content of the women's newspapers. The eight themes will be raised in order from the most prevalent to the least. They are: 1) food shortages and rationing; 2) work in Germany, through programs such as the Service du Travail Obligatoire (STO) and Relève; 3) strikes and demonstrations; 4) aid for the Francs-Tireurs et Partisans; 5) reference to female resistance martyrs and action on symbolic dates; 6) information concerning the PCF and Soviet Union; 7) news reports; 8) the Jewish question.

While this chapter is a study of these eight themes, the four main points of the argument of this chapter, as mentioned above, will be illustrated in the detailed discussion of the newspaper articles. The eight themes illustrate the four points to differing extents. All eight themes provide evidence of my first point that women within communist networks had the opportunity to develop their own initiatives. The second point, that communist women were more politically experienced than other French women, is reinforced in the discussion of themes two, three, five, six and seven. The discussion of themes one, two, three and four demonstrate the third point of this chapter, the complementary and cooperative nature of women's roles within the communist resistance. Again, all eight themes illustrate the fourth point concerning the wide range of roles women resisters performed as members of the communist resistance.

1) Food Shortages and Rationing

Every edition of the 32 different titles cited in this chapter contained at least one paragraph concerning the campaign for higher rations. Newspapers called on women to protest locally, to write petitions to local government, or to meet with their mayors in order to negotiate an increase in available rations. Protests over provisioning held not only material but symbolic significance for women in the resistance. Obtaining food for their families was an aspect of women's lives normally conducted in the private sphere. But once this daily task became entangled with government policy and control during the war, it was pulled into the public sphere. As soon as Vichy was not able to provide sufficient food, French citizens began to question the legitimacy of the regime. Shannon Fogg writes that shortages 'forced government officials to respond to citizens and

affected political decisions'.¹¹ Food distribution and the lack of available provisions were ever-present problems for the Vichy regime which had to balance Nazi demands for requisitions and a frustrated and volatile civilian population. It was not difficult for the communist resistance to make provisioning a central issue of their propaganda because it was a real problem faced by the majority of the population.

We have already seen that Vichy policy espoused the importance of mothers raising strong, healthy French families. The Vichy regime was, thus, forced to view women as legitimate protesters when they raised their concerns over insufficient rations. Women used Vichy rhetoric against the regime in order to portray themselves as anxious mothers rather than aggressive resisters. Female protests framed the food issue in terms of their starving children and families, rather than as a political issue that concerned German requisitions. Schwartz notes that men were also involved in the fight for increased rations, but only within the context of the workplace. Men included a call for higher rations as part of their strike action.¹² Women were assumed to be non-violent and less politically motivated than men, which made them appear less threatening than men. As wives and mothers, women protested publicly without directly endangering their lives or their families. To encourage public discontent in such a direct way was a task that only women could perform effectively. Food protest became the domain and responsibility of women. Schwartz argues that '[m]any, perhaps even most, food protests were indeed the fruits of French Communist Party organisers who sought to mobilise women around food issues in an effort to build a popular protest movement and recruit female activists to the Party.'¹³ Communist women were already politically motivated and had experience in organising political campaigns. They also better understood how to manipulate a political situation. While many of the women involved in the protests were in all probability solely concerned with rations for their families, the aim of the organisers was for the protests to be a defiant act of resistance. The communist leadership clearly intended women's protests to be a form of political action that could encourage resistance.

Women's action for food was established as a part of the struggle against the Vichy regime. By confronting the repressive regime, resisters were able to deny legitimacy to the regime. The Vichy regime, and occupying authorities, only had control while it

¹¹ Fogg, *The Politics of Everyday Life in Vichy France*, 54.

¹² Schwartz, 'The Politics of Food and Gender,' 40.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 42.

appeared that their authority was accepted. Women were encouraged not to let the regime function unhindered. The communist leadership believed that women could contribute to undermining the regime by confronting the authorities over their inability to ensure the wellbeing of France's general population. One important tactic of the underground press was to focus on the fact that Vichy ministers could not be relied upon to ensure the wellbeing of French families. In an article that appeared in the January-February 1943 edition of *Sauvetage de la Famille Française* the editors emphasised that they knew Laval and the minister of supplies were responsible for giving French provisions to the Germans.¹⁴ The article continued that it was not the ministers who had to listen to the cries of children or console them in their misery: 'All is clear. Only we ourselves are responsible for our children.'¹⁵ Many editions of the communist underground press established women as the only people with the will and legitimacy to act on behalf of their families. If Vichy could not ensure the welfare of the mothers and children it prioritised, what power did it really have? Women's newspapers aimed to turn opinion against the Vichy regime and its attitudes.

Protests over rationing and requisitioning were organised by women resisters across Europe. Gildea writes that '[w]omen were angry that the German army of occupation was maintained at the expense of the French, and commandeered large amounts of food and resources'.¹⁶ Jane Slaughter writes that Italian women often seized food supplies before they could be requisitioned by the Germans. When the women knew of grain warehouses or dairies that were well-stocked, but which were to be used by the Germans, they seized the products and redistributed them amongst the resistance. The Women's Defence Groups (GDD) also organised public demonstrations to protest meagre rations and the lack of supplies. Slaughter writes that such action became the focus of the GDD. She states that '[t]here can be no doubt that it was the GDD that built connections among thousands of anonymous women, transformed individual despair and frustration into public activism, and became the symbol of the contribution of women to the Italian Resistance'.¹⁷

¹⁴ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/37. *Sauvetage de la Famille Française*: organe de combat des femmes françaises dans le Front National, January-February 1943, 2.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, 138.

¹⁷ Slaughter, *Women and the Italian Resistance*, 69.

Before calls to action, articles first introduced the difficulty women faced when trying to provide for their families during the occupation. This was a tactic to ensure not only that women identified with each other and with the common problems that had to be solved, but also that women understood that this was a problem they were ideally situated to confront. The May 1943 edition of *La Voix des Femmes* contained an article with a list comparing the September 1939 prices of basic foodstuffs with the 1943 prices. Butter had tripled in price, sugar had doubled, wine was four times the price, while bread was the only item to have had a negligible price increase.¹⁸ Mitchell writes that the economic section of the Nazi military commander in France kept a close watch on price rises and estimated that 'the cost of living in Paris had risen from August 1939 to July 1942 by 65.5 percent'.¹⁹ Readers of the clandestine press were asked how families were meant to survive with the increasing cost of living and the decreasing wages. Many problems stemmed from increasing food prices, but the women's newspapers continuously declared that women were equal to the challenge.

Women were regularly directed to write petitions to their local councils to request extra rations be made available. A letter was published in the October-November 1942 edition of *La Voix des Femmes*. It was written by the *ménagères* of the Pas-de-Calais region and addressed to their local prefect. The women expressed their worries for the long-term health of their husbands and children due to the difficulty of finding enough food to nourish them. The Pas-de-Calais women requested that the prefect agree to ensure there was bread, enough meat to fill their ration tickets, potatoes, butter, and milk for children and the elderly.²⁰ The same letter had been published in August 1941 in an edition of *La Ménagère*. The accompanying article, titled 'Will they listen to the grievances of mothers?', stated that numerous copies of the letter had been sent to the prefect of the Pas-de-Calais region on 14 July.²¹ The fact that the producers of the newspaper included a full copy of the letter is also interesting. This way the article combined a report of action already taken with a call to readers to follow the precedent by copying and sending letters to demand improved rations.

¹⁸ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/50. *La Voix des Femmes*: organe des Comités Populaires Féminins, May 1943, 2.

¹⁹ Mitchell, *Nazi Paris*, 66.

²⁰ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/50. *La Voix des Femmes*: organe des Comités Populaires Féminins, October-November 1942, 2.

²¹ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/30. *La Ménagère*: journal des Comités Populaires Féminins du Pas-de-Calais, no. 4, 2 August 1941, 1-2.

Women's newspapers drew attention to the fear authorities felt when faced with the mobilisation of the population. The August 1942 edition of *La Ménagère de l'Aisne*, a department in the north east, reported that a group of housewives from St Michel kept their 'collaborator mayor' confined for two days in order to 'give him a taste of the restrictive regime that he did not know'.²² The women received supplementary food tickets as a result of their actions. The editors claimed that the public powers were scared by the potential of active women who challenged the values of the regime. In the November 1942 women's edition of *L'Humanité*, the editors recounted that Laval yielded to the demands of French farmers out of fear of future action. The article argued that since he had yielded once out of the fear of popular protest Laval could do so again. Emphasising the weaknesses of those in charge who could be pressured to help them provided further encouragement to female readers. The article continued with a list of suggested future action: 'A group of 200 mothers who protest at the Town Hall, a workshop which strikes to demand bread, the Wives of Prisoners who occupy the "Maison du Prisonnier". These are our battle plans dreaded by the *affameurs* of Vichy. Our force lies here.'²³ Communist women knew the potential that a united protest movement could have. The UFF released its first information bulletin at the end of 1943. One article was introduced by a paragraph describing the importance of a mother's will to fight for her family: 'It is possible to fight despite the regime of terror created by the Germans. Repression only takes hold when patriots are isolated in their action. If we are numerous we will win our cause.'²⁴

The communist resisters' campaign for increased provisions was organised and widespread. Their campaign was not limited to food provisions. The December 1941 edition of *La Ménagère de Paris* included an anecdote of a woman who went to her town hall to ask for more coal. Pregnant with her fifth child, she explained that her youngest daughter had caught a bad cold, which could prove fatal, because she did not have enough coal to heat her home.²⁵ In the March 1943 women's edition of *L'Humanité* and the September 1943 edition of *La Femme d'Eure et Loir*, a department close to Paris, women readers were called to demand the supplies their children needed for the return

²² MRN: 85AJ 1/1/30. *La Ménagère de l'Aisne*: organe des Comités Féminins de l'Aisne, no. 2, August 1942, 2.

²³ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/25. *L'Humanité*: spécial des femmes, no. 6, November 1942, 2.

²⁴ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/39. *Union des Femmes Françaises pour la défense de la famille et la libération de la France*: bulletin d'information des comités, no. 1, end of 1943, 4.

²⁵ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/30. *La Ménagère de Paris*: Union des Femmes Françaises, December 1941, 2.

to school.²⁶ At the end of 1943, the UFF released its first information bulletin aimed at its committees. It was a series of 16 single-sided pages full of directives and advice. It contained an article concerning activism on provisioning and listed the different items that should be demanded for different groups of people. These included very young children, school children and adolescents, pregnant women, prisoners' wives, prisoners, and old people. For example, babies and young children needed more milk than other groups. Pregnant women needed a balanced and substantial diet before and after the birth of their child, while prisoners were in need of a special food ticket that would allow them a balanced ration. This information was designed to direct committees' actions and help determine what to write in their local newspapers.

For the women who compiled the newspapers, the call for more rations was part of the resistance struggle and the fight for the liberation of France. The April 1943 edition of *La Voix des Femmes de Saint-Denis*, for example, linked the fight for bread with the fight against the occupiers: 'It is necessary to make demands for our children, help the allies to defeat the villain Hitler who steals our products from us.'²⁷ Women's fight for bread was framed as their contribution to the fight being waged by the Allies. It was necessary to encourage and, on occasion, work to convince women that it was a good choice to be a part of confrontational and public activity. The February 1943 edition of *Ménagère du Villejuif*, a district in southern Paris, asserted that the occupation of France had 'opened the eyes and awoken the consciences' of the population and had made people less indifferent to events in their own country.²⁸ Sometimes women were instructed to take matters completely into their own hands, bypass the authorities, and appeal directly to suppliers themselves for more rations. In the March 1943 edition of *Femmes*, readers were instructed to visit the country in groups in order to buy directly from French farmers before the Germans were able to requisition the food. The newspaper advised women to '[g]o in groups to the train station to protect your returning delegation against the searches of the *Vichyssois cops*'.²⁹ This was practical advice that encouraged women to engage in subterfuge against the Vichy police and Nazi authorities.

²⁶ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/25. *L'Humanité*: édition féminine, March 1943, 2; MRN: 85AJ 1/1/15. *La Femme d'Eure et Loir*: journal des femmes patriotes d'Eure et Loir, September 1943, 2.

²⁷ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/50. *La Voix des Femmes de Saint-Denis* : organe des Comités Populaires Féminins de la région "Nord", no. 1, April 1943, 2.

²⁸ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/30. *La Ménagère du Villejuif*: organe des Comités Populaires Féminins de Villejuif, no. 1, February 1943, 1.

²⁹ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/15. *Femmes*: organe féminin de l'Union des Femmes, no. 1, March 1943, 2.

The women who produced the newspapers were heavily involved in resistance activity. They were well informed, aware of the political status quo, and prepared to take on the responsibility of directing women's action more broadly. Communist women's 'battle plans' differed from those of the male units and were a unique aspect to the resistance struggle. The women's underground press encouraged many different forms of action on the single issue of provisioning which illustrates the initiative used by female resisters. The issue of food scarcity was also a way to expand resistance activities into a new sphere that continued the aim of mass popular engagement. Women's campaign for better rations was a unique act of resistance in that it used Vichy propaganda against itself to protect the women who were operating in public. Demanding provisions, whilst previously called a 'support' act or apolitical, can be seen to have been, in fact, an important form of resistance within the communist movement. No other act of resistance could be performed so publicly with such limited consequences for those involved.

2) 'Occupy the factory', 'do not leave', 'stay and fight': obstructing the STO

The women's underground press routinely addressed the issue of the requisitioning of French workers. Laval first organised a volunteer program, the Relève, in mid-1942 for male workers to go to work in Germany in return for the release of French prisoners-of-war. The Germans wanted 350,000 men, 150,000 of them skilled workers. We have seen in Chapter Three that the program failed. Neither the numbers of volunteers or returned servicemen lived up to these expectations. As a result, Laval designed a law that mobilised all men between the ages of 18 and 50 and all unmarried women between 21 and 35 to work as the government deemed useful in the interest of the nation.³⁰ Some eligible workers, 100,000 of the desired 350,000, were permitted to stay and work in France for the Todt organisation, a German engineering company that increasingly sourced its workforce from forced labour. Vichy did not want women to be sent to Germany, but male workers soon began to be rounded up by French authorities if they did not present themselves for deportation. After the volunteer program failed to deliver sufficient results, a forced labour service, the STO, was introduced. As the program continued, younger and younger men were enlisted for the STO. Charles Sowerwine

³⁰ Philippe Burrin, *Living with Defeat: France under the German Occupation, 1940-1944*, trans. Janet Lloyd, London: Arnold, 1996, 152.

writes that, over the course of the war, 730,000 French men were sent to Germany and 35,000 died there.³¹

Women were encouraged by the resistance to act against the STO because it affected all of France, not just men. In the first instance, women were asked to encourage and support men in their decision to avoid deportation. In February 1943, *Ménagère du Villejuif* explained that often men wanted to resist at work, or to flee to the country, but felt that they were not able to leave their family in hardship. The article continued that it was ‘up to women, in this case, to take up their responsibilities. It is up to us to tell them: “You can leave in peace, your children will not want for anything because I am going to work for them.”’³² In this example, the cooperation of women and men was emphasised as essential to the success of resistance. The October 1943 edition of *Jeunes Filles de France*, presented what Vichy would most likely see as the next step after the failure to deport sufficient numbers of male workers. They wrote that Vichy would argue that ‘[s]ince the young men succeed in hiding themselves, escaping our searches, organising themselves against us, we will attack young women; the woman is weaker, she can evidently not use the same methods of defence, it is she who will make up the numbers.’³³ Readers were told that Vichy thought that men were able to look after themselves, while women were not. Women were called to protect themselves by strength in numbers and join groups at work or local groups of the Front Patriotique de la Jeunesse. While women were never drafted as part of the STO, the newspaper illustrated that, if women did not protest, it was difficult to identify where Vichy would stop. The article instructed women to move, stay with friends, obtain false papers and not remain isolated because, when one was alone, it was not as easy to defend oneself.

The negative consequences of the STO were given in the women’s underground press in order to encourage women’s resistance on this issue. The articles first established why it was a problem for France, and for French men, to work in Germany, and then suggested how women could prevent deportations of workers. The October 1942 edition of *L’Ouvrière* claimed that leaving to work in German factories was a death sentence. Articles advised that, if the Germans ‘want to force you, stop work, occupy the factory.

³¹ Sowerwine, *France Since 1870*, 195.

³² MRN: 85AJ 1/1/30. *La Ménagère du Villejuif*: organe des Comités Populaires de Villejuif, no. 1, February 1943, 2.

³³ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/26. *Jeunes Filles de France*: journal des Comités Féminins du Front Patriotique de la Jeunesse, October 1943, 2-3.

Only one instruction: do not leave.³⁴ The focus of this article, and others, was not how French people would be contributing to the German war machine, as many were already involved in German industry in their factories in France because of the occupation, but rather on the fact that French men did not want to die for Germany. This is a significant difference. In March 1943, *L'Humanité édition féminine* included an article describing the speech given by a woman in the street in Arras. She put forward the reasons to avoid working in Germany: 'To leave for Germany is to accept death without combat. It is to betray France, her people who suffer, her captive prisoners. It is to betray the Allies who fight for our liberation ... One man for Germany is a gun turned against the Allies.'³⁵ Such articles also implied that death was certain if French men left for Germany because the factories in which they would be put to work were targets for Allied bombers.³⁶

The mobilisation of women against the STO directly demonstrates that female resistance was organised as a part of the overall strategy of the communist resistance movement. Women were given specific instructions and advice that differed greatly from that given to men. It is important to underline this difference because it clearly illustrates that the communist leadership structured their resistance movement with an agenda for women to follow, and a separate, but inter-connected, agenda for men to follow. In the underground press, all French citizens were called to resist deportation. But, while men were called to join underground resistance networks, women were called to join local groups that were engaged in more subtle and 'above-ground' resistance. The May 1943 edition of *Femmes* blamed Laval for sending French men to their death, adding that supplying Hitler with men and arms was prolonging the war and delaying the liberation of France. Instructions were given for women to help workers and young people find refuge in order to avoid deportations and the police. They were also asked to collect food and clothing tickets for people on the run.³⁷ In this article there was an evident difference between what was expected of men and what was expected of women acting against the STO. Both were instructed to avoid deportation, but women were also instructed to support the needs of the men who had refused to leave for Germany. Men forced

³⁴ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/31. *L'Ouvrière*: organe des Comités Populaires Féminins de la région Parisienne, October 1942, 1.

³⁵ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/25. *L'Humanité, organe central du Parti Communiste*: édition féminine, March 1943, 1.

³⁶ See Mitchell, *Nazi Paris*, 68.

³⁷ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/15. *Femmes*: organe du Comité des Femmes dans la lutte pour la libération de la France, no. 1, 1 May 1943, 1.

underground, to become 'illegal' activists, depended upon the support of women who were able to remain 'legal' activists above-ground.

Women were called to action regarding the STO both as mothers and as citizens. The June 1943 special women's edition of *L'Humanité* contained an article urging women to protect men from the decrees of Hitler and Laval. Mothers were appealed to because mothers 'can most effectively present opposition to the departure of their children: "Mobilisation of youth" decrees Laval, "Mobilisation of Mothers" respond those who refuse to send their children to die for Berlin'.³⁸ Gildea recounts the example of one mother who began to recruit *réfractaires* for a local maquis unit. After her son and eight friends were arrested trying to avoid the STO by crossing the border to Switzerland, Mme Lamouille told her son to get sent to hospital. She then managed to pick her son up from the hospital in a taxi and he joined the maquis in the Haute-Savoie region. Lamouille then began to recruit young men avoiding labour service for the resistance. When she saw them arrive by train, she vetted them and, where appropriate, told them how to contact local units.³⁹ The November 1943 *L'Humanité édition féminine* also addressed readers in their role as mothers to act to protect their daughters: 'Mothers! Form your "Committees for the Defence of your Children"... do not let your daughters leave any more than your sons.'⁴⁰ The status of mothers in French society gave women a platform upon which to make their views heard concerning the well-being of their families. Women were singled out to receive individual attention and specific advice by the communist resistance movement because they could employ certain methods of resistance that men could not.

As noted, women's clandestine newspapers argued that working in Germany helped the Nazis to expand their war campaign. The October 1942 special women's edition of *L'Humanité* drew attention to Hitler's plan to take French workers to Germany in order to replace German workers who were being sent to the Eastern Front: 'finally Hitler clearly shows the manner in which he intends to collaborate with the French working population'.⁴¹ The article commented that there was hope, however, because Hitler 'did not count on the will of the men and women workers to fight against his acts of

³⁸ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/25. *L'Humanité*: numéro spécial des femmes communistes, June 1943, 1.

³⁹ Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, 137.

⁴⁰ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/25. *L'Humanité*: édition féminine, November 1943, 2.

⁴¹ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/25. *L'Humanité, organe central du Parti Communiste Français (S.F.I.C.)*: édition spéciale féminine, October 1942, 1.

barbarism, vandalism and murder'.⁴² *Trait d'Union des Familles de Prisonniers de Guerre* included an article in its July 1943 edition detailing the role of Laval in the STO alongside some general information concerning workers' lives in Germany. Laval was accused of handing over France's youth to the Germans. The article stated that the young men were dressed in the military uniform of the Todt organisation and sent to the Eastern Front to dig trenches, defuse mines and work on the front line. In the article, women were encouraged to organise a resistance front of French mothers: 'Laval makes threats because the resistance is becoming bigger and bigger. Laval's police can do nothing against our unanimous solidarity sustained by the people in their entirety.'⁴³ Through mass action, readers were told, women could affect the outcome of the war.

Mothers were urged not simply to help their sons and daughters escape deportation, but also to register their disapproval of the scheme with the authorities. In August 1943, *La Femme Comtoise* instructed women to form a resistance front. Readers were encouraged to protest at town halls, prefectures, train stations and the assembly points for requisitioned workers. The article concluded: 'MAMANS, the lives of our children are in our hands ... For our children make a shield of our bodies.'⁴⁴ The article suggested that mothers who put themselves in harm's way would be protected because they were mothers. The *Voix des Femmes* edition of April 1943 included an alleged conversation between a passenger on a bus and an STO worker on leave. The man described the maltreatment of the workers at the hands of the Nazis and the constant air raids, and said that most of his comrades had been killed already. He did not want to go back. The article explained that the bus passenger helped him to avoid returning to Germany and called readers to help: 'Patriots! help those who do not want to leave ... help them, hide them. France will have need of her sons. Better to fight to save France rather than die in a camp or in a bombing for Hitler.'⁴⁵ Women were asked to take on responsibility for the welfare of those who wished to avoid deportation. Female readers were expected to take charge not only for themselves, but also for the men who needed their encouragement and practical assistance.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/38. *Le Trait d'Union des Familles de Prisonniers de Guerre*: organe d'Union et de Défense des Femmes de Prisonniers et de leurs Familles, July 1943, 1.

⁴⁴ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/15. *La Femme Comtoise*: organe de l'Union des Femmes pour la Défense de la Famille et la Libération de la Patrie, no. 2, August 1943, 2. Emphasis in the original.

⁴⁵ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/50. *La Voix des Femmes de Saint-Denis*: organe des Comités Populaires Féminins de la région "Nord", no. 1, April 1943, 2.

Women's work aiding *réfractaires* was portrayed as essential work by the women's underground press. The September 1943 edition of *Jeunes Filles de France* contained a long article concerning *réfractaires*. The article detailed what had been done to help them, what more could be done and why these men were important. The first paragraph described the growth of the anti-deportation movement and the subsequently greater need to coordinate the efforts of those willing to provide support for *réfractaires*. The Union des Jeunes Filles Patriotes took on this role and created committees dedicated to providing aid to *réfractaires* in and around Paris. Their committees distributed thousands of identity cards, collected bread tickets, put together packages of supplies and donated clothes, and organised collections and subscriptions for the benefit of *réfractaires*. The female members organised contacts in order to introduce individuals into maquis or armed resistance networks. Producing propaganda was another of their main functions. The committees exhorted the wider population to show solidarity with young vulnerable people.⁴⁶ This article is significant because it described not only the activities that women undertook, but also the fact that they had the initiative to set up all-female groups to organise a specific aspect of women's resistance related to this crucial issue.

3) Strikes and demonstrations: how women were protected in plain sight

From the winter of 1940 until mid-1944, the communist party encouraged women to hold protests and demonstrations as concerned housewives. Women's public action was a part of the tactics of communist resistance networks. Coordinated 'above-ground' and underground resistance was intended to result in widespread resistance of the French population. Staging protests gave women the opportunity to develop and implement their own initiatives. In 1942, *Ménagères du Nord* published an article that announced that it was time to increase women's action. The article argued that, despite the complaints of citizens, no solution had been found to the daily-life difficulties of French people. Readers were urged to intensify their action in public by either demonstrating or visiting mayors and local councils. The article claimed that, without action, nothing would change.⁴⁷ Demonstrations were a form of action that encouraged widespread

⁴⁶ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/26. *Jeunes Filles de France*: organe de l'Union Jeunes Filles Patriotes, adhérente aux Forces Unies de la Jeunesse Patriotique, September 1943, 2.

⁴⁷ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/30. *La Ménagère du Nord*, 1942, 1.

insurrection. Women all over France were able to express their grievances and thereby contribute to the cause of resistance through organised, and spontaneous, protests.

Unlike what took place at the rue Daguerre and rue de Buci protests, the majority of female protests that were staged all over France usually occurred without any major acts of violence, arrests or shootings.⁴⁸ Seemingly spontaneous action that came about because women were frustrated in never-ending queues was the safest form of demonstration. Sémelin argues that it was far more difficult for the authorities to deal with unarmed forms of disobedience.⁴⁹ If the police had tried to repress the demonstrations of unarmed women it would have aroused public indignation. Police and governing authorities found themselves in the position of either allowing women to demonstrate and to break up the protest without force, or arresting the instigators and risking the repercussions of negative public opinion. The September 1943 edition of *La Patriote Parisienne* discussed the safety of demonstrations and what they could achieve for the public: 'Certain shy women think that any demonstration is impossible. The 14th of July showed that one can in a certain way express one's will without the risk of being arrested.'⁵⁰ The article criticised sceptics who thought that demonstrations changed nothing. Some women were described as failing to understand that the authorities were afraid of the popular will and the combativeness of the people.

Reports of women whose demands had been successful were intended to encourage other women to take similar public action, and reassure readers that demonstrations could be safe and successful. Michael Berkowitz states that the reports of armed Jewish resistance not only 'had a decisive impact' on the morale of Jews in camps and ghettos, but also helped to inspire other Jews to resist.⁵¹ In the edition of January-February 1943, *Sauvetage de la Famille Française* printed a list of strikes and demonstrations under the heading: 'Follow the examples of these aware and determined women'.⁵² In Romainville, on the outskirts of Paris, a group of women went to the town hall to demand galoches for their children. In Goussainville, a north-east commune of Paris, a delegation of women took a petition with 300 signatures to the mayor and

⁴⁸ Von List, *Résistantes*, 195.

⁴⁹ Sémelin, *Unarmed Against Hitler*, 121.

⁵⁰ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Parisienne*: journal édité par l'Union des Femmes pour la Défense de la Famille et la Libération de la France, September 1943, 1.

⁵¹ Michael Berkowitz, 'The Nazi Equation of Jewish Partisans with 'bandits' and its Consequences,' *European Review of History*, 13: 2 (2006), 321.

⁵² MRN: 85AJ 1/1/37. *Sauvetage de la Famille Française*: organe de combat des femmes françaises dans le Front National, January-February 1943, 2.

received a further distribution of potatoes. The list continued with a description of a group of prisoners' wives in Gentilly, in southern Paris, who went to the town hall to ask for free canteen meals for their children. A compromise was reached whereby the children received canteen meals at half the price. In northern Paris, in Argenteuil and Bobigny, 200 women were said to have collected potatoes from train wagons that were destined for the Germans.⁵³ Women's underground newspapers repeatedly listed other women's actions not only to encourage and reassure readers, but also because including numerous examples of female action could make readers feel a part of something larger than their own isolated action.

Newspapers most often directed women to act on issues relating to the home. Some newspapers, however, also recommended women strike at their workplaces. The January 1942 edition of *Jeunes Filles de France* included an article concerning the female workers at the mine in Bourges in central France. The women concerned were employed as sorters and had recently been asked to work an extra half hour without a pay increase. They refused to work the extra half hour and, in addition, demanded better working conditions, better food provisions, and a pay increase of 50%.⁵⁴ The November 1942 edition of *La Voix des Femmes* raised the matter of workers and their rights. The Germans and the Vichy traitors were accused of forbidding any pay increases in the hope that famine would force the workers to go to Germany. The female workers were reminded that in 1936 'cohesion was the condition of victory'.⁵⁵ The Popular Front provided a model for female resisters because it managed to succeed only through joint action and cooperation. The article directed the female workers to strike in their factories. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, a paper which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five, also made reference to the example of the Popular Front government. United action was crucial to the success of resistance and the Popular Front provided an example of how multilateral cooperation could be successful on a national scale.

Wives and mothers were the most numerous at demonstrations against the requisition of workers.⁵⁶ *L'Humanité édition féminine* of March 1943 mentioned two successful protests that took place at Nantes and Montluçon train stations where

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/26. *Jeunes Filles de France*: UJFF, January 1942, 2.

⁵⁵ MRN: *La Voix des Femmes*: organe des Comités Populaires Féminins, November 1942, 1-2.

⁵⁶ *Résistance*, Bulletin Pédagogique Annuel, publié par le Musée de la Résistance Nationale (MRN) en partenariat avec le Centre régional de documentation pédagogique (CRDP) de l'académie de Créteil, 2012-2013 edition, Communiquer pour résister (1940-1945), 15.

protestors prevented the trains of requisitioned workers from leaving. It was not the work of the men, but of the women, that resulted in the delayed departure of the requisitioned workers. The article encouraged readers to '[r]epeat these actions, lay across the rails if you have to.'⁵⁷ Gildea writes that the most famous protest against the Relève was at Montluçon on 6 January 1943. Five thousand women demonstrated and Gildea argues that '[s]tories of this demonstration had a huge impact and stimulated wider opposition to forced labour in other towns and cities.'⁵⁸ Simone Thibault, a young communist resister, participated in the protest at Montluçon. She estimated that there were around a thousand people gathered on the platform and around the trains, while still more laid on the tracks. The UFF had organised the publication and distribution of tracts calling women to join the demonstration.⁵⁹ Sémelin writes that the significance of this event was not the fact that some workers escaped being sent to Germany, because most were found and put into custody again, but the fact that a large enough group united to disrupt the operations of the authorities.⁶⁰ Such an act had a form of indirect effectiveness because it had an impact on public opinion and the morale of the population.

It is evident that, for women's protests to be successful, it was essential the women be peaceful. They were encouraged to be forceful in their demands, but non-violent. This tactic necessitated that the women be unarmed and passionate for seemingly personal reasons. The June 1943 edition of *La Voix des Femmes* for the 20th *arrondissement*, mentioned a specific example of a peaceful women's protest. The UFF had called women to protest against the further reduction of bread rations, but on this occasion the police knew of the protest and arrived before the women. The female demonstrators, however, calmly continued their protest down streets crowded with police officers and vans. The article concluded that women had shown the police that they could not be provoked, and would continue to fight for their children's bread despite police intimidation.⁶¹ Another article in the same edition described the spontaneous protest of a group of women who had been waiting in line outside the town hall in order

⁵⁷ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/25. *L'Humanité, organe central du Parti Communiste: édition féminine*, March 1943, 1.

⁵⁸ Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, 139.

⁵⁹ Simone Thibault quoted in Marie-Louise Coudert, *Elles, la résistance*, Paris: Messidor/Tempus Actuels, 1983, 170.

⁶⁰ Sémelin, *Unarmed Against Hitler*, 171-172.

⁶¹ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/50. *La Voix des Femmes: édité par l'Union des Femmes pour la Défense de la Famille et la Libération de la France, comité du 20^{ème} arrondissement*, June 1943, 1.

to redeem their coal vouchers. Some had been waiting for four hours and, when told that the office was closing, the angry housewives refused to accept such a declaration. The article congratulated the women and noted that '[f]aced with such energy the cops drew back. Bravo housewives!! You have shown that united we can act and that Laval's police fear your anger.'⁶² Women did not need to be violent to achieve their demands because, under the Vichy regime, women had a powerful status as mothers.

Strikes and demonstrations gave women with a will to resist an opportunity to express their opposition to the occupying authorities and the Vichy regime. In the December 1942 edition of *La Voix des Femmes*, we read that a group of 16 women travelled to Vichy in order to talk with Pétain and Laval. No politicians agreed to meet them. Instead, they were threatened by the police. The newspaper wrote that the men's unwillingness to talk with the women was disappointing, and once again evidenced that Vichy did not, in reality, prioritise the wellbeing of France's families. As a result, the article recommended women form *comités féminins* around France as the only way to register complaints and organise coordinated activity.⁶³

It was always dangerous to demonstrate against the Vichy government and its directives, but some acts were more risky than others. Female protests were encouraged by the communist leadership. It was a calculated decision that weighed the risks against the benefits both for the women involved, and the resistance movement as a whole. Daily life continued during the occupation. Women remained concerned with the needs of their families. Encouraging women to demonstrate and write petitions was, like all decisions made by resisters, one that balanced opportunity, need and the safety of the individuals involved. Women were able to place themselves in opposition to the police and Vichy regime due to their unique, idealised position in the home and because they were not seen as 'soldiers'.

4) 'Support is precious': women's aid for the Francs-Tireurs et Partisans

As previously mentioned, one of the main strengths of communist resistance was the complementary nature of the different groups that together formed the movement as a whole. Above-ground and underground resisters supported each other's activities in a way that emphasises the nature of the organisation, what enabled it to grow and how it

⁶² Ibid, 2.

⁶³ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/50. *La Voix des Femmes*: organe des Comités Populaires Féminins, Christmas 1942, 1-2.

sustained itself. As well as staging their own operations, the FTP provided armed support at various events, such as at the rue de Buci and rue Daguerre protests. Women's groups, in turn, provided material and moral support for the FTP units enabling them to function on a day-to-day basis. This was a large proportion of the work female resisters did as part of the underground communist movement because it was something only women could do.

Women's underground newspapers often contained paragraphs or articles calling for women to provide supplies, accommodation and protection for members of the FTP. The September 1943 edition of *La Patriote Parisienne* contained an article that succinctly illustrates how newspapers appealed to women to aid FTP units. In a short article titled 'Parisiennes', women were asked to become the *marraines*, literally meaning godmothers, of the Paris members of the FTP who 'cover themselves in glory by destroying the enemy'. The article continued: 'But they are men. They need the practical and moral support of all the French people.'⁶⁴ Women were appealed to as uniquely capable of providing necessary daily support. Women were asked to give supplies, clothes and money to resistance groups who would then pass what was collected on to the men in the FTP. Often, as in this case, resistance tasks were split between different units along gender lines.

Despite the gendered stereotypes used to divide tasks between the FTP and their *marraines*, these women had significant responsibilities, and the opportunity to use their initiative, that traditional conceptions of gender division would not have allowed. Some groups of *marraines* even published their own underground newspapers.⁶⁵ The operations and importance of the FTP are the focus of these papers. *La Vivandière*, in its November 1943 edition, included an article condemning both Vichy, for hunting FTP members, and the German police for describing the FTP groups as terrorists in order to discredit their patriotic activities. The article instructed women to encourage and support

⁶⁴ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Parisienne*: journal édité par l'Union des Femmes pour la Défense de la Famille et la Libération de la France, September 1943, 2.

⁶⁵ See: MRN: 85AJ 1/1/29. *La Madelon du Franc-tireur et Partisan*: journal de liaison des Marraines des Francs-Tireurs et Partisans de la région Parisienne, édité par l'Union des Femmes Françaises; *Marraines Bretonnes*: journal des femmes patriotes dans l'Aide aux Francs-Tireurs et Partisans Français et Réfractaires; MRN: 85AJ 1/1/29. *Les Marraines du Groupe "Jean-Jaurès"*: journal régional de parrainage et de liaison des Francs-Tireurs Partisans; MRN: 85AJ 1/1/35. *Quatre-Vingt Treize*: journal des marraines de la Compagnie des Francs-Tireurs-Partisans, édité par l'Union des Femmes Françaises de la région Parisienne (Front National); MRN: 85AJ 1/1/37. *Sambre et Meuse*: journal des marraines de la Compagnie des Francs-Tireurs-Partisans (FTPF) 'Soldats de l'An II', édité par l'Union des Femmes Françaises (Front National); MRN: 85AJ 1/1/50. *La Vivandière*: journal des marraines des Francs-Tireurs-Partisans du Groupe Jean Baillet.

réfractaires and to let all acquaintances know the 'magnificent exploits of these valiant amongst the valiant'.⁶⁶ Whilst in reality not all *réfractaires* became resisters, in the *marraine's* newspapers, becoming a *réfractaire* was the step before the individual in question inevitably became a resister. In general, men were praised for their honourable action when they fled deportation, whether or not they subsequently joined the resistance. In order to establish the legitimacy and importance of the active and armed groups, the article in *La Vivandière* was followed by a list of successful operations carried out by the local FTP unit. The amount of money and supplies collected in Gennevilliers, located on the northern outskirts of Paris, was also included in this edition. Clothes, jams, vegetables, butter, cheese, coffee, eggs, sausages, flour, pasta, soap, cigarettes and 21 kilos of potatoes were collected along with 500 francs. It was left to the women to collect what they could, however they could, and their success on that score was documented and made known.

The communist resistance movement needed women to perform a range of essential gendered roles in order to sustain its resistance activities. Rescue and shelter are now recognised in the historiography as important aspects of resistance activity. The April 1943 edition of *La Femme d'Eure et Loir* contained an article which explained that the great number of patriots fighting to liberate France were in need of moral and material aid. The article stated that 'in the hard moments of combat, how beneficial it can be for these soldiers to have a well-earned meal, under a welcoming roof'.⁶⁷ Women were encouraged to perform so-called support roles as a part of their duty as patriots. The October-November 1943 edition of *Les Marraines du Groupe "Jean-Jaurès"*⁶⁸ included an article that mentioned those who had recently been executed as resisters. The amount of money collected from around Paris was listed alongside the money collected by women who sold small hand-sewn objects on 11 November. The total amount collected was reported as 15,923 francs. This was significant, given that in 1941 it cost 7 francs for a pound of carrots.⁶⁹ The Christmas 1943 edition of *La Ménagère* suggested that readers should aid the families of illegal combatants by helping with the

⁶⁶ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/50. *La Vivandière*: journal des marraines des Francs-Tireurs-Partisans du Groupe Jean Baillet, no. 2, November 1943, 2.

⁶⁷ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/15. *La Femme d'Eure et Loir*: organe des femmes patriotes d'Eure et Loir, April 1943, 2.

⁶⁸ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/29. *Les Marraines du Groupe "Jean-Jaurès"*: journal régional de parrainage et de liaison des Francs-Tireurs Partisans, October-November 1943.

⁶⁹ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/31. *Nous, les Femmes*: journal des femmes communistes du canton de Villejuif, March 1941, 1.

gathering and distribution of supplies or organising collections for them. The article declared that ‘this form of support is precious’.⁷⁰ Collecting for the FTP involved many women, significant organisation and regular contact with the active male units. Support of guerrilla fighters, *réfractaires* and their families was one of the most important activities women were commonly involved with as members of the French Resistance.

Through the underground press, women were encouraged to help the FTP in a multitude of ways. The August 1943 edition of *Propagande et Actions Féminines* included an article in the 15-page booklet that listed the various ways it was possible to aid the FTP. Four significant suggestions were made. 1) Women were encouraged to recruit new members from amongst *réfractaires* by sheltering and caring for them until the FTP was ready to welcome them. 2) Women were asked to be observant and pass on information to resistance organisations or FTP units concerning train, troop or German supply movements. 3) As women had the opportunity to wander relatively unhindered, it was also suggested they could note the places Nazis frequented such as hotels, garages, cafes and factories, and to pass the information on to resistance members. 4) The final suggestion was to donate money or sell rosettes on 14 July, and Lily of the Valley on 1 May, the proceeds of which could be used for the benefit of the FTP.⁷¹ Women’s newspapers repeatedly suggested that readers pass information, supplies or people to FTP units. This implies that women’s groups had contacts in active units and vice versa. Women were responsible not only for collecting supplies, but also distributing the gathered items amongst maquis units. Providing aid for the FTP was a project of enormous responsibility and was highly complicated. It involved initiative and discretion and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

5) *Martyres* and symbolic references

To inspire women to action, the underground press continuously referred to important female resisters and significant historical dates. Well-known female figures were mentioned for at least two reasons: first, to provide examples of how the authorities treated women in resistance; and second, to inspire other women to continue the resistance cause and achieve the goals of the women who had been arrested. Particular

⁷⁰ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/30. *La Ménagère*: journal des Comités Populaires Féminins du Pas-de-Calais, December 1943, 1.

⁷¹ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/35. *Propagande et Actions Féminines*: édité par l’Union des Femmes pour la Défense de la Famille et la Libération de la France, August 1943, 8-9.

dates, such as Remembrance (or Armistice) day, Bastille Day and Mother's Day, were underlined as fitting days to stage a resistance action. Dates and symbolic action related to the French Revolution were also significant for resisters. We know that the aim of the clandestine press was to incite action and draw support for the resistance. The references to *martyres* and symbolic dates helped the women's newspapers do this by placing their fight in historical context, connecting individual actions to those of others across France and establishing how the actions of women were essential for the liberation of France.

Female figures throughout history who participated in armed struggles were regularly referred to in the women's underground press. Such figures drew the reader's attention to the French tradition of women's participation in meaningful battles and implied that joining the resistance was what French history expected of women in times of crisis. One paper published in the Nord and Pas-de-Calais departments was named after Louise de Bettignies, a French woman who had been a spy for the British during the First World War.⁷² Posthumously, she received the Croix de Guerre with palm, the Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur, the British Military Medal and was made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire. In the November 1942 edition of *Les Midinettes*, the female readers were invited to play their part to help the Allied soldiers, those soldiers operating undercover in France and those in the French army overseas: 'We are the successors of Jeanne d'Arc, of Jeanne Hachette, of Louise Michel, we are the sisters of Madeleine Marzin whose heroism urges on our young passion.'⁷³ Hachette took up a hatchet and helped to inspire the flagging troops who managed to save Beauvais from invasion in 1472, while Michel was a militant activist at the barricades during the Paris commune. Marzin led the rue de Buci protest discussed in Chapter Three. Such articles usually referred to patriotic *martyres* in order to convince readers of the importance, and historical validity, of their resistance contribution.

Jeanne d'Arc was an important example of an individual woman leading a resistance struggle. The communist resistance movement wished to motivate female readers with the story of Jeanne, an ordinary girl who became one of France's best-known heroines and patriots. A late 1943 edition of *Jeunes Filles de France* was devoted

⁷² MRN: 85 AJ 1/1/29. *Les Louise de Bettignies*: organe des femmes partisans du Nord et du Pas-de-Calais, 1944.

⁷³ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/30. *Les Midinettes*: organe des jeunes Parisiennes du Front Patriotique, 25 November 1942, 1.

entirely to detailing the life of Jeanne d'Arc.⁷⁴ The humble conditions of the early life of Jeanne d'Arc growing up were likened to the readers' own lives. The article called Jeanne d'Arc the first martyr for national independence: 'Strong in her faith and her courage Jeanne resisted everything, the depression of reclusion, the odious violence of her gaolers, the attempts of spies and false friends to corrupt her, the arbitrary trial behind closed doors, the crafty judges ..., sadistic inquisitors, the most gruesome of deaths'.⁷⁵ The similarities between the resistance of Jeanne d'Arc and the situation of the female resisters were recounted in order to stress that action was possible regardless of the difficult circumstances. The *Femmes* edition of May 1943 drew the attention of readers to the fact that Vichy was planning a celebration of Jeanne d'Arc. The article stated that Vichy wished to make French people forget their current oppressors and reignite the hatred of their old enemies, the English. The editors declared that Jeanne d'Arc, a real patriot and peasant girl, was inspired by an ardent love for her country: 'The real successors of Jeanne are the thousands of French people who fight against the Germans and their servants.'⁷⁶ By appropriating this historical figure, both the Vichy authorities and the Resistance wished to legitimise their own position and connect it with a proud historical struggle in the past. Both Gerd Krumeich and Gabriel Jacobs argue that, despite Vichy's efforts, Jeanne remained, and remains, a champion of resistance.⁷⁷

The focus on female *martyres* in the women's underground press was meant to elicit feelings of outrage and anger and therefore, despite the risk, make women want to follow in the footsteps of those who had fallen. In a women's edition of *L'Humanité* from the end of 1943, an article titled 'The Heroism of French Women' discussed the ways that women had shown themselves to be the equals of men in the fight for liberation. The underground tasks of women in resistance networks were listed: 'adherents or group organisers, typists, couriers, liaison agents, volunteers in the ranks of the F.T.P. or lodging, feeding, caring for the ardent combatants of the "army without uniform", [women] fight

⁷⁴ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/26. *Jeunes Filles de France*: organe national de l'Union des Jeunes Filles Patriotes, adhérente aux Forces Unies de la Jeunesse Patriotique, end of 1943, 1.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 2.

⁷⁶ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/15. *Femmes*: organe du Comité des Femmes dans la Lutte pour la Libération, no. 2, 20 May 1943, 1.

⁷⁷ See: Gabriel Jacobs, 'The Role of Joan of Arc on the Stage of Occupied Paris,' in *Vichy France and the Resistance: culture and ideology*, eds. Roderick Kedward and Roger Austin, 106-122, London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985; Gerd Krumeich, 'The Cult of Joan of Arc under the Vichy Régime,' in *Collaboration in France: politics and culture during the Nazi Occupation, 1940-1944*, eds. Gerhard Hirschfeld and Patrick Marsh, 92-102, Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers, 1989.

and volunteer themselves.⁷⁸ Above-ground activities of women in the resistance were also listed: 'speaking at markets, at the factory gates, in cinemas, churches; through their papers, tracts, inscriptions, they tirelessly denounce [Nazi] barbarism, the complicity of Vichy.' These lists underline the multitude of tasks women performed as resisters. The article also emphasised that, despite the necessity of resistance, there were consequences for those women caught performing these roles. The article continued: 'Battle is tough. French police and the Gestapo ... do not hesitate to make martyrs [of resisters].'⁷⁹ The article stated that Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier was interrogated, whilst chained, for 52 hours without food or rest. Thérèse Pierre, a young teacher, was described to have succumbed to injuries from her torture during an interrogation by French police officers in November 1942. Readers were given the hope that, by their actions, they might save other women who had been imprisoned or, at the very least, make the sacrifice of those women who had already died worthwhile.

The underground press often expressed indignation that French citizens were being arrested for trying to save France. In an undated issue of *La Voix des Lilas*, women were instructed to 'fight against the fascist bandits' who were responsible for the arrest and deportation of 'courageous victims who only had a dream, to save our Homeland and spare it the horrors that it currently endures'.⁸⁰ The February 1942 edition of *La Ménagère de Paris* contained a paragraph which asked readers to help save Marie Dubois, a mother of two, condemned to death by the Germans for the crime of 'being French and loving France'.⁸¹ The article insisted that mothers write to Pétain and Monsieur de Brinon in Paris on behalf of Dubois' children to prevent her 'murder'.⁸² In the edition of *La Voix des Femmes* printed in June 1943, an article referenced the death of Marie-Thérèse Fleury while she was being held in a Nazi concentration camp. The Nazis, with the complicity of Laval, his police and Pétain, were blamed for the monstrous treatment of such patriotic women: 'Their crime was to love France. It is necessary to protest forcefully against the murderers of these women. Send letters of protestation to De Brinon. The

⁷⁸ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/25. *L'Humanité*: édition féminine, end of 1943, 1.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/50. *La Voix des Lilas*: édité par l'Union des Femmes pour la Défense de la Famille et la Libération de la France, undated, 1.

⁸¹ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/30. *La Ménagère de Paris*: UFF, February 1942, 2.

⁸² Ferdinand de Brinon became the Vichy regime's representative to the German High Command in Paris in July 1940. In 1942 he was made Secretary of State. He was a valued and enthusiastic supporter of Germany and collaboration. He was arrested after the war and sentenced to death in March 1947.

people of Paris must prevent similar crimes from happening.⁸³ Patriots and potential resisters were called upon to help the victims of fascist repression.

Danielle Casanova was mentioned in editions of the women's underground press in many different contexts. She was used as an example by communist networks because she was a dedicated communist involved in the resistance struggle from the beginning of the war, and because she had sacrificed herself for her beliefs and her country. In the September 1943 edition of *La Patriote Parisienne*, one article included an excerpt from one of Casanova's last letters written from a French prison: 'Our beautiful France will be free and our ideal will triumph.'⁸⁴ The November 1943 edition of *Femmes de Picardie*, a department in the north of France, included mention of a group of female patriots who placed a bunch of flowers on a monument to commemorate the death of the 'great Patriot DANIELLE CASANOVA'.⁸⁵ The communists declared 19 September 1943 to be a day of homage to Casanova. On this day, flowers were placed at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, her home, her office and the tombs of other resisters who had been shot. The women detainees in the Prison de la Petite Roquette sang 'The Marseillaise' in her honour. Banners with a description of her life were put up outside a factory in Boulogne.⁸⁶ Her name and example were also used for a 'Promotion Danielle Casanova' to encourage women to join the PCF.⁸⁷ Casanova and Lucie Aubrac (who, by the end of 1943, had successfully rescued her husband from Nazi custody twice) were called the modern 'Jeannes' in *Jeunes Filles de France*. The young readers were called to act as part of the resistance struggle in order to show themselves to be 'worthy of the heroines who gave their life for France'.⁸⁸ The article ended with directions to pay homage to these women by increasing action against the invaders.

When the women's underground press mentioned male martyrs it was usually a short note with minimal detail whose purpose was to remind readers to honour their

⁸³ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/50. *La Voix des Femmes* : édité par l'Union des Femmes pour la Défense de la Famille et la Libération de la France, comité du 20^{ème} arrondissement, June 1943, 1.

⁸⁴ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Parisienne*: journal édité par l'Union des Femmes pour la Défense de la Famille et la Libération de la France, September 1943, 1.

⁸⁵ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/15. *Femmes de Picardie*: expression de la volonté des femmes picardes unies dans le Front National, November 1943, 2. Emphasis in the original.

⁸⁶ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Parisienne*: journal édité par l'Union des Femmes pour la Défense de la Famille et la Libération de la France, November 1943, 2.

⁸⁷ See: MRN: 85AJ 1/1/25. *L'Humanité*: édition féminine, November 1943, 1; MRN: 85AJ 1/1/25. *L'Humanité*: édition féminine, end of 1943, 2; *L'Humanité*: édition féminine, October-November 1943, 1.

⁸⁸ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/26. *Jeunes Filles de France*: organe national de l'Union des Jeunes Filles Patriotes, adhérente aux Forces Unies de la Jeunesse Patriotique, end of 1943, 2.

memory and avenge them. An article in *L'Ouvrière* printed in late 1941 mentioned a group of young men who had been executed by the Nazis. Women were entreated to remember the men: 'these valiant French men died in the service of France. Their names will not be effaced from our memories. Teach them to our children. Swear to avenge them by rising up always more united against the oppressor who starves our children and relegates us to misery.'⁸⁹ Male victims of repression were referred to in order to highlight the disproportionate and unjust procedures of the occupying authorities. Female *martyres*, on the other hand, were referred to specifically as examples to follow. The difference is significant and clearly links back to the separate roles expected of women and men. Readers were called to follow in the footsteps of women who had been killed or arrested, but women were not asked to emulate the behaviour of men. Both women and men had a celebrated role to play in the French Resistance.

Symbolic dates were used by resistance networks to stage symbolic acts of resistance and encourage the French population to reconnect with the heroic traditions of French identity. Such dates included 1 May (Labour Day), 31 May (Mothers' Day), 14 July, 20 September (the anniversary of the first decisive French victory after the Revolution against Prussian forces at Valmy), 11 November and even Christmas Day. All were referenced as days of solidarity and action. Powerful memories of the connotations of these dates were intended to produce action. For the women's underground press, the gendered aspects of symbolic dates were raised in order to encourage women, in particular, to take certain action as mothers and carers of the family.

As mentioned, marking Mothers' Day during the war was fraught for Vichy. It made women reflect on how they could no longer care for their families as they would wish. Some articles drew attention to the fact that women were capable of more than Vichy wanted of them. Most articles, however, emphasised the contradiction between what Vichy propaganda depicted for French mothers, and the reality of the wartime situation. Vichy envisaged large, happy families raised in a nurturing and loving environment created by the mother whose sole purpose was to rear children imbued with the cultural and moral traditions of 'eternal France'. This image, as the women's newspapers pointed out, could not be superimposed on the much bleaker reality of wartime. The underground press argued that such a contradiction meant that Vichy did

⁸⁹ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/31. *L'Ouvrière*: organe des Comités Populaires Féminins de la région Parisienne, end of 1941, 1.

not have a grasp on the reality of women's lives and therefore could not provide for their best interests. Miranda Pollard writes that even Pétain's supporters recognised that the Vichy regime provided little evidence of its commitment to pro-family rhetoric. She argues that Vichy was aware of the 'acerbic criticism and disappointment of its natalist (and Childbearing) constituencies' but still remained more concerned 'with regulatory, symbolic gestures rather than actual incentives or real material compensations'.⁹⁰

Vichy wanted Mothers' Day to be a celebration of French traditions and family represented by the essential figure of the 'mother'. The communist resistance wanted to reappropriate the day as a day of mothers' protests. In the May 1943 edition of *La Femme d'Eure et Loir*, the contradiction that Vichy policy posed for women's lives was noted and discussed at some length: 'Mothers' day! Mothers' day! proclaims the Vichy government in order to appeal to us. But no! There is not, there cannot be a mothers' day celebration while we are not able to provide the needs of our family. Mothers' day? When every day our anguish increases!'⁹¹ An article in *La Voix des Femmes* in May 1943 instructed women to make Mothers' Day a day of action: 'Go in delegations ... Establish your Popular Committees, unite to get better provisioning out of the Public Powers and the Germans.'⁹² Pollard writes that '[t]he contradictions between on the one hand the propaganda and discourse of Vichy concerning women and on the other the daily practicalities of the state,'⁹³ could not be reconciled. The women's underground press recognised the hypocrisy of the Vichy regime asking women to raise large families while French mothers received inadequate support or provisions. In November 1943, *Femmes de Picardie* explained the contradiction in explicit terms: 'The government says "Give France more children"; but the mothers of these needed families are abandoned to misery.'⁹⁴

An important historical example frequently mentioned in the underground press was the battle of Valmy in 1792. The September 1942 special women's edition of *L'Humanité* directed readers to meet at the Place de la République in Paris, or outside

⁹⁰ Miranda Pollard, *Reign of Virtue: mobilising gender in Vichy France*, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1998, 126.

⁹¹ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/15. *La Femme d'Eure et Loir*: organe des femmes patriotes d'Eure et Loir, May 1943, 1.

⁹² MRN: 85AJ 1/1/50. *La Voix des Femmes*: organe des Comités Populaires Féminins, Mai 1943, 2.

⁹³ Miranda Pollard, 'La politique du travail féminin,' trans. Danièle Voldman, in *Le Régime de Vichy et les Français*, ed. Jean-Pierre Azéma et al., Paris: Fayard, 1992, 242.

⁹⁴ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/15. *Femmes de Picardie*: expression de la volonté des femmes picardes unies dans le Front National, November 1943, 2.

regional town halls across France, on the evening of 20 September.⁹⁵ *La Femme d'Eure et Loir*, in September 1943, filled the front page with an article detailing the victory of Valmy in 1792 and comparing that battle with the situation of the war. The article focused on the fact that the French army at Valmy was full of young volunteers who were poorly trained but managed to fight off the invasion. Interestingly, the article went on to point out that a France which did nothing to save itself, and was liberated solely by the Allies, would have been a 'cowardly nation of the second order that would no longer be able to value its bravery and rights'.⁹⁶ Women were called to applaud General de Gaulle, the Comité de Libération National (CLN) and to aid the Francs-Tireurs, by whose action, 'supported by the entire nation, the Germans will be chased out of France and our prisoners liberated'.⁹⁷ People's armies were an historical tradition in France that gave the people some agency and freedom.

In order to give their fight for food greater legitimacy, the women's newspapers invoked the historical French tradition of women campaigning for food for their families. Numerous editions of the underground press linked the struggle for food during the occupation with women's fight for bread throughout history, especially since the French Revolution. The October 1943 edition of *Jeunes Filles de France* included a reference to the fight for bread in October 1789: 'We are not going into combat unarmed ... we have our force, the great force of women who fight tooth and nail for the life of those in their care, and who do not give up. Remember the days of October '89, these women, these young girls going to Versailles to obtain bread for a starving Paris.'⁹⁸ Gildea writes that since women 'were less likely than men to attract brutal repression from the authorities, they had been at the forefront of bread riots since the French Revolution'.⁹⁹ After the 1789 Revolution, to increase bread prices had been a politically charged act that often resulted in a public outcry. Historical examples of women involved in a similar fight gave legitimacy to women's fight for rations during the war. Conjuring the image of these women was intended to encourage readers to act as part of an historical tradition in which women led the people in a fight for survival.

⁹⁵ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/25. *L'Humanité*: édition spéciale féminine, September 1942, 1.

⁹⁶ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/15. *La Femme d'Eure et Loir*: le journal des femmes patriotes d'Eure et Loir, September 1943, 1.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/26. *Jeunes Filles de France*: journal des Comités Féminins du Front Patriotique de la Jeunesse, October 1943, 1. See also: MRN: 85AJ 1/1/30. *Ménagères du Nord*, no. 28, 14 July.

⁹⁹ Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, 138.

Marking Bastille Day (14 July) during the occupation was in itself an act of resistance. The Nazis forbade French citizens from celebrating both Bastille Day and 11 November. John Sweets writes of Bastille Day 1942 in Clermont-Ferrand. He recounts that all the local resistance groups gathered to sing 'The Marseillaise' 'in defiance of the government's ban on such public gatherings'.¹⁰⁰ His analysis concludes that 'the impact of the event was unmistakable'. In the weeks following the demonstration there was a noticeable 'increase around the town in comments sympathetic to the resistance. The Clermontois seemed impressed that the resistance was moving beyond underground propaganda to action'.¹⁰¹ Women's newspapers encouraged their readers to remember the women of 1789 and their contribution to the dramatic course of events. The *Femmes de Provence* edition of July 1942 featured an article about 14 July and the need to protest as the women had in 1789: 'In this fight for liberty, women played a great role'.¹⁰² The women who were active from 1789-1793 were the focus of the article. The women who participated in the fight for bread in 1789 were repeatedly used as a collective example of what could be achieved with joint action. The following year's July edition concentrated on the meagre rations and the deportation of workers to Germany, but it still referred to the national holiday in its call to action.¹⁰³

The day that had the most symbolic resonance with France's situation during the occupation was Remembrance (or Armistice) Day. The October 1942 editions of *L'Ouvrière* instructed all readers to meet at the Arc de Triomphe at 3.00 pm to celebrate the Armistice of 1918, or, if that was not possible, readers were urged to strike.¹⁰⁴ The November 1942 special women's edition of *L'Humanité* reminisced on the happiness and relief felt in November 1918. Readers were counselled to recognise that France was being oppressed and could only be freed by the joint action of the people. The editors wanted 11 November 1942 to be a day of unity: 'FRENCH WOMEN! participate in all the demonstrations organised by the Committee of the National Front by wearing the National colours'.¹⁰⁵ Women were asked to teach their children the importance of the day

¹⁰⁰ Sweets, *Choices in Vichy France*, 209.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² MRN: 85AJ 1/1/15. *Femmes de Provence*: organe de défense des femmes des Bouches-du-Rhône, July 1942, 1.

¹⁰³ MRN 85AJ 1/1/15. *Femmes de Provence*: organe de défense des femmes des Bouches-du-Rhône, July 1943.

¹⁰⁴ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/31. *L'Ouvrière*: organe des Comités Populaires féminins de la région Parisienne, October 1942, 2.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* Emphasis in the original.

and even to coordinate lessons with teachers to instruct their children to think of 11 November as a day of Patriotic action. The November 1943 edition of *La Patriote Parisienne* drew attention to the previous 25 years of the celebration of 11 November as a day of peace and remembrance. The article stated: '11 November 1943 unfolds at the moment where our country bleeds, where it venerates its best fallen sons on the field of honour of the Liberation.'¹⁰⁶ As 11 November already had symbolic power, it was possible for individuals to show their support for resistance merely through small acts, such as wearing the *tricolore* colours, in order to demonstrate one's patriotism and rejection of the occupation.

The underground press used the Christmas season to incite action out of anger, frustration, disappointment and hope. The joy of pre-war years and the Christmas tradition of goodwill were compared to the negative experiences of Christmas under occupation. The December 1941 edition of *La Ménagère de Paris* instructed women to demand increased rations. Only two sentences were spent reflecting on the dire situation, while the rest of the paragraph directed women readers to act '[s]o that our children have their Christmas'.¹⁰⁷ The Christmas 1942 edition of *La Voix des Femmes* established Christmas 1942 as a 'day of solidarity, struggle and hope'.¹⁰⁸ Readers were asked to consider the families who were suffering that Christmas because a family member had been killed or imprisoned as a resister. They were asked to donate a toy, confectionery, a parcel or some money to help make Christmas brighter for these families. The December 1943 edition of *Femmes de Picardie* focused on the prospect of the bleak Christmas in store for France that year. Toys were too expensive and oranges were unavailable in France. Without coal for a fire or any butter, milk or meat, the article stated that it was going to be a pitiful Christmas. The article also drew attention to the many *absents* who would miss Christmas with their families, including some children who had been evacuated from town centres. The article then instructed women to join 'the women's organisation of the Front National and work so that your little ones again know the warm family atmosphere' of Christmas.¹⁰⁹ The December 1943 edition of *La Ménagère* differed from other newspapers as it drew attention to those who did not

¹⁰⁶ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Parisienne*: journal édité par l'Union des Femmes pour la Défense de la Famille et la Libération de la France, November 1943, 1.

¹⁰⁷ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/30. *La Ménagère de Paris*: UFF, December 1941, 1. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁰⁸ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/50. *La Voix des Femmes*: organe des Comités Populaires Féminins, Christmas 1942, 1.

¹⁰⁹ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/15. *Femmes de Picardie*: expression de la volonté des femmes picardes unies dans le Front National, December 1943, 2.

suffer the deprivation felt by regular families: 'all French women think of this with sadness and also anger'.¹¹⁰ For the women's committees, who focused so much of their work on families and provisioning, Christmas was a crucial time of year to intensify their activities.

6) Propaganda for the PCF and the USSR

The majority of the women's underground newspapers, despite being published by the communist resistance, did not draw attention either to communism or to the fact that their organisers were communist. Not all members of the network, and certainly not all readers of the newspapers, were expected to be communists. Welcoming non-communists into their resistance organisations was a political as well as a patriotic goal of the communist resistance. Beyond the short-term goals of increasing the number of resisters, the leadership also hoped new members would remain with the party at the time of liberation. Despite the objective to avoid the direct mention of communism, there were a number of articles in various editions that reflected the communist background and ideology of the organisers of the network. Such articles praised the PCF and USSR. Apart from references to the anniversary of the Russian Revolution and the determination of the Soviet people, articles concerning the USSR generally described the actions of Soviet women involved in combat.¹¹¹ For example, the November 1943 women's edition of *L'Humanité*, focused on Soviet women and their status as equals: 'Being in possession of the same rights as men, our Russian sisters are today in the midst of the liberating combat.'¹¹² The equality between Soviet women and men in daily life was also mentioned in many of the editions of the women's press in order to provide an example of the possibilities for French women. In December 1943, *Femmes de Picardie* included an article that described the diverse roles of Soviet women as pilots, nurses, doctors, surgeons and partisan fighters in units on the front line. Behind the lines, Soviet

¹¹⁰ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/30. *La Ménagère*: organe des Comités Féminins du Nord et du Pas-de-Calais, Christmas edition, December 1943, 1.

¹¹¹ Examples include: MRN: 85AJ 1/1/26. *Jeunes Filles de France*: UJFF, January 1942; 85AJ 1/1/30. *La Ménagère du Villejuif*: organe des Comités Populaires Féminins de Villejuif, no. 1, February 1943; 85AJ 1/1/25. *L'Humanité*: édition féminine, March 1943.

¹¹² MRN: 85AJ 1/1/25. *L'Humanité*: édition féminine, November 1943, 2.

women were listed as workers in factories, ateliers and laboratories, and as labourers on farms.¹¹³

Soviet women were described as role models for female French resisters because they were heavily involved in the same struggle against a common enemy. An article in the *Propagande et Action Féminines* edition of April-May 1942 reported that, on 8 March (International Women's Day), Radio Moscow in France broadcast greetings from Soviet women to French women. This article was intended as a written response to the radio message and praised the Soviet women fighting to defend their country. One example from the radio broadcast was recounted in the newspaper. Matcha was a young girl and head of a group of partisans who were charged with the reconnaissance of an enemy's camp in a neighbouring village. She journeyed through the woods alone to spy on the enemy and then returned to her unit to report on what she had witnessed. The unit was able to disband the enemy camp a few days later.¹¹⁴ The article ended with a lesson for French readers: 'Soviet women make some immense sacrifices to save their homeland, they provide the example of how to save France.'¹¹⁵ Examples of women fighting to save their own countries not only provided proof of women's capabilities, but also united the resistance in different countries as allies in the same struggle. In this way, women's domestic struggles were connected to the battle being waged on an international scale for freedom and peace. The communist resistance movement wanted women to see this connection between their individual lives and the war as having ramifications beyond their individual lives.

Positive reports on how other resistance networks viewed the communist movement were included in the women's newspapers. Fernand Grenier (a pre-war communist deputy who escaped to England in January 1943) was reported to have been named as delegate of the PCF to the provisional government by General de Gaulle in the April 1943 Saint-Denis edition of *La Voix des Femmes*. The article stated that de Gaulle singled them out because the communists had clearly demonstrated their commitment to reinstating a free, independent and democratic France. The article also drew attention to women's understanding of what was at stake: '[women] ready themselves to help in the

¹¹³ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/15. *Femmes de Picardie*: expression des femmes unies dans le Front National, December 1943, 1.

¹¹⁴ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/35. *Propagande et Actions Féminines*: bulletin édité par les Comités Populaires Féminins, no. 6, April-May 1942, 2.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

liberating fight alongside the communists, the Gaullists and all the patriots so that France can live again.’¹¹⁶ Mentioning de Gaulle’s support of communist resistance endorsed and legitimised the work of communists. It is interesting that the newspaper used the identity and work of the communists to emphasise their patriotism and commitment to a positive future for France. Often communists had been accused of being unpatriotic given their allegiance to the Comintern. Yet, a major theme of the women’s newspapers was the patriotism of their readers and of the communist movement. The patriotism of French communists was also emphasised when the national struggle was tied to local and individual actions. French female resisters projected themselves as part of a violent international political and ideological struggle, but the patriotism of readers and their wish to liberate France remained the dominant theme in women’s newspapers.

7) Political and military updates: the ‘news’ in women’s newspapers

Reports of international events in 1942 and 1943 were important inspiration for readers in France who remained under occupation with no sign of the end of hostilities. The successes of the Allies gave hope to those in France who continued to resist. Reports of domestic and international events included commentary on how the event affected France and the development of the war. The articles tended to draw attention away from the implications of any single event, and towards the consequences it would have on the day-to-day lives of readers.

Some articles from the later years of the war continued to mention the signing of the Armistice in June 1940. An article in the November 1943 edition of *Femmes de Picardie* focused on the underlying politics of what had happened. The article stated that in order ‘to humiliate the French people Hitler made the delegates of Pétain sign the shameful armistice of June 1940 in the same place where the German delegates had capitulated in 1918’.¹¹⁷ How could Pétain claim the Armistice was signed in dignity and in honour when clearly Hitler wished to make the French suffer for their previous victory over Germany? It was essential for the underground press to undermine the authority of Vichy as a means of prompting readers to question the legitimacy of the regime and, the newspapers hoped, abandon Pétain’s government. All the articles that referenced the

¹¹⁶ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/50. *La Voix des Femmes de Saint-Denis* : organe des Comités Populaires Féminins de la région “Nord”, no. 1, April 1943, 1.

¹¹⁷ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/15. *Femmes de Picardie*: expression de la volonté des femmes picardes unies dans le Front National, November 1943, 1.

armistice of 1940 mentioned that the war continued for all French citizens. An article in a May edition of *La Ménagère de Bordeaux* discussed the realities of the Armistice. The French people who suffered knew the war had not ended but instead continued, 'sly and silent, doing more damage than with arms'. Illness, malnutrition, deportations, and the killing of hostages were doing the damage that arms were not. The article stated that, if the French people remained fearful and inactive, they would continue to die, 'softly but surely'.¹¹⁸ A 1942 edition of *La Ménagère du Nord* contained an article about the Armistice and occupation: 'The armistice is signed, however the war continues; it is a war of extermination ... a regime of terror is established'.¹¹⁹ It was important that readers recognise that the war in France would continue as long as France was occupied. The underlying message was that action and solidarity were needed because France was still at war and it was a total war being waged on every front.

The women's underground press did not ignore the ongoing war outside of France. Keeping women readers informed of significant international events was another way that their daily struggles were linked to the global war. The position of armies, the liberation of African countries by the French army (from November 1942), the accord reached between de Gaulle and Giraud (1 June 1943), and the liberation of Corsica (October 1943) featured in the newspapers.¹²⁰ The October 1943 edition of *La Ménagère Parisienne* elaborated on events in Corsica. The report, however, concerned the recent suffrage granted to Corsican women who were soon to be voting and standing for local government for the first time. It was a positive article focused on the future, the importance of women in the resistance struggle, and the hope that French women would continue to make a difference: 'It is a great victory of democracy this new participation of women in public life, in the administration of the country. Honour to the women of Corsica, to the people of Corsica who opened the way!'¹²¹

Whilst there had been no changes in the status of the occupation of France, military victories overseas were reported in the underground press in order to give

¹¹⁸ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/30. *La Ménagère de Bordeaux*: organe des Comités Féminins Bordelais, no. 2, May, 1.

¹¹⁹ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/30. *La Ménagère du Nord*, 1942, 1.

¹²⁰ See: MRN: 85AJ 1/1/26. *Jeunes Filles de France*: journal des Comités Féminins du Front Patriotique de la Jeunesse, October 1943; 85AJ 1/1/50. *Voix des Femmes*: organe des Comités Populaires Féminins, May 1943; 85AJ 1/1/50. *Voix des Femmes*: édité par l'Union des Femmes pour la Défense de la Famille et la Libération de la France, comité du 20^{ème} arrondissement, June 1943; 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Parisienne*: journal édité par l'Union des Femmes pour la Défense de la famille et la Libération de la France, November 1943.

¹²¹ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/30. *La Ménagère Parisienne*: édité par l'Union des Femmes Françaises pour la Défense de la Famille et la Libération de la France, October 1943, 1.

women hope for an end to the war. The May 1943 edition of *La Voix des Femmes* contained a report of the liberation of French territory in Africa by the Allies and the French army. Given the focus of women's newspapers, the effect on requisitions after the liberation of these countries was raised in the article. The article stated that Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia were under French control once again and that 'the thieving Germans and Italians and their *vichysois* accomplices' had been forced to stop 'robbing all their riches and starving their population'.¹²² The focus of the article, however, was on the battle women continued to wage in France. As we have seen, women's demands were linked, not only to the political future of France, but also to the international war. Through these articles, women's resistance was given further legitimacy as part of an international struggle and women were empowered with the prospect of political influence in a liberated France.

8) The Jewish question

There were relatively few mentions of the plight of Jewish people in the communist women's underground press. This was because of the structure of the communist resistance in France, not because the communists were unconcerned by violent anti-Semitism. We know that Jews across Europe were members of communist resistance groups. In the same way that women had their own local committees and newspapers, so did communist Jews in France. Concerns that were specific to Jews were the focus of Jewish resistance units. In France, Jews had been either members of the PCF or members of the communist-organised, and mainly Jewish, *Main d'Œuvre Immigré* (MOI) groups since before the war began. Renée Poznanski explains that the MOI was formed in 1932 as a way to mobilise immigrant workers depending on their nationality (Romanians, Hungarians, Poles, and so forth).¹²³ During the war, MOI groups across France became valuable armed resistance units.

There were two important aspects to Jewish communist resistance in France: armed resistance units and the clandestine press. Poznanski discusses the armed MOI units active in Paris. She emphasises that the Vel d'Hiv round up in July 1942 prompted many young Jews whose relatives or close friends had been captured by the French police

¹²² MRN: 85AJ 1/1/50. *La Voix des Femmes*: organe des Comités Populaires Féminins, May 1943, 1.

¹²³ Renée Poznanski, 'Reflections on Jewish Resistance and Jewish Resistants in France,' *Jewish Social Studies*, 2: 1 (1995), 147.

to join the resistance. Most often, she writes, they joined the Jewish partisans of the MOI. Poznanski stressed that Jews were well represented in the FTP-MOI groups operating in Paris. She states that out of the four units that were established, 'Jews constituted ninety percent of the first detachment (recruited from Romanian and Hungarian immigrants) and the entire second (so-called Jewish) unit. The group that transported weapons for the various units was composed entirely of Jewish women.'¹²⁴ These units made an impact: 'Until the middle of 1943, the FTP-MOI staged repeated military operations in Paris. Young Jews were in the vanguard of this activity, directly responsible for about two-thirds of the attacks made in Paris between July 1942 and July 1943.'¹²⁵ Arnold Paucker makes the important observation that in Germany there were relatively few Jews in the German communist resistance because a central theme of communist ideology was atheism and anti-Zionism. He goes on to mention that the exception to this rule were the Jewish youths who joined the communist resistance as active Jewish anti-fascists. These young people 'opted for the extreme Left and above all for the Communists, because they saw in them the most fanatical, adroit, determined and best organised opponents to the Nazi regime. And at the time they were quite right.'¹²⁶

Jewish communist resistance groups created a dedicated and vigorous underground press. Poznanski writes that the Jewish communist press in France was well established by the 1930s. Jewish communists managed to produce clandestine news sheets within the first weeks of the occupation. Poznanski highlights that their newspapers 'addressed the Jews, with the dual goal of informing and mobilising them'.¹²⁷ She identifies three underlying themes in the Jewish press: 'unconditional support for the Soviet Union ("the only country which has completely uprooted antisemitism and racism"); faithful repetition of all orders issued by the French communist resistance; and references to the specifically Jewish context'.¹²⁸ The communists distributed underground newspapers that focused on issues related specifically to Jews in the Jewish populated centres around Paris. Poznanski lists three subjects that were the focus of Jewish communist newspapers produced before the summer of 1942 in the greater Paris area. They were the situation of internees' families, the plight of the wives of internees and the

¹²⁴ Poznanski, 'The Geopolitics of Jewish Resistance,' 257.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Arnold Paucker, 'Resistance of German and Austrian Jews to the Nazi Regime 1933-1945,' *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, 40 (1995), 8.

¹²⁷ Poznanski, 'Reflections on Jewish Resistance,' 148.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

need to provide assistance to underground operatives and their families.¹²⁹ Poznanski notes that calls to action typically asked women to write letters to Vichy representatives and send parcels to inmates. Children were even asked to write letters to their teachers explaining the awful treatment of Jews and their families. She writes that a 'flood of letters was indeed sent in response to this directive'.¹³⁰ The same tactic used by the women's underground press was used in Jewish newspapers to address a specifically Jewish agenda.

As mentioned above, there were also Jewish women's underground newspapers produced by the communists. One example of a newspaper that was printed in Lyon by the women's branch of the national movement of the fight against fascism was titled *La Voix de la Femme Juive*. The focus of the articles in the August 1943 edition was the anti-fascist struggle rather than the battle for liberation. The exploits of Jewish women elsewhere in Europe were mentioned: 'Be worthy of your sisters of the Warsaw Ghetto who, armed, courageously fought to defend their existence and their right to life and that of their children, for the honour of their people.'¹³¹ The edition mentioned the Jewish units of the FTP and the need to encourage husbands, fiancés and fathers to fight fascism. One article described the Gestapo storming into the home of a Jewish family in Lyon in order to arrest the husband and wife and leave their two young children in the care of the 'hitlérien government'.¹³² Another article was dedicated to the anniversary of the Vel d'Hiv roundup in Paris. The article emphasised the need to support each other in order to avoid further loss. Women's committees were reported to be collecting funds to support families, women and children in need. The article encouraged its readers to help save their orphans. The threat to the Jewish people was openly acknowledged: 'Our homes brutally destroyed, our people deported, assassinated, we have a sacred task to accomplish to save those who are left'.¹³³ While this Jewish women's newspaper structured its articles and calls to action in much the same way as the other women's tracts, the Jewish women readers were instructed to help combat specifically the anti-Semitic aspects of the occupation. In line with communist tactics, Jews were treated as a

¹²⁹ Poznanski, 'The Geopolitics of Jewish Resistance in France,' 257.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/50. *La Voix de la Femme Juive*: organe du Mouvement National Juif de lutte contre le fascisme (section féminine), August 1943, 2.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

separate group that warranted their own units, clandestine press and specific forms of activity.

There is another story to be told about the communists' part in the rescue of Jews and female Jewish communist resisters in general. However, the detailed history of Jewish communist women's resistance lies outside the scope of this thesis as my study is necessarily guided by the material under review. The following examples in the communist women's underground press, however, alert us to the fact that the communists were involved in the rescue of Jews and disapproved of the treatment of the Jewish population.

Despite the fact that communist Jews had their own dedicated underground press, there were a few references to Jews in the women's underground press present in the archives of the MRN. *La Franc-Comtoise* edition of August 1942 reported details of the, now infamous, Vel d'Hiv round up. Readers were alerted that it was the French police who arrested the Jews, including mothers and children. The article warned that 'if women do not demonstrate their indignation, if they do not unite to escape similar horrors, all, *Jewish or non-Jewish people* will be exposed to this terrible fate'.¹³⁴ The readers were further instructed to 'group yourselves anew and in greater numbers and protest in front of the Prefecture, the Kommandantur to show your desire to see all the mothers returned to their children. Demand to know what they did with the little ones.'¹³⁵ The May 1943 edition of *Femmes* urged women to adopt Jewish children who had been saved by the resistance from deportations to Poland. Readers were asked to understand that '[w]ithout parents, without family, they only have the sympathy and solidarity of wounded and fighting France'.¹³⁶ The article appealed to readers and ended thus: 'French families who can, house a Jewish child.'¹³⁷ The special women's October 1942 edition of *L'Humanité* contained a short paragraph commanding support of the Jewish population. Readers were told to teach their children respect for fellow human beings as a value at the core of the resistance: 'FRENCH WOMEN! Teach your children to hate Hitler and to

¹³⁴ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/15. *La Franc-Comtoise*: journal des Comités Féminins de Franche-Comté, édition du Belfort et du Territoire, no. 1, 7 August 1942, 1. Emphasis in the original.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/15. *Femmes*: organe du Comité des Femmes dans la Lutte pour la Libération de la France, no. 1, 1 May 1943, 2.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

love little Israelites, innocent victims of fascism.’¹³⁸ Members of the resistance exhorted mothers to raise the next generation to be champions of social justice. The women’s underground press appealed to women as women and as mothers in order to encourage them to act as members of an elaborate and politically charged resistance plan.

Conclusion

The analysis of the clandestine women’s press in this chapter has highlighted four points that are central to this thesis. First, women were able to develop their initiatives and organise parallel but interconnected all-female sub-networks within the communist resistance movement. Women had autonomy and agency in the communist resistance network because they were viewed as essential contributors by the organisation. Second, communist women developed their initiatives because they were politically aware and politically experienced. They understood the broader implications of their resistance, as evidenced in multiple articles of the underground press. Third, the complementary and cooperative nature of female resistance was essential to the functioning of the communist resistance movement. Women’s groups and men’s groups, such as FTP units, were co-dependent. Together they enabled the communist resistance to survive and continue. Fourth, the range of roles performed by women in the communist resistance was extensive. Women were responsible for the production and distribution of their own local clandestine newspapers. These newspapers give us an insight both into the roles that women did perform and the roles that the communist leadership wanted women to perform. Women in communist networks understood not only the importance of unarmed resistance but also the importance of women activists in general. These women were idealistic and committed to resistance and the communist ideology.

¹³⁸ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/25. *L’Humanité, organe Central du Parti Communiste Français (S.F.I.C.): édition spécial féminine*, October 1942, 2.

Chapter Five

The Resilience of Female Resisters Inside The ‘Fortress of Fascism’, 1944

Public opinion had well and truly turned against the Nazi occupiers and their Vichy collaborationists by 1944.¹ De Gaulle’s emissaries had managed to form a precariously united movement, the Conseil National de la Résistance (CNR), to tie the major internal resistance networks with the Free French in London.² The Allies were gaining ground in North Africa and the Soviet Union throughout 1943. Over the course of the war, the priorities of resistance networks had evolved in order to contend with the changing situation of the war. Resisters had to be resilient to survive. They had to change strategies in order to combat new threats, which included developing guerrilla warfare tactics. They also had to establish coping mechanisms to survive arrest and deportation. Communist resistance was now focused even more heavily on developing combat units and increasing propaganda. The Liberation of France was a difficult process started with the Allied landings in Normandy in June 1944. Pockets of Nazi soldiers who refused to surrender remained in France until the Armistice of May 1945. In August 1944, de Gaulle and the Free French established the Provisional Government of the French Republic thereby officially ending the Nazi occupation of France.

This chapter has three aims. The first is to build on our growing understanding of women in the communist resistance through a discussion of new roles adopted by female resisters in the later stages of the occupation. The second is to expand on my argument that women were engaged so extensively in communist groups because they had the opportunity and experience to develop their own initiatives. The third aim of this chapter is to consider how communist women’s groups perceived themselves and their work as resisters. I argue that the fact that communist women were politically conscious and

¹ See: Laborie, *L’Opinion Française sous Vichy*.

² Sweets, *Choices in Vichy France*, 210.

motivated by a commitment to a political ideology proved significant in determining the role they played within the communist resistance. The consequences of undertaking resistance activities did not deter these women because they understood that the consequences of inaction were far greater. Communists were able to recognise the broader implications of their involvement in the French Resistance, the importance of so-called support roles, and the value of the contribution of female activists in general.

This chapter is divided into four sections in order to tease out these arguments. All four sections address the resilience of resisters. The first three sections deal with different aspects of women's resistance in the final year of the occupation, while the fourth section reflects on how women saw their own contribution to resistance immediately after France was liberated. The first two sections discuss roles connected to FTP units which were a major focus of communist resistance activity in 1944. The first considers the tasks of women mentioned in the journal of Lucienne Maertens. The second section concentrates on the small minority of French women in armed units. The third section focuses on the experiences of female communist resisters after arrest and/or deportation. By this late stage in the war, Nazi prisons and camps across Europe were overcrowded with internees fighting to survive until the end of the war. The behaviour and opinions of female internees and deportees offers an insight into how women perceived resistance and the consequences they suffered from their connection to the communist resistance movement. A handwritten monthly produced by the women in the all-female Prison de la Petite Roquette facilitates my discussion of communist women detained in French prisons. The analysis of French female communist deportees concentrates on their use of survival techniques that were based upon their commitment to resistance, to communism and to each other. The fourth section continues the discussion of how women understood their role in the resistance. A consideration of how female resisters viewed their involvement, both during the war and after liberation, gives an insight into their motivation and their understanding of the hierarchy of the resistance movement. Letters written by the Union des Femmes Françaises (UFF) and their series of biographical booklets published from 1945 will be examined as examples of women's own call for recognition after the war.

More than a *marraine*: Lucienne Maertens and the Union des Femmes Françaises

As secrecy was essential for a resistance network to operate, very little documentation concerning resisters and resistance activities survived the war. This is partly what makes the *cahier* of Lucienne Maertens so remarkable. As mentioned in the Introduction, the journal of Maertens contains details of her activities from October 1943 through to July 1944. After being appointed the *inter*, a director and liaison, for the UFF,³ she began keeping track of her resistance activities and recording her observations. Her first entry explains why she decided to keep any kind of record: ‘being made U.F. liaison I have decided to write my activities in this notebook almost every day to remind me of the progress made by my organisation.’⁴ Maertens ran the risk of the discovery of her journal in order to keep notes on her resistance activities. If it was found, her journal would have provided evidence that she was a resister and could have resulted in her torture for the identity of the individuals referred to throughout her journal. The only allusion she made to risk and danger was in her entry of December 1943: ‘Activity reduced over the past few days due to the arrest of my family and the need to move immediately.’⁵ Maertens’ *cahier* is not only rare for its mere existence, but also for the information it contains.

The journal of Maertens allows readers to note the multitude of roles that women performed as communist resisters. The fact that Maertens worked first with the UFF and then with the Francs-Tireurs et Partisans (FTP) means that her notes provide information concerning the structure of women’s groups and the function these groups performed as a part of the wider communist resistance movement. Maertens wrote notes regarding the different committees and branches of the communist movement with which she was involved, as well as reports of the various meetings. Her inclusion as a woman in organisational meetings is significant because it indicates that the UFF was treated as a part of the central communist leadership. A large percentage of the *cahier* comprises organisational and practical details concerning the coordination of local women’s groups and how they could best complement other communist resistance operations.

Maertens attended regular meetings with various individuals and groups in her capacity as UFF coordinator and liaison between local UFF committees and the underground PCF hierarchy. She was constantly in contact with resisters, both women

³ Appears as UF in her notes.

⁴ MRN: Fonds de Famille Maertens. Cahier of Lucienne Maertens, 1.

⁵ MRN: Fonds de Famille Maertens. Don de Jean Maertens, NE 2052 bis. Cahier of Lucienne Maertens, 1943-1944, 12.

and men. As part of this work she was also responsible for organising meetings between new and old contacts. In November 1943, she noted that she had managed to establish communication between a *marraine* and a recruiter. Later in that same month she discussed the creation of Aid Committees for the *réfractaires* with the FN (Front National) and the FUJ (Forces Unies de la Jeunesse Patriotique).⁶ She recounted in her journal that next she had to 'prepare a report and a work plan in order to discuss again with F.N. Seems to be cognizant of women's work, could certainly do a lot together.'⁷

Providing support for resisters was a vital part of resistance. I have already shown that a broad network of people was needed to run an effective resistance movement and that women were essential to this structure. In order for a large resistance movement to function in the long-term it was necessary to involve an extensive number of people. This is illustrated in the journal of Maertens. On numerous occasions, Maertens related finding business owners who were willing to help their members. In October she found a launderer who was prepared to wash and mend the laundry of the men of the FTP and a grocer who would accept all food tickets, even procure sufficient rations for them.⁸ In November she found a printer who would print their underground material.⁹ Over the remaining months she located teachers and priests who were also prepared to support their networks. These examples illustrate the extent to which the UFF was not only acquainted with the activities of the FTP, but also involved in the organisation of FTP units.

Maertens was also in contact with people from other organisations. Resistance organisations, on occasion, worked together. In December 1943 she was corresponding with the Red Cross in order to organise collections for Christmas parcels. The UFF and the Red Cross aimed to distribute presents for children and Christmas trees for families. Together they aimed to send 30,000 to 40,000 packages to deportees for Christmas in 1943.¹⁰ In late October, she wrote of plans to organise 'Christmas for the victims of repression'¹¹ in a list of future projects. The intention was to unite people and lift the morale of those who did not have the provisions to make Christmas bright. Christmas

⁶ The FUJP was a national youth resistance movement made up of various youth units ranging from communists to Christians.

⁷ MRN: Fonds de Famille Maertens. Cahier of Lucienne Maertens, 10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

gatherings were to be hosted by some nuns and a teacher.¹² In her December 1943 notes, Maertens also wrote of a report due to be done with the Paris Committee of the Liberation concerning research being conducted into the Brigade Spécial (BS). The Assistance Française (AF) had been asked to investigate the workings of the BS in order to provide useful information for resisters. Contact had already been established between the AF and a magistrate who was to inform them of the methods of BS investigations and provide documentation of ongoing investigations. The families concerned would then be notified of any investigations already underway. The AF was also to write some articles, to be reprinted by the communist resistance, which revealed the methods of the police. Another magistrate was to write an article protesting against the 'internment measures after acquittal or a dismissed case.'¹³

As we learnt in Chapter Four, a safer way of contacting potential recruits was through written material rather than face-to-face approaches. On numerous occasions, Maertens reported writing and delivering questionnaires to multiple professionals. She did not go into any further detail concerning these questionnaires, but from her descriptions it seems they provided a way of assessing whether someone could help their networks. During the 1930s, the PCF used biographical questionnaires in order to determine the commitment of a member, or the level of training a new recruit needed.¹⁴ Resistance had grown to such an extent that the communist movement was actively seeking out individuals who could perform specific roles.

The relationship between the women's and men's units of the French communist resistance was complicated. Maertens' comments make it clear that the male hierarchy valued the contribution of the UFF. They were happy for the women to organise and coordinate their own groups. At the same time, the men were not involved in expanding or organising UFF activities. In November 1943, Maertens managed to make contact with a male leader involved with the FTP. She wrote that 'he has the intention of forming some aid committees for the *réfractaires*, he is in touch with [multiple individuals and] each, through a mediator of his organisation, is in contact with some *réfractaires*, but he would like to coordinate the efforts. He thought a woman would be suitable and that is why he approached us.'¹⁵ When rank-and-file members were unable to help *réfractaires*, the man

¹² Ibid., 15.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Berlière and Liaigre, *Liquider les Traîtres*, 53-57.

¹⁵ MRN: Fonds de Famille Maertens. Cahier of Lucienne Maertens, 6.

wanted to be able to direct recruits to this new woman who would have knowledge of the funds and ration and identity cards at their disposal. The woman in the proposed role would also be trusted with the addresses of businesses or organisations that were likely to provide aid or employment. Maertens, however, was concerned about the security of this new system. She was reluctant to give the liaison or his men the contact details of her women but she felt that if she refused, the man would not work with the already-established female network. This example highlights both the appreciation and the lack of understanding many men had regarding women's groups. This man who approached Maertens clearly knew the effectiveness and organisational capabilities of the UFF. It seems that he also underestimated Maertens' adherence to security protocol and the risks that women ran as *marraines* of the UFF.

The male hierarchy of the PCF made no contribution to the organisation, projects or expansion of the local committees of the UFF. Just like the UJFF in the 1930s, the UFF was run by women. The underground PCF allowed women to use their initiative to spread the resistance mentality and contribute to the communist resistance movement. Male communist leaders realised that they benefited from the work done by communist women and their affiliates. But, on occasion, Maertens did have difficulty impressing upon the male hierarchy the importance of women's groups. It is clear from her notes that Maertens fought for the women's networks at the meetings she attended. She wanted greater coordination and closer connections between the different units of the communist resistance. She believed that this was the best way to ensure that each functioned as efficiently as possible. Contact between women's groups and active units was essential in order to ensure that men and provisions could be passed without delay from one to the other. Contact between arms of the communist movement was also necessary in order to organise safe accommodation for men in hiding. The key to the communist network was coordination between the multiple branches. To make the most of the tasks performed by women's committees, it was necessary to establish cooperation between the FTP and the UFF. This was the main task that Maertens shouldered, and it was a difficult one.

A resistance network could only grow through the determination and commitment of its existing members. Maertens aimed to increase UFF membership and expand its activities. In her summary of the month of December 1943, Maertens reflected that she was not satisfied with the rate at which the local committees were growing. She

believed they would be better positioned to expand their committees if their existing members understood the problems that interested the general population. Maertens concluded that ‘we still do not understand all the problems that interest the masses and only once we have understood their needs and aspirations will we succeed in leading them with us’.¹⁶ Maertens believed that the efforts of the UFF to collect money for the FTP had been successful – 150,000 francs was collected in six months – precisely because armed resistance was seen as necessary by the population.¹⁷ Maertens talked to the local leaders under her command individually in order to assess their commitment and understanding of the goals of the UFF. She was pleased that the two local heads with whom she met in October and November understood their work very well. Lack of understanding of certain UFF activities and their relation to the wider network was often a problem Maertens faced with local committee heads. In February 1944, Maertens recorded her impressions of a *marraine* who had not been in contact with other groups and did not know all the sections. Maertens did not believe that she would be able to initiate much activity with this woman in the future.¹⁸ In April 1944, Maertens had to explain the difference between the FTP and *réfractaires* to a new *marraine*,¹⁹ and examine with a *comité directeur* ‘the question of aid for *réfractaires* and recruitment for the UF’²⁰ that the woman had not completely grasped.

Maertens also recorded many meetings with local leaders, who recognised the impact of their resistance work. In April 1944, she met with a UFF woman who lived in the 4th *arrondissement*. Maertens gave her some UF tickets, and the woman was to write some petitions for bakeries and supervise a collection for *réfractaires* and the FTP. Maertens wrote: ‘we can use her to a great extent, she is intelligent and understands the UF problem’.²¹ That same month, Maertens also met with a *marraine*. The *marraine* gave Maertens some ‘examples of objects made in her region’ and they contemplated the expansion of her activities. Maertens noted that they discussed preparations for 1 May and the totals of her collections. At the end of her reflections of her meeting with this *marraine*, Maertens wrote: ‘I gave her 2500 francs for the *réfractaires*.’²² Evidently

¹⁶ Ibid., 17.

¹⁷ Ibid., 17.

¹⁸ Ibid., 28.

¹⁹ Ibid., 29.

²⁰ Ibid., 30.

²¹ Ibid., 29.

²² Ibid.

Maertens was committed to her leadership role. She wanted the UFF to reach its full potential. In order to facilitate the growth of the UFF, Maertens had to ensure that the women under her guidance understood their role, and the role of the UFF and FTP, and were empowered to act.

Maertens, like Danielle Casanova, is another example of a woman in a communist-run organisation who seized the chance to develop and implement her own initiatives. She recorded meeting with a male liaison to discuss her new plans for the organisation of their recently-formed women's direction. He gave positive feedback and asked her to do the absolute maximum to place women at all levels of the sponsorship organisation. The liaison also pointed out 'that it is not necessary for the female volunteers of the FTP to be communists'.²³ The goal of the communists was popular resistance which meant that anyone could be a potential member. In January 1944, the number of UFF adherents was given by Maertens to be 711.²⁴ She continued to believe that they could increase the number of adherents by making a few changes. Also in January, Maertens commented that it was important for women to be involved in all branches of activity concerning the FTP. Women could recruit male and female combatants, be liaison agents, collect information, organise the food and health services, produce propaganda and collect money and provisions. She wrote: 'If the FTP services feel our support they will be able to devote themselves completely to the armed fight relying more and more on us for the auxiliary services.'²⁵ By 1944, resistance activity had grown to such an extent that it was essential for the movement to divide tasks between specialist units for the sake of efficiency.

Throughout the entire occupation, the communist resistance used the complementary nature of women's activities to foster the growth and development of their resistance movement as a whole. Maertens emphasised in her journal that the growth of the FTP was only a viable option if there was a support network such as the UFF. In multiple entries she listed the money and products that the women had collected for *réfractaires*. In January 1944, she reported that the collections for the FTP had reached 154,456 francs.²⁶ By May 1944, it had reached 299,654.²⁷ Women were able to

²³ Ibid., 22.

²⁴ Ibid., 25.

²⁵ Ibid., 22.

²⁶ Ibid., 21.

²⁷ Ibid., 47.

collect large amounts of money and either prepare, donate or collect plenty of provisions. As the liberation of Paris approached, the nature of the collected provisions changed and became mainly medical supplies needed by FTP fighters. *Réfractaires* were mentioned constantly throughout Maertens' journal. In her summary of one meeting she noted that there were only two groups available to help manage the needs of the *réfractaires* and one of them was the UFF.

The communist resistance was a national movement. Units in different localities operated separately as part of a mass movement. Certain tasks performed by women mentioned in Maertens' journal are examples of a singular action performed as one part of a much larger campaign. Delegations to local mayors are one such example. In November 1943, Maertens briefly mentioned delegations to the town halls in both the 19th and 20th *arrondissements*. The one in the 19th *arrondissement* managed to obtain galoches and pinafores for local children. She wrote that the delegation in the 20th *arrondissement* failed because it was 'badly received by the Mayor'.²⁸ It is interesting to note that women were not only forming delegations to appeal to mayors, as suggested in multiple underground newspapers, but also that Maertens was kept informed of such actions. Delegations were part of a mass effort to get women publicly active in multiple locations. Maertens indicates that it was not just a matter of encouraging any action by individuals, but of encouraging action by multiple groups across many areas. Women were called to individual action that was, in actuality, one part of mass action as far as the network organisers were concerned.

Maertens was involved in all activities undertaken by the UFF committees for which she was responsible. As we saw in Chapter Four, underground newspapers were an important aspect of communist women's resistance activities. Maertens listed the publication and distribution of a number of titles of the women's underground press in her journal. She mentioned the second edition of the journal *Marraines* and the first edition of *La Vivandière*,²⁹ as well as the journals '93 and *Sambre et Meuse*.³⁰ She also wrote that she prepared articles for *L'Humanité* concerning the promotion of the FTP.³¹ In April, she prepared not only an edition of *La Patriote Parisienne*, but also a tract

²⁸ Ibid., 6.

²⁹ Ibid., 14.

³⁰ Ibid., 28.

³¹ Ibid., 12.

concerning the closure of bakeries and exemplars for flyers demanding bread.³² Women's units were established as a vital part of the communist resistance movement. Maertens' *cahier* repeatedly shows that women were involved in every part of communist resistance activity.

The challenges for women in armed units

Due to the nature of the war in France and the traditional gender stereotypes that permeated French society, there were relatively few female combatants in the French Resistance. Those women who did take up arms, however, usually belonged to communist-organised units. Despite their virtual exclusion from early historical literature on armed resistance, women throughout Europe did take up arms against the Nazis. By 1944, combat operations and preparation for armed battle were the priority. Due to the lingering stereotypes in France surrounding women's 'natural differences,' it was difficult for women to be accepted, or even trained, as armed militants. The Free French operating from London excluded women from service that required any form of combat. The British-run SOE, on the other hand, welcomed and trained women agents and so attracted French women who did not feel they could do enough with the parameters enforced by the Free French. Unlike other European countries, in France it was not the norm for women to be members of an armed unit.

Due to her role with the FTP, Maertens was focused on the armed struggle. In her journal she made it clear that she considered the contribution of women to the final armed fight as valuable and essential. Maertens believed that in order for their campaign to succeed, women had to be convinced that the liberation of France was not far away. She worried that the concept 'of the imminent fight still gains ground too slowly in the minds of women'.³³ After the Normandy landings in June, Maertens was concerned that the female resisters, despite their efforts, were not reacting fast enough to the rapid developments in France. She suspected that women had not fully grasped the importance of the fact that Allied armies were fighting on French soil. For the most part, she deemed the responsibility to lie with those in charge who better understood the situation, but who had failed to emphasise sufficiently the significance of the armed fight and its consequences. Women were not automatically engaged with combat developments

³² *Ibid.*, 29.

³³ *Ibid.*, 47.

because, for the most part, they were excluded from armed combat. The communist leadership played an essential role in developing and channelling women's resistance.

If women were involved with an armed unit, it was generally connected to the communist resistance. Schwartz underlines that in France it was groups either directly linked to, or affiliated with, the PCF that gave women the chance to occupy combat positions.³⁴ Slaughter notes that all-female combat units in Italy were generally tied to the communist resistance. She explains that this was because of the unconventional tactics adopted by the communists.³⁵ Their armed divisions focused on sabotage, guerrilla operations, or paramilitary missions intended to provide protection for resisters. As a result, these units had no specific military aim, which allowed the units more flexibility and women greater opportunity to bear arms. Schwartz also mentions the fact that, in France, women were the first liaison agents used to re-form the party, as we saw in Chapter Two. This experience introduced them to a different structure of responsibility which made them more likely to consider unconventional female roles. Communist resistance networks in Europe gave those women who wanted to join the armed fight the opportunity to be involved with an armed unit.

Women were engaged in combat roles to the greatest extent in the Red Army in the Soviet Union and the communist resistance in Yugoslavia. Anna Krylova states that, during the war, 520,000 Soviet women served as regular troops in the Red Army, while another 300,000 were in combat and home front anti-aircraft formations.³⁶ Young women and men who had grown up in the USSR of the 1930s had been introduced, through state propaganda and paramilitary training, to the idea that women could, and would, be soldiers in the upcoming conflict. This was the complete opposite to policies instituted in France. Krylova features many Soviet women who were able to realise their dream of taking up arms alongside men after June 1941. The numbers of women in the Red Army were unique and inspirational for communist women across Europe. Strobl goes into detail about the resistance activities of a girl in the Netherlands who 'right from

³⁴ Paula Schwartz, 'Partisanes and Gender Politics in Vichy France,' *French Historical Studies*, 16: 1 (1989), 128.

³⁵ See Jane Slaughter, *Women and the Italian Resistance, 1943-1945*, Denver, CO: Arden Press, 1997.

³⁶ Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat: a history of violence on the Eastern Front*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 3.

the start, had modelled herself on the example of the Russian partisans'.³⁷ According to Krylova:

The majority of women combatants were state mobilised, military trained, and belonged within the professional and technical elite of the Soviet armed forces. Serving as machine and mortar gunners, snipers, artillery fighters, combat pilots, and junior commanding officers in male, mixed, and female units³⁸

Soviet women volunteered as combatants due to state propaganda and state mobilisation and were accepted in the Red Army due to the adoption of new models of female behaviour and manpower shortages. The support of the Soviet state for partisan women fighters explains, in large part, the considerable numbers of armed women in the USSR compared to France. As already mentioned, French authorities did not support the concept of armed women. The fact that France was occupied also meant there was no official recruitment or training of combatants, male or female, during the war.

Jelena Batinić focuses on female partisans in Yugoslavia. She argues that the

mass participation of women in the communist-led Yugoslav Partisan resistance is one of the most remarkable phenomena of the Second World War. According to official figures, by the end of the war two million women had been involved in the Partisan movement. Some 100,000 served in the Partisan army – a degree of female military involvement unprecedented and unrepeated in the region.³⁹

The first women to become partisans were pre-war communist activists who were intellectually engaged and committed to communist ideology. After 1942, peasant women flocked to partisan units and became the majority of female partisans.⁴⁰ The change in demographic can be attributed to the nature of the conflict in Yugoslavia. Civil war was waged concurrently with war against the Nazis resulting in a climate of constant fear and violence. Batinić explains that, for those forced to flee their villages where the entire community had been targeted because of their ethnicity, 'the Partisans provided a

³⁷ Ingrid Strobl, *Partisanas: women in the armed resistance to fascism and German Occupation*, trans. Paul Sharkey, Edinburgh and Oakland, CA: AK press, 2008, 92.

³⁸ Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, 10.

³⁹ Jelena Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans: a history of World War II Resistance*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, 2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 133.

refuge from persecution and terror'.⁴¹ In Yugoslavia joining a partisan unit was a practical way for women to protect themselves and contribute to the cause of resistance.

The extent of women's inclusion as armed combatants was dependent on the character of the war in any given country. Slaughter argues that, in Italy, all-female combat units were usually attached to an existing male unit and that while 'appeals for volunteers emphasised the glorious and heroic nature of women's activities in these units, it is apparent that the formations had a pragmatic base.'⁴² They usually consisted of wives, mothers and sisters of partisans who were forced to flee their homes after reprisals or their pursuit by the fascist police. Women in Spain contributed to guerrilla warfare during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) due to the ad hoc nature of the combat. The experience of women in France differed from that of women in Yugoslavia, Italy and Spain because of the different struggles in each country. French female communist resisters most often had the opportunity to adopt a false identity and continue their resistance activities above ground rather than having to flee to the maquis. There was no constant armed fighting in France, unlike the civil wars in Spain or Yugoslavia. As a result, France was a much more stable environment to engage in resistance activities than elsewhere in Europe.

In some countries, such as France, it was deemed more useful by resistance networks for women to stay operating legally – living in their homes under a legal identity – because they were then able to provide units with more options. It also enabled women to acquire provisions and operate safe houses. In some cases, it was important for women to remain as isolated agents who could carry out dangerous missions without endangering others. For example, in some countries women were recruited to carry out executions of Nazi soldiers as a part of special operations. Strobl interviewed a Dutch woman who was involved in such operations in the Netherlands. H el ene Moszkiewiez was a Belgian Jewess who worked undercover at Gestapo headquarters in Brussels. As a part of this work she was trained to execute a Nazi officer.⁴³ Numbers and roles of female combatants differed greatly depending upon the nature of the war in any given country.

The French communists, as members of the Comintern, admired the combatant women in the Soviet Union. They were supportive of women in roles that disrupted

⁴¹ Ibid., 136.

⁴² Slaughter, *Women and the Italian Resistance*, 61.

⁴³ H el ene Moszkiewiez, *My War in the Gestapo*, 2d ed., Great Britain: BCA, 1995.

gender norms. As a result, some French women did have the opportunity to join armed units. Female combatants were generally young, with no family obligations, and were based in urban centres rather than rural maquis units.⁴⁴ There were a few communist armed groups in France that were either run by women, or solely comprised women. Schwartz identifies guerrilla groups in Paris and Marseilles that were led by women combatants. She also mentions all-female units that existed in Limoges and Lyon.⁴⁵ Maertens, in her entry for June 1944, commented that one militia unit contained 40 women.⁴⁶

The underground newspaper, *Les Louise de Bettignies*, was edited by the women partisans of the Nord and Pas-de-Calais districts. This newspaper was written by women who had taken up arms against the occupiers. In July 1944, the paper praised the FTP and called women to join the active militias in greater numbers: 'Multiply destructions, sabotages, recuperations of arms Show your desire for action by strewing flowers on the monuments to the dead and the tombs of martyrs of the Liberation of France'.⁴⁷ Women were called to organise, arm and train themselves to become patriotic militants who could fight alongside the Allies. The article read: 'Today the hour of the Liberation has sounded; women are ready to take their part in the combat FRENCH WOMEN, with courage and bravery, organise our patriotic militias on which depends the Liberation and future of France.'⁴⁸ The editors insisted that women could be armed combatants concurrently with more traditionally feminine resistance activities. For example, the newspaper still called women to become *marraines* of the FTP. This edition of *Les Louise de Bettignies* encouraged women to become combat fighters in the resistance but also continued to value women's work as *marraines*. The communist resistance movement enabled women to adopt the resistance role that suited their situation and the needs of their local units.

All women, even those officially accepted as combatants in great numbers, suffered difficulties as soldiers because of their gender. According to Batinić, women in the Yugoslav partisans had to overcome the traditional notions of gender roles. High-ranking men often 'underestimated, neglected or misused women fighters' despite

⁴⁴ Schwartz, 'Partisanes,' 129.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ MRN: Fonds de Famille Maertens. Cahier of Lucienne Maertens, 54.

⁴⁷ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/29. *Les Louise de Bettignies: organe des femmes partisans du NORD et du Pas de Calais*, July 1944, 1.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 2. Emphasis in the original.

official policy to include female combatants.⁴⁹ Even those who were respected as fighters still took on 'traditional chores: cooking, laundering, washing dishes, fetching water, sewing, mending and cleaning.'⁵⁰ Some peasant women voluntarily accepted these chores because they were accustomed to performing both heavy labour and domestic duties before the war. Krylova also laments the fact that the abilities of female combatants were underutilised in units of the Red Army. In the Soviet Union, however, young combatant women were so convinced of their legitimacy as soldiers that they often protested and were subsequently included in a more meaningful way. Krylova features the example of Zoia Medvedeva, a 19-year-old volunteer who trained as a machine gunner. When directed by a male senior officer to remain at headquarters as a medical orderly, she replied: 'I do not know how to attend to the wounds. I was trained to fire from the machine gun ... I am a woman machine gunner, comrade Lieutenant!'⁵¹ In France, lingering stereotypes that women could not be engaged in the waging of war resulted in armed women being given the status of 'honorary men', as Schwartz phrases it. She emphasises that 'the gender of the person did not redefine a "male" task; rather the gender tag of the task redefined the person.'⁵² Female combatants had no clearly defined place in warfare in Europe. Apart from the Soviet Union, women were rarely acknowledged either during or after the war as female soldiers.

Confined but active: enduring internment through joint support and action

Arrest, incarceration and deportation were a significant aspect of many women's stories of resistance. The following three sub-sections focus on women who were held as political prisoners. The discussion of female political prisoners is used in this chapter to emphasise two points. Firstly, women suffered consequences for their resistance activities that were often seemingly disproportionate to their classification as occupying 'support' roles. Secondly, women used their initiative and experience of communist tactics to survive incarceration.

The majority of women knew the potential cost of their commitment to resistance. As we saw in Chapter Three, the French police and Nazi soldiers made no secret of the consequences of contributing to resistance. Posters and news articles

⁴⁹ Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans*, 143.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 148-149.

⁵¹ Zoia Medvedeva quoted in Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, 9.

⁵² Schwartz, 'Partisaness,' 136-138.

publicised the immediate retaliation to be expected after resistance attacks or the discovery of a resistance network.⁵³ The sheer scale of arrests alone made it impossible for the Nazis to keep the consequences of resistance secret. In Chapter Four, we read reports in women's underground newspapers of the arrest, deportation and execution of female, as well as male, resisters. Caroline Moorehead writes that solidarity between women internees was 'forged at least in part by the fact that most of the women had known and recognised the risks they had been running in the Resistance'.⁵⁴ She quotes Madeleine Dissoubray, a resister who was arrested and incarcerated at Romainville before she was deported to Birkenau: 'We weren't victims ... It wasn't like the Jews or the gypsies. We saw the Germans' posters, we read about the penalties, we heard about torture. We knew what we were doing. It was our choice, and this gave us a strong emotional link.'⁵⁵ The fear of the consequences did not seem to deter communist women.

The women featured in this chapter spent time in La Santé prison, the Fort de Romainville, the Prison de la Petite Roquette – all in France – and the Auschwitz-Birkenau and Ravensbrück camps in present day Poland and Germany, respectively. The problems faced by internees ranged from the lack of bedding, meagre rations and solitary confinement, to torture, seeing male family members tortured or executed, forced labour and general maltreatment. Situated in the 14th *arrondissement* in Paris, the Prison de La Santé was opened in the 1860s. During the war, women prisoners usually only spent some months in La Santé before being moved to another more permanent holding facility. The Fort de Romainville was located on the outskirts of Paris, and by June 1942 it was the main site for holding hostages arrested in the Paris area. Over the course of the occupation almost 4,000 women (7,000 people in total including men) spent time in Romainville. Eight out of ten of these prisoners were deported, while 200 were shot.⁵⁶ A German officer, Sonderführer Trappe, was the camp commandant. For those women who transferred from La Santé, many after enduring months of isolation, the move to Romainville was nevertheless refreshing because there was a small courtyard and, most importantly, they shared cells with other inmates. Due to overcrowding and the ruthless

⁵³ The infamous L'Affiche Rouge poster, which pictured members of the Manouchian unit of the FTP-MOI, is one example. Anti-communist posters were regularly produced by Vichy and collaborationists in Paris.

⁵⁴ Moorehead, *A Train in Winter*, 161.

⁵⁵ Madeleine Dissoubray quoted in Moorehead, *ibid.*

⁵⁶ Thomas Fontaine, 'Le fort de Romainville, un camp allemand en France (1940-1944),' December 2007, 2, www.fondationresistance.org/documents/dossier_them/Doc00049.pdf (accessed 14 October 2017). See also: Thomas Fontaine, *Les Oubliés de Romainville: un camp allemand en France, 1940-1944*, Paris: Tallandier, 2005.

nature of the Nazi and Vichy regimes, conditions in the prisons and camps were demoralising. It became essential for female detainees to develop ways of coping with the deprivation, fear and brutality to which they were exposed. Initiated by the communists, women internees became closer through their efforts to support each other and survive their imprisonment.

In order to have a chance at survival when surrounded by death, deprivation, illness and inhumane enemies, it became essential to develop coping mechanisms. There is a sizeable literature on the various coping mechanisms that were employed by internees across Europe to help them survive Nazi camps and prisons. Political ideology, religious faith, humour, music, all played a part for different internees.⁵⁷ The term 'spiritual resistance' has often been applied to those whose only recourse was to retain their identity in dehumanising circumstances, escape with reading or writing or retain their connection to their religion. Such spiritual resistance was used not only as coping mechanisms but also as a way to defy one's persecutors. Agnès Humbert, arrested as a member of the Musée de l'Homme resistance group, wrote of the importance of humour to help her pass otherwise monotonous days in prison. She noted in her memoir that during the intense cold of winter 'my only source of warmth is a small stock of private jokes, the ultimate in self-indulgence, for my own pleasure and mine alone'.⁵⁸ She included an account of one conversation with a female prison guard. This particular guard returned with her pencil and notebook every week to demand if prisoners were Jewish. When the guard returned for the third week in a row, Humbert quipped '[a]fter my third denial I add: "Honestly, Madame, I simply haven't had the time to convert to Judaism since last week."' ⁵⁹ Unsurprisingly, the guard did not smile but simply turned and walked away. The purpose of the humour was for Humbert's own benefit. It was a way to remain

⁵⁷ See: Ernst Simon, 'Jewish Adult Education in Nazi Germany as Spiritual Resistance,' *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, 1 (1956): 68-104; Irving Halperin, 'Spiritual Resistance in Holocaust Literature,' *Yad Vashem Studies*, 7 (1968): 75-82; Stephen Powitz, 'Musical Life in the Warsaw Ghetto,' *Journal of Jewish Music and Liturgy*, 4: 4 (1981-2): 2-10; *We Are Here: songs of the Holocaust*, compiled by Eleanor Mlotek and Malke Gottlieb, New York: The Educational Department of the Workmen's Circle, 1983; Larissa Tiedens, 'Optimism and Revolt of the Oppressed: a comparison of two Polish Jewish ghettos of World War II,' *Political Psychology*, 18: 1 (1997): 45-69; Aaron Kramer, 'Creative Defiance in a Death-Camp,' *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 38: 1 (1998): 12-24; Eliyana Adler, 'No Raisins, No Almonds: singing as spiritual resistance to the Holocaust,' *Shofar*, 24: 4 (2006): 50-66; Karen Horn, "'Stalag Happy": South African prisoners of war during World War II (1939-1945) and their experience and use of humour,' *South African Historical Journal*, 63: 4 (December, 2011): 537-552.

⁵⁸ Humbert, *Résistance*, 89.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

amused, to keep her mental strength, to retain some control over her situation, and to defy her captors.

Contact with other inmates or family outside the prison was enormously important to the morale of an inmate. Despite the difficult conditions at Romainville, it was far from the bleakest of Paris prisons. Thomas Fontaine writes about prisoners at Romainville and the relative freedom they felt there. There were trees and grass where they were allowed to stroll for an hour each day. Fontaine describes the fort as a 'haven, an oasis, almost paradise: that is how detention in the fort at Romainville was often evoked and compared with previous stays in prison'.⁶⁰ Internees could wear and wash their own clothes. Here, the women were given slightly more nourishing rations than in La Santé and they were able to receive parcels from family members twice a week. The dormitories were better-lit with either eight or 24 bunks. It is this last point that is perhaps most important. Compared to La Santé, where many of the communist internees were kept for weeks in isolation, Romainville was preferable. Contact with other comrades was crucial for coping with prison life. Humbert commented on the inability to talk with fellow inmates: 'Silence reigns in the cells at La Santé, as communication among ourselves is practically impossible here. Sometimes we manage to send a few messages via the 'trusties' or exchange a few hasty remarks in the yard, but conversation is now out of the question.'⁶¹ Vaillant-Couturier commented on her joy at being reunited with others and able to talk after her isolation at La Santé.⁶² Female communist inmates at Romainville, la Petite Roquette and Birkenau benefitted to an enormous extent from the physical and moral support of their fellow internees.

Perhaps as part of the same 'political reflex' that had prompted the communists to rebuild the PCF in 1939, communist internees continued their commitment to the cause of resistance. Communists drew strength from each other and the survival of their party. Moorehead writes that new internees found the communist women intimidating. Most often the communists were better educated, politically committed and had an 'inventive and unflagging determination' that the non-communists found daunting.⁶³ The communists 'remained highly conscious of the cause for which they had fought' during their incarceration. Communist women remained politically active in prison, organising

⁶⁰ Thomas Fontaine quoted in Durand, *Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier*, 178.

⁶¹ Humbert, *Résistance*, 86.

⁶² Durand, *Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier*, 179.

⁶³ Moorehead, *A Train in Winter*, 160.

the other internees to protest and keep busy. The women prisoners were given one meal of soup a day that became increasingly thin and insubstantial and in which, more than once, the women found a dead mouse. Vaillant-Couturier recounted how, in Romainville, the 46 women in their section pooled the meat, cheese, butter, cooked vegetables and confectionery that they received either from family members or the Red Cross. This enabled them to provide a morning soup cooked on their own stove in addition to their midday meal provided by prison management.⁶⁴ The women, nevertheless, continued to suffer from hunger and weakness.

Even when incarcerated, these women were determined and motivated to retain some power over their situation and not surrender. Casanova became the leader at Romainville. One example of her initiative involved protesting their still-insufficient ration. Casanova organised for the women in dormitories with windows facing the street to yell simultaneously 'I am hungry' over and over again. The women internees were able to get the attention of people walking by, some of whom even stopped to listen. While Casanova and Germaine Pican, who were identified as the instigators of this action, spent over a week with no food in the punishment cells, commandant Trappe agreed, as requested, to taste their ration. As a result, the soup became a little more substantial. Pican later explained that this protest 'taught us an important lesson ... It made us understand that we were not completely powerless.'⁶⁵ They continued to resist the authority of both the Vichy and Nazi regimes even when they were at their most vulnerable.

By remaining active, the women improved their physical wellbeing and their emotional wellbeing. On the advice of Maï Politzer, a communist activist who had also been a midwife, the women internees began to do gymnastics and have cold showers in the morning to strengthen and prepare their bodies for whatever hardships were ahead of them. Families sent wool, old clothes and sewing materials which allowed the women to unpick and re-stitch warm clothes for themselves. The women shared books and organised lessons in Italian and political history. They began staging theatrical afternoons on Sundays for which they prepared comedy routines, learnt plays and sang. Dubbed *après-midis artistiques*, these afternoons also became popular with the guards and the

⁶⁴ Ibid., 183.

⁶⁵ Germaine Pican quoted in Moorehead, *ibid.*, 154.

male internees who watched from the other side of the fence in the courtyard.⁶⁶ Miriam Intrator writes of the importance of books and reading in the Theresienstadt ghetto in German-occupied Czechoslovakia. She emphasises that activities such as reading and sharing books, knowledge and ideas 'gave many increased strength and hope by providing them with ways of maintaining a crucial connection with the lives they had known before the terror began'.⁶⁷ On the initiative of Casanova and Vaillant-Couturier, the women in Romainville began to write a daily news bulletin titled *Le Patriote de Romainville*. News articles consisted of information gathered from inmates or from overhearing the guards of the prison (Vaillant-Couturier could speak German). Political analysis, news of the war and demands for better conditions for internees filled the handwritten leaflet that was duplicated enough times that each room had a copy.⁶⁸ All these activities were essential for maintaining the morale of the inmates.

The common and clear foundation of the communists' commitment to resistance did differentiate communist internees from non-communist internees. In her book that examines German communists throughout the twentieth century, Catherine Epstein writes of the importance of solidarity among male communists in prisons and concentration camps. She cites the example of Eric Honecker, a German communist who spent a decade in Nazi prisons and became leader in East Germany from 1971-1989. Honecker described the importance of solidarity with regard to the survival of communist inmates. He recounted that it was the underground KPD that

organised the decisive resistance, the solidarity, and the unity of the political inmates. In the beginning I was in strict solitary confinement, but soon after my arrival I noticed this solidarity. Secretly I was slipped a piece of bread, or I was whispered some information about the international situation, about the situation inside Germany, or about events that had occurred in the jail. That gave me strength and made it easier to endure solitary confinement. But I was especially strengthened by knowing that the party continued to live and fight behind jail walls.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Moorehead, *ibid.*, 163.

⁶⁷ Miriam Intrator, 'The Theresienstadt Ghetto Central Library, Books and Reading: intellectual resistance and escape during the Holocaust,' *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, 50: 1 (2005), 3.

⁶⁸ Durand, *Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier*, 182-183.

⁶⁹ Eric Honecker quoted in Catherine Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries: German communists and their century*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003, 80.

A conviction, political or not, to the cause for which they were fighting benefited a prisoner's wellbeing. Epstein notes that numerous authors have 'suggested that strong political convictions helped political prisoners to survive the camps.'⁷⁰ A belief that theirs was the right cause, the cause that would emerge victorious from the war, sustained many prisoners and gave others a comfort that they had died for a worthy cause. Epstein quotes Jean Améry, a famous post-war essayist and an Austrian survivor of Auschwitz, who recounted that a prisoner's political belief was 'an invaluable help' when faced with the brutality of the camps. Améry noted that those committed to a political ideology 'survived better or died more dignified deaths' than those prisoners who were not.⁷¹ A firm belief in the cause for which an individual risked their life and sacrificed their freedom gave them strength during their captivity. Techniques developed for coping with the various forms of incarceration during the war greatly affected the survival of identifiable groups. Communism gave its adherents hope, community and purpose. What enabled these women to survive prison was their comradeship, strongly held political convictions, their determination and their idealism.

La Patriote Enchaînée: communist resistance and survival in a women's prison

The clandestine news sheets produced by women in prisons, such as *La Patriote Enchaînée* and *Le Patriote de Romainville*, provide examples of how important women's group activities were to the internees. Not only are the newspapers an example of communist women's initiative to continue resistance under extremely difficult circumstances, but they also illustrate how important it was for maintaining morale to build a community amongst internees. The production of an underground newspaper allowed resisters to deny the legitimacy of the occupiers and the Vichy regime. To continue to produce clandestine resistance material whilst in prison denied the police the victory of an arrest resulting in the cessation of an internee's resistance activities.

A discussion of the content of *La Patriote Enchaînée* gives an insight into the experiences and resistance of women in the Prison de la Petite Roquette. It was established as a women's prison in the late 1920s and remained as such until it was

⁷⁰ Ibid., 82.

⁷¹ Ibid.

permanently closed in the 1970s.⁷² A park now occupies the site where the prison once stood. All that remains of the prison are the gate posts with a cement plaque at eye level that reads: 'From the call of General de Gaulle 18 June 1940 to the liberation of Paris 25 August 1944 4,000 female resisters were imprisoned in this location for fighting against the occupier. They contributed to the Liberation of France'.⁷³ The communist women internees of la Petite Roquette, like those in the Fort de Romainville, wrote an underground paper for themselves full of news and information. Titled *La Patriote Enchaînée*, monthly editions dating from July 1943 through to June 1944 survived the war and are in the MRN archives. Each edition comprises four pages of cramped handwriting. The writing is neat and small with stylised article headings and drawings, including one of the prison for the header on the front page. All nine editions contain an article on life in the prison and on events related to the war. The remaining articles vary between the topics of resistance, communist history, the PCF, international communism or women in history.

The paper created by the communist internees of la Petite Roquette is useful to understand the lives of women after their arrest and how they remained committed to the cause of resistance. Also of interest, in comparison to other women's underground newspapers mentioned in this thesis, is the fact that *La Patriote Enchaînée* was written by and for communist women. As a result, many of the articles are either communist propaganda, detail the history of communism or describe the activities of the communist resistance. Due to the division of content of the articles, my discussion of *La Patriote Enchaînée* is split into three themes: life in the 'fortress of fascism'; women and resistance; and the past and present ideal of communism. A separate set of articles that reported developments in the war were also included in a few editions. Though not the feature of the discussion of this chapter, the inclusion of a perspective on the situation of the war in the women's underground press illustrates how women saw their resistance campaign connected to the wider battle against fascism. The structure and composition of the paper indicate the preoccupations of the women writing and reading the paper.

⁷² La Grande Roquette prison was built in 1830; in 1836 a second prison was built across the road and became La Petite Roquette. La Grande Roquette was closed in 1899, while the Petite Roquette was only closed in 1974.

⁷³ 11th *arrondissement*, rue de la Roquette.

(i) *Life in the 'fortress of fascism'*

As we saw earlier in this chapter, women most often knew the consequences of their actions, so arrest, incarceration or deportation did not stop their commitment to resistance. *La Patriote Enchaînée* provided communist internees with the chance to publicise their ideology, encourage fellow inmates and present an alternative to accepting the authority of the state. Life in prison differed little from one day to the next. Fellow prisoners gave colour to the lives of all internees. Deprivation was, obviously, another major element of life in prison. Every edition of *La Patriote Enchaînée* contained an article titled 'La Vie à la Roquette', life in la Roquette. These articles included information on the demographic of the prisoners, the lessons they gave each other, reports on rationing and actions undertaken to improve life inside the prison.

A number of articles indicated that the female communist internees knew the importance of raising morale. Multiple articles, for example, illustrate the fact that communist resisters were strengthened by their own political convictions. In the November 1943 edition, the 'life in prison' article began with the observation that autumn was upon them: 'But what is the grey weather compared to the sun which glows in our hearts?'⁷⁴ Faith in the virtue of communism allowed communist internees to hope and fight for the future despite the bleakness of their situation. The article continued: 'What does it matter if it is cold? ... Our hope is stronger than ever, soon days full of light will open up before us and nothing can dampen our spirits.'⁷⁵ In the December 1943 edition, the editors commented that winter had brought continuous rain. But, once again, it was noted that the women's spirits remained high. One of the eldest internees had been chosen to present a talk on literature in order to familiarise the internees with French writers and poets. The article declared that '[i]n this way are spent the hours of spare time on Sunday and Mr Blues does not grab hold despite the grey and overcast sky'.⁷⁶

Lessons organised by the women internees were a means to build community whilst keeping mentally active. The detainees organised French, English, Spanish, German, shorthand, geography, history and political lessons. The women in one *atelier* also gave instruction in nursing. The editors, who believed such skills would be useful in

⁷⁴ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*: édité par les femmes communistes de la Roquette, 1 November 1943, 3.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33, *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 December 1943, 2.

times to come, congratulated the women involved and their initiative. All the 'brave teachers' were praised for sacrificing their recreation time to prepare the lessons. In the November 1943 edition, the editors wrote that the progress of the lessons was compelling: 'We will leave better armed for the fight that we will take up after our internment. Our months ... will have been employed to the maximum so that each could learn what she did not know.'⁷⁷ Some who came into the prison illiterate, learnt to read and write.

For the communists, lessons were a part of keeping up the fight against fascism. As far as communists were concerned, if resisters became inactive, docile prisoners, it was a victory for the Vichy and Nazi regimes. The 'life in prison' article written in the April 1944 edition of *La Patriote Enchaînée* commented on the changing attitude of the inmates towards lessons. The editors were concerned that the health and first aid lessons were not attended often enough. They reproved their readers: 'Comrades! In the hour when combat enters the decisive phase, we must be able to show our efforts for this education in particular which will permit us to play a more active part in the liberating fight of tomorrow.'⁷⁸ The same April edition commented that there was a feeling of sloppiness in their section that was not tolerable. The editors wrote that '[h]ere more than anywhere we must show ourselves to be disciplined communists.'⁷⁹ If internees gave up the fight or lost sight of their communist commitment, the enemy and their collaborators would have succeeded in removing them from the resistance struggle. In June 1944, the editors continued to try to encourage the prisoners to stay committed to their lessons: 'Persevere! do not squander our time in la Roquette. Always learn more!'⁸⁰ Over the course of May, the internees had heard a number of political lectures titled: 'Economic Paris', 'The bourgeois revolution in England', 'Joan of Arc', 'The women's movement in France', 'Period of 1830 to 1848' and 'The Commune of Paris'.⁸¹ Lessons gave detainees the opportunity to exercise their minds, unite detainees in a common activity, increase morale, and continue to resist.

Deprivation was a defining characteristic of life in prison. Once again, the communist internees refused to accept their situation and instead, continually

⁷⁷ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 November 1943, 3.

⁷⁸ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 April 1944, 4.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 June 1944, 4. Emphasis in the original.

⁸¹ Ibid.

campaigned to improve their provisioning. In la Petite Roquette the women staged a quasi-demonstration and managed to ensure that the vegetables in their soup would be cooked properly, and all the torn and filthy mattresses be replaced. In the October 1943 issue of *La Patriote Enchaînée*, the editors praised the women in different sections of the prison for their protest activities. The first group were commended for spontaneously breaking into 'The Marseillaise' when a female guard attempted to disrupt some internees. The second group were congratulated for taking the lead and protesting over the soup.⁸² In November 1943, the 'life in prison' article included a list of all the demands that had been put forward by the internees. They wanted 'paper and envelopes to be sold in the canteen, the return of textile ration cards to the families of detainees, a supplementary blanket each, the reinstatement of a sugar ration for every internee and the opening of a bathroom'.⁸³

Some protests were successful while others were not. The importance of any of these actions, however, was the act of protest itself. One action that was successful was similar to that instigated by Casanova at Romainville whereby the internees improved the quality of their soup ration. In December 1943, the editors stated that the internees had made so much noise with one of their demonstrations that it had been heard on the street outside the prison. As a result, inspectors from the Penitentiary Administration and the government had visited the prison. Both had agreed that, in the future, a political detainee could be present in order to guarantee that the correct weight of vegetables was used for their rations.⁸⁴ Three months later, in March 1944, *La Patriote Enchaînée* reported another planned visit of an inspector from the Penitentiary Administration. The prisoners had put together a list of their demands to hand over to the inspector.⁸⁵ It is easy to see the parallels between preparing appeals to pass to the prison administration, and the petitions women prepared to present to local mayors and officials. Protests and demonstrations were a characteristic of female resistance.

Activities that encouraged solidarity amongst the women were mentioned regularly in *La Patriote Enchaînée*. The communist women internees commemorated the Revolution of October by wearing red stars and explaining the fight of the Soviet people for their liberation to the other detainees. In November 1943, a minute of silence was

⁸² MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 October 1943, 4.

⁸³ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 November 1943, 3.

⁸⁴ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 December 1943, 3.

⁸⁵ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 March 1944, 2.

observed for 50 hostages and the 22-year-old son of one of the internees who had all been 'executed by the *hitlériens*.'⁸⁶ The vast majority of women in the prison celebrated 11 November, reportedly with 99 percent wearing the national colours and all observing a minute of silence at eleven o'clock. Together they sang seven verses of 'The Marseillaise'.⁸⁷

Another means of encouraging solidarity and a continued commitment to resistance was to tie those inside the prison with resisters still at large. While France remained in turmoil, the editors reminded readers, it was important not to give up the fight. The edition written for February 1944 included a short paragraph reminding the women of the oath they had all made a month previously, on 1 January. Readers were told that '[w]e are all here on an equal standing, for the same goal: the independence of our country and the construction of a new society. ... Do not forget that as a gesture of unity, 1 January last, we all made a pledge to avenge those who fall each day under blows of the enemy for the triumph of our just cause.'⁸⁸ In the June 1944 edition, the celebrations of 1 May were recounted. In the afternoon, women gathered in the courtyard where a tricolour flag was hung behind them. They performed a spoken chorus of the call of the 'heroes, men and women, victims of German and French assassinations' that ended with a performance of 'The Marseillaise' which was 'profoundly moving'.⁸⁹ From these glimpses into life in la Petite Roquette, it is clear that female communist internees continued to use their initiative to create opportunities for resistance.

ii) Women and resistance

After women were incarcerated they did not abandon the ideals for which they had been arrested. Female communist internees maintained connections with resisters who remained operating outside of prison. The July 1943 edition of *La Patriote Enchaînée* described how prisoners sewed, embroidered or knitted 'some marvellous things inside this sad Roquette'.⁹⁰ Most of their handiwork, save the re-sewn old garments used to clothe themselves, provided material support that benefited the resistance movement. In February 1944 the editors of the news sheet were happy that 'in addition to our monthly

⁸⁶ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 November 1943, 3.

⁸⁷ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 December 1943, 2.

⁸⁸ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 February 1944, 3.

⁸⁹ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 June 1944, 4.

⁹⁰ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 July 1943, 3.

parcel [from the Red Cross], we have received 29 complete outfits, 96 balls of wool'.⁹¹ Such a quantity of wool meant that the women internees would be able to knit and then sell a number of garments, the proceeds of which would go to helping various families. Maertens noted in her journal entry of June 1944 that objects, including a box, which had been made by women in la Petite Roquette had been sold for 5000 frs.⁹² Through this work, women in la Petite Roquette remained connected to resistance networks in a tangible way. Internees were able to retain their resistance mentality because they were still contributing to the functioning of a network.

While prisoners felt useful and connected, either to each other or life outside the prison, it was easier to stay motivated. In June 1944, the women mentioned the constant support of the Red Cross. On this occasion they had received espadrilles, lingerie, clothes, wool, 42 slips, one shirt, 43 pairs of culottes, five bras and 82 metres of material. Quakers also donated two trousseaus for two young girls from needy families.⁹³ Even in *La Patriote Enchaînée*, women internees were called on to become devoted *marraines* for the valiant FTP. Due to the contacts of the communist resistance movement, it was still possible for female detainees to aid the FTP. The editors wrote that one of the women's small boxes was sold for 500 francs while the badges they made sold for 200 to 300 francs. The clothing, shoes, hats and slippers they donated sold for around 25 francs. Retaining a distinct connection to the communist resistance movement was invaluable to these women.

The role political prisoners had to play in the resistance remained important to them behind prison walls. Internees were surrounded by ideological enemies in the form of the prison staff. Discretion was a focus of the evocative 'life in prison' article in February 1944: 'we are here in the fortress of fascism. The walls have ears'.⁹⁴ The article emphasised that all those working in the prison could be agents of the enemy. The editors wrote that the visiting 'nuns, the guards, even the direction, under their benevolent appearance are all enemies.'⁹⁵ The front page of the July 1943 edition of *La Patriote Enchaînée* features an illustration of a liberating avenging angel with her sword held out before her. She is depicted as a backdrop to the text of the article titled '14 July 1789! The

⁹¹ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 February 1944.

⁹² MRN: Fonds de Famille Maertens. Cahier of Lucienne Maertens, 48.

⁹³ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 June 1944, 4.

⁹⁴ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 February 1944, 2.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

people of Paris weary of injustices and misery seize the Bastille! 14 July 1943! Battle of the French people for their liberation!’⁹⁶ The article detailed the struggles of the people in 1789 that led to their successful joint uprising (the *levée en masse* during the French Revolution) and drew parallels with the situation of France and its people under occupation. Thus, even from within the prison, women called for resistance as French patriots who longed for the liberation of their country.

Strength through unity was a theme underpinning all editions of the underground press. This is no less true for *La Patriote Enchaînée*. In the October 1943 edition, special mention was made of female communist resisters who had previously been deported. In a box straddling the fold of two pages we read: ‘We will not leave Marie-Claude VAILLANT-COUTURIER and her suffering sisters to endure the same end as DANIELLE CASANOVA who we promised we would avenge!’⁹⁷ For the communist internees, the martyred women were evidence of the continued need to remain united or risk defeat. An article on the front page of the November 1943 edition was titled simply: ‘Unite! Unite! Unite!’ It was a long article that described the significance of unity at different moments of historical importance. The examples mentioned were: 1914 at the outbreak of war, 1920 when the PCF was first formed, 1934 when faced with the fascist threat, during the years of the Popular Front and, lastly, during the occupation. ‘With its unity and its discipline,’ the editors wrote, ‘our Party leads the people of our country to victory. Without unity our Party will not be able to triumph. Unite! Unite! Unite!’⁹⁸

When in prison, female internees remained committed to resistance because of their opposition to fascism and their awareness of the importance of their contribution to resistance activities. The March 1944 edition featured an article that mentioned the need for women to be knowledgeable and involved in matters of political importance: ‘women should have the right, and they have the need, to participate in all aspects of life in their country.’⁹⁹ The article continued with a description of historical struggles and female role models, such as Jeanne d’Arc, that led to the development of a tradition of patriotic French female fighters. The article ended with a general call to resistance: ‘WOMEN TO COMBAT! For a free, strong, happy and independent France! For the liberation and

⁹⁶ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 July 1943, 1.

⁹⁷ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 October 1943, 2-3. Emphasis in the original.

⁹⁸ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 November 1943, 1. Emphasis in the original.

⁹⁹ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 March 1944, 1.

emancipation of the people!’¹⁰⁰ Communist women were self-aware and committed to resistance. An article in the June 1944 edition again focused on the power of unity throughout French history with special reference to the Popular Front era. The UFF received a special mention in the article: ‘Women are also in the fight. All the patriotic women ... formed a vast gathering: the Union des Femmes Françaises which plays a very important role in the activities of the FN.’¹⁰¹ The communist internees recognised their importance within the resistance as well as the danger they posed to their arresting authorities. Communists could not remain immobile while the Vichy and Nazi regimes continued to wreak havoc in France.

iii) The past and present lessons of communism

The communist women internees in la Petite Roquette demonstrated a detailed knowledge of communist history, ideology and the goals of the communist resistance. The virtues of communism were espoused openly in *La Patriote Enchaînée*. The articles concerned with history reveal that the women were politically educated and motivated prior to being arrested. The edition of July 1943 noted that there were 138 political prisoners surrounded by 750 women arrested under common law.¹⁰² The editors of the paper wrote that it was imperative to educate the large number of prisoners and elucidate how they were all victims of fascism. For the communist women, it was vital to remain strong and active as a model the other prisoners could follow: ‘Our solidarity, our union are examples for them’.¹⁰³

Identification of potential enemies was a central aspect of communist activism. During the years of the occupation, identifying enemies was a matter of survival. On numerous occasions, certain female guards were named as anti-communists. In *La Patriote Enchaînée* of December 1943, one of the front-page articles discussed the powerful, and dangerous, enemy of the communists: the bourgeoisie. The article suggested that the resources of the bourgeoisie included the police. The editors warned caution against enemy spies placed within the party and police traitors who had already betrayed members who were subsequently killed. At the end of the article advice was given to the women internees specifically: ‘Inside this Bastille we must respect and also

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 4.

¹⁰¹ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 June 1944, 2.

¹⁰² MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 July 1943, 3.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

make respected the discipline of our party.¹⁰⁴ The women were warned not to listen to lies designed to create divisions, but instead to ‘serve our Party with all our force as disciplined communists’.¹⁰⁵ The fact that the women internees chose to write a paper full of communist propaganda and advice on communist discipline is significant because it illustrates their considerable commitment and knowledge of communist history and party directions. After incarceration the women were able to use their training and initiative as communist activists.

Political knowledge was especially important to the communist internees in la Petite Roquette. They wanted to remain informed and continue their education as a way to arm themselves for the ongoing fight against fascism. In December 1943, the communist internees wrote that it was more important ‘than ever to continue our education in order to serve our Party better at the time of our liberation’.¹⁰⁶ In February 1943, the value of expanding their political understanding was mentioned. The editors wrote that all women should have a political education. They argued: ‘Sometimes people object “I know it already”; that is false! One never possesses enough of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine. It is a must, for us, to profit from our time spent here to understand better the fight made by our brothers and the history of our Party.’¹⁰⁷ *La Patriote Enchaînée* was written by and for communist internees who were aware of the importance of a political education. The women in sections four and five even wrote out examples of ‘tracts, posters, reports, stickers, lists of demands etc. ... to train us for the tasks which will fall to us on our release.’¹⁰⁸ Knowledge of why the PCF resisted and how they could resist gave communist prisoners clarity and confidence.

The choice of the PCF to resist was grounded in the political agenda of the party and its mentor, the Comintern. The communist internees were committed to resistance and to the PCF. As a result, *La Patriote Enchaînée* often featured articles that provided lessons for French patriots using the model of the Soviet Union. For example, the battle of the Soviet people against Hitler’s forces was referred to in the July 1943 edition. Despite the scale and ferocity of Hitler’s assault, ‘an entire people rose up to respond to the

¹⁰⁴ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 December 1943, 4.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰⁷ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 February 1944, 2.

¹⁰⁸ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 November 1943, 3. Ellipses in the original.

attacks of the invader.¹⁰⁹ The aim was to inspire the female internees to feel solidarity with the people of the Soviet Union who were also fighting for their freedom. The front page of the October 1943 edition was devoted to an article praising the success of the Red Army. In the article, the importance of unity in the fight for liberation was again mentioned. Unity of all the resistance networks across Europe was argued to be essential for victory against Hitler: the PCF's 'adhesion to the National Committee of the Resistance shows once more its desire for union.'¹¹⁰ Communism was praised and defended as a shining light for the political future of a united France.

The written word of the internees was used to give purpose to the monotony of prison life, to sustain the prisoners who had little else that was nourishing on which to survive and to deny any victory for the occupiers and collaborators. Activities inside the prison were also used to prepare the internees for life outside prison, both as resisters and as citizens. An analysis of *La Patriote Enchaînée* illustrates how French communist women resisters continued their struggle after incarceration.

The unfathomable miracle: surviving deportation as a political prisoner

Arrest and deportation are an essential part of the story of female communist resistance. As we learnt in Chapter Three, women were rarely executed. Instead, they were deported to Germany, kept in prisons and used for forced labour. An exception to this general rule was a single all-female convoy of political prisoners that was sent from France to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Their experiences highlight once again the remarkable ability of the women prisoners to take stock of their situation and recommit to resistance. Whilst imprisoned, communist women continued to develop resistance strategies that suited their changed circumstance. After arrest, torture and deprivation, one obvious show of resistance was survival. For the convoy of French women sent to Birkenau, survival was the last recourse of resistance. As more and more of their convoy succumbed to the harsh conditions, it became increasingly important to the group as a whole that at least one woman survive to recount their experiences. Of the 230 women on the convoy of 24 January 1943, 49 returned to France. Charlotte Delbo (1913-1985), a communist deportee

¹⁰⁹ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 July 1943, 2-3.

¹¹⁰ MRN: 85AJ 1/1/33. *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 October 1943, 1.

and one of the survivors, acknowledged that '[f]or all of us, this is still a miracle we cannot fathom.'¹¹¹

Just over half of the convoy, 119 out of the 230 women, were communists. Many of them had been imprisoned together in France and had already developed coping techniques based around mutual support and commitment to resistance. Soon the deportees had created a network based on their common identity as French female political prisoners that helped them to survive the horrors they experienced at Birkenau. Delbo wrote a collective biography of the women who comprised the convoy. She wrote that they were not the only French women in the camp, but they were the only political deportees. The other French women at Birkenau were Jews. Delbo emphasised that the 'conditions for Jews and non-Jews were nearly the same. Nearly. But that slight difference led to a higher mortality rate among the Jews.'¹¹² Jewish women normally only met the day before they were deported. At Birkenau they were housed in blocks that were a 'mixture of Jews from different countries without a common language or much basis for friendship and mutual aid'.¹¹³ For Delbo, these conditions explain, in part, the higher death rate of Jewish deportees as opposed to her own convoy. Thomas Rahe notes the importance of sharing a mother tongue in the ability of Jewish internees in Bergen-Belsen to practice religion in the camp which provided them with a method of spiritual resistance.¹¹⁴

The time the women spent together in French prisons before deportation, and their common language, allowed them to establish friendships and develop a closeness that helped them survive Birkenau. Delbo wrote:

If our convoy had so many survivors – and for Birkenau in 1943, 57 out of 230 after six months was exceptional, unique in the history of the camp – this was because we already knew each other ... and had formed small, tightly knit units within a large homogenous group, helping each other in all sorts of ways, often quote small: holding each other's arms while walking, rubbing each other's backs during roll call; and, of course, we could talk to each other. Speech was self-defence, comfort, hope. By talking about who we were before, about our lives, we perpetuated the

¹¹¹ Charlotte Delbo, *Convoy to Auschwitz: women of the French Resistance*, trans. Carol Cosman, Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1997, 13.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Thomas Rahe, 'Jewish Religious Life in the Concentration Camp Bergen-Belsen,' *Journal of Holocaust Education*, 5: 2/3 (1996): 85-121.

time before, we maintained our reality. Each of the survivors knows that without the others, she would not have returned.¹¹⁵

The women deportees were able to work together to protect those in their barracks who were most at risk. Delbo, and the other female survivors, believed that it was their solidarity that enabled any of them to survive.

Another survival strategy used by communist prisoners in camps was their ability to gain positions as Kapos, the German word for prisoner functionaries. Despite their bad reputation for their role in helping to maintain the Nazi camp system, Kapos had the opportunity to transfer their fellow comrades in order to protect them from the harshest conditions of the camp. They were able to do this because they were assigned with supervisory or administrative roles. Epstein discusses the value of having a German Communist Party (KPD) member placed in Kapo positions within a men's camp. For example, they could transfer prisoners to different, less dangerous, work details, access supplementary food and medical supplies, remove a comrade's name from transport or medical-experimentation lists, or could use their unique position to encourage continued resistance.¹¹⁶ The problem with making the choice to save a comrade, emphasises Epstein, is that a non-communist suffered in their place. She concedes that '[r]egardless of the moral price of taking on Kapo positions, KPD networks were tremendously successful in preserving the lives of party members: German communists had significantly higher survival rates than other camp prisoners'.¹¹⁷

Communist solidarity and initiative worked to the advantage of communist deportees. When the women arrived in the camp, Casanova was recognised by the German communists. Delbo wrote that after Casanova was assigned as a dentist of the camp, she was able to use her contact with Kapos of various commandos to have other convoy members reassigned to lighter work details and pass on supplementary food, even medical or clothing items. Delbo recounted that Casanova managed to get Mai Politzer admitted as a physician, a dozen women as nurses and two women as seamstresses.¹¹⁸ As a dentist, Casanova worked in the medical huts and had access to medicines which allowed her to pass various vaccines and medications to women in the camp. Casanova herself contracted typhus and, after a few weeks of illness, died on 9

¹¹⁵ Delbo, *Convoy to Auschwitz*, 9.

¹¹⁶ Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, 74.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹¹⁸ Delbo, *Convoy to Auschwitz*, 44.

May 1943. Epstein writes that male communists followed the same tactics: 'comrades provided each other with extra food rations, easier work assignments, longer stays in camp sick bays, and spiritual support'.¹¹⁹ Communists never forgot that they were a part of a large network that relied on individual members to work together for the success of the movement.

The structure of the French communist resistance and the development of communist tactics encouraged comradeship and mutual aid between activists who were imprisoned. Epstein quotes the observations of two German communists, both of whom became government ministers in East Germany after the war. When Karl Schirdewan arrived in Sachsenhausen in 1939, he was greeted by a fellow communist who was in charge of his barracks. This man warned Schirdewan of what to expect, but also reassured him that the other communist internees would do what they could for him. Schirdewan benefited from the solidarity in the camps. He wrote:

Evenings when I came back to my barracks totally exhausted, comrades helped to bathe, apply ointment, and tie up my sore hands and feet. Especially in the first days, this help proved decisive The concrete help for survival was only one side of the matter. Just as important was that feeling that our cooperative conduct radiated a considerable strength.¹²⁰

Epstein argues that for men like Honecker and 'Schirdewan and Selbmann, as for so many other communists, the material, political, and spiritual support offered by comrades made an intolerable situation somewhat bearable'.¹²¹

In mid-1944 the remaining women of the French convoy were separated into quarantine and transferred from Auschwitz to Ravensbrück. There was no official explanation given, but Delbo believed their convoy was never destined for Auschwitz. She judged that they were moved thanks to a well-publicised broadcast by Fernand Grenier, the communist deputy to the Gaullist government-in-exile, which recounted a somewhat distorted version of the experiences of the convoy of French women. She wrote: 'One can always guess. Or simply imagine that one fine day some bureaucrat discovered that, contrary to regulations, non-Jewish French citizens were being held at Auschwitz (no

¹¹⁹ Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, 72.

¹²⁰ Karl Schirdewan quoted in Epstein, *ibid.*, 72-73.

¹²¹ Epstein, *ibid.*, 73.

convoy of “politicals” was sent to Auschwitz after ours), and the Gestapo then decided to transfer us’.¹²² The women then became a tiny percentage of the ‘estimated 120,000 female prisoners who went through Ravensbrück.’¹²³ Nikolaus Wachsmann, an expert on Nazi camps and prisons, writes that over the course of the war Ravensbrück grew into a large complex with factories, workshops, sub-camps and satellite camps located across Germany. Wachsmann describes the conditions of the camp:

the final stages of the Second World War were by far the worst: over half of the 25,000 or more deaths of women registered as Ravensbrück prisoners occurred in the last four months of the camp’s existence. Many died from mass starvation and illness. Others were murdered by lethal injection and shooting, or in a provisional gas chamber, set up in early 1945.

Wachsmann emphasises that ‘[b]y this time life inside Ravensbrück had reached the last circle of hell’.¹²⁴

Survival was most often determined by the friendship and support provided by fellow prisoners. Margarete Buber-Neumann, a survivor of both Gulag and Nazi concentration camps, wrote that women who felt no loyalty to each other and shared no common identity (in her experience women imprisoned as ‘Asocials’) often denounced each other which subjected their fellow internees to harsh punishments, loneliness and constant fear. Buber-Neumann fled Germany with her partner, Heinz Neumann, an outcast of the KPD, in 1935. They arrived in Moscow in the early summer but were both arrested two years later in the Great Purge. Neumann was executed in November 1937 while Buber-Neumann was sent to one of the largest Gulags in Soviet Russia.¹²⁵ At the time of the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact, Buber-Neumann was handed over to the Nazi regime and returned to Germany. After a stay in prison she was sent to Ravensbrück in August 1941. She managed to survive thanks to the mutual support provided by various prisoners and her ability to retain her sense of self. On 21 April 1945 she was released

¹²² Delbo, *Convoy to Auschwitz*, 11.

¹²³ Nikolaus Wachsmann, ‘Introduction,’ in Margarete Buber-Neumann, *Under Two Dictators: prisoner of Stalin and Hitler*, 2d ed., trans. Edward Fitzgerald, London: Pimlico, 2008, xvii. Sarah Helm writes that over the six years of its existence, 130,000 women spent time in Ravensbrück. Its maximum population at one time rose to 45,000 internees. She cites that estimates of the death toll range between 30,000 and 90,000. In Helm, *If This is a Woman: inside Ravensbrück, Hitler’s concentration camp for women*, London: Little, Brown, 2015, xii.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, xvii.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, xiii-xiv.

with around 60 long-term political prisoners without warning or explanation.¹²⁶ After the war, given her experiences of Stalinist terror and persecution, she became an outspoken critic of the Soviet regime.

The significance of mutual support and/or belief in a cause are recurring themes of survivors' accounts. In a German prison, before she was deported to Ravensbrück, Buber-Neumann met a young woman, also a political prisoner. They began talking. Buber-Neumann wrote:

She knew I had come from Soviet Russia, and for her that was the land of hope. Eagerly she asked me about my experiences, and when I told her she was horrified. She sat on the mattress beside me and wept.

'All those years in prison I was consoled and strengthened by what the Communists told me about Soviet Russia. It made it all seem worthwhile. It was my only hope. And now ... I wish I could disbelieve you, but I can't. All this suffering seems so useless. What have we got to live for now?'¹²⁷

Buber-Neumann acknowledged the power of belief in a cause. During her time in Ravensbrück, she was surrounded by 'Bible Students', Jehovah's Witnesses, who had been arrested for their religious beliefs. Their common identity and commitment to their religion gave them strength and support that enabled them to survive their concentration camp ordeal. Buber-Neumann also observed that women from the resistance movements in occupied countries 'found it easier to stand the camp life. They had fought for a cause and the fact that they were now in a concentration camp was proof of their danger to National Socialism. It strengthened their self-respect and helped them to hold their heads high.'¹²⁸

Women remembering women resisters

It has not been my point in this chapter to bestow value on women's resistance retrospectively because they were arrested and deported and therefore suffered for their commitment to resistance. Instead, the discussion in this chapter emphasises that women committed themselves to the cause of resistance knowing full well the potential

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, xvii.

¹²⁷ Buber-Neumann, *Under Two Dictators*, 160.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 184.

consequences of what could happen to them if they were caught. Women maintained their resistance mentality right up to the end of the war. Reactions of women in prison clearly illustrate that they believed in communism. They did not join resistance activities on a whim. They were idealistic and resilient. They believed in the political ideology of communism. Women were not involved as resisters solely to support the men in their lives whether they were husbands, brothers, fathers or friends. Over the course of this thesis it has become clear that women were dedicated to the ideal and importance of resistance. They were dedicated to resistance to a greater extent than the term 'support' roles would imply.

How did female resisters view their resistance contribution at the end of the war? The directions given in the articles of the underground press, including the news sheets produced in *la Petite Roquette*, illustrate that women believed their contribution to resistance activities was important. As mentioned in the Introduction, in the immediate post-war period it was difficult to define and locate the tasks many women performed in the resistance within a military framework. The representation of resistance depicted after the war was one constructed by men. The idea that women were modest, self-deprecating and unwilling to promote their own activities has been put forward as an explanation of why female resistance did not receive adequate recognition immediately after the war or even years after the war was over. Hanna Diamond writes that women often answered her questions about their own resistance activities with evasive responses such as 'we were doing what anyone in our situation would have done' or 'we did nothing compared to the men who were fighting'.¹²⁹ Men did not tend to say they had done anything particularly special either. The difference was that men talked about what it was they had done as resisters. Men could share their stories as soldiers of the resistance, but how could women's stories fit into this framework? This is a particularly interesting distinction given that it is evident that women in the communist resistance clearly knew that they had participated as valuable members of the movement.

The collection donated by the Maertens family to the MRN contains a letter of particular interest to the perception of women's resistance at the time of the Liberation. It is from the director of the UFF to the director of the FN. The letter was sent in June

¹²⁹ Hanna Diamond, *Women and the Second World War in France 1939-1948: choices and constraints*. Harlow, UK: Pearson Education Ltd., 1999.

1944 as an offer of formal adhesion to the FN.¹³⁰ The letter referenced the cooperation between the two organisations during the war, a list of tasks performed by UFF adherents and assurance of the women's confidence in the future of the FN. This appears to be a concrete request for official recognition of the UFF as a part of the FN. The FN had multiple branches and was accepted as a legitimate resistance network both inside and outside of France, which was a status the UFF did not yet have.

The collection of UFF documents held in the MRN also contains another significant letter. It is a draft or copy of a letter from the Committee Director of the UFF to the President of the CNR. It began: 'Until this day not a single female organisation of the RESISTANCE has been recognised by the NATIONAL COUNCIL of the RESISTANCE, even though the women of France have held a great place in the fight that our people led for four years.'¹³¹ The letter then listed the range of activities and women's groups that comprised the UFF. The fact that the occupiers killed UFF members was also mentioned. The UFF clearly wanted its contribution to resistance to be counted: 'These Committees are not only simple propaganda Committees, they are Committees of Action directed towards the practical fight against the occupier and traitors.'¹³² The letter drew the CNR President's attention to the fact that the FN had already recognised the contribution of the UFF. The UFF called on the CNR to 'recognise officially'¹³³ the women's resistance organisation. It was important to the UFF that its contribution be publicly acknowledged. Clearly the UFF knew the value of its contribution to the resistance struggle and wanted its members to be recognised as resisters.

During the war, communist women had focused on and encouraged the engagement of women in resistance. They had survived arrest and deportation and proven themselves willing to risk their lives for the cause of resistance. In the immediate post-war period, the women involved in the UFF collected biographies concerning women who had been members of the resistance in order to publish booklets filled with the stories of women resisters. The result was a series of *Livres d'Or* which were published

¹³⁰ MRN: Fonds de Famille Maertens. Letter to Comité Directeur du Front National, from Union des Femmes Françaises, June 1944.

¹³¹ MRN: Fonds de l'Union des Femmes Françaises, Carton no. 1. Letter to Conseil National de la Résistance, from Comité Directeur de l'Union des Femmes Françaises, undated, 1.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 2.

from 1945 and into the 1950s.¹³⁴ The booklets were a means of recognising women who had been involved in the resistance, particularly those who had lost their lives as a result of their activity.

The roles of the women featured in the booklets varied greatly and once again illustrate the vast contribution women made to the communist resistance movement. In the second instalment, the story of Léa Blain (1922-1944) was told. She joined the resistance in 1942 and became involved in underground work requiring her to adopt a false identity. She was responsible for the welfare of young *réfractaires* escaping the STO. Blain provided them with the necessary identity papers, found them safe houses in which to shelter and passed them to the maquis. She also acted as a courier for letters, documents and even arms. She was killed on the morning of 1 August 1944 along with another young man from the FTP when they came across some German troops and engaged in combat. Before she died, Blain killed one Nazi and mortally wounded another.¹³⁵

Claudine Guerin (1926-1943), whose communist mother had been arrested and whose father was a POW, also featured in the second edition. She was tied to activity connected to André Pican, mentioned in Chapter Three in relation to the printing of the clandestine *L'Humanité*. Guerin spent time in Romainville and was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau along with her fellow internees. She died separated from the other French women, which upset them greatly, in the medical block of the camp.¹³⁶ She was 17 years-old. In the fourth instalment the story of Mireille Lauze (1920-1945) was recounted. She had been a member of the UJFF and after the occupation she immediately began organising girls at her work to write and distribute underground newspapers. She was arrested in February 1941 and sentenced to 15 years hard labour. Lauze was deported to Ravensbrück in May 1944 and that is where she died. The excerpts of her letters included in the booklet are evidence of her faith that the future would be happy and that she kept up her morale with that knowledge.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ MRN: Fonds de l'Union des Femmes Françaises, Carton no. 6. Carton contains the first four booklets and various letters and biographies for future editions.

¹³⁵ MRN: Fonds de l'Union des Femmes Françaises, Carton no. 6. *Livre d'Or*, 2^e fascicule, Paris: Le Foyer Danielle Casanova, 8-10.

¹³⁶ MRN: Fonds de l'Union des Femmes Françaises, Carton no. 6. *Livre d'Or*, 2^e fascicule, Paris: Le Foyer Danielle Casanova, 24-27.

¹³⁷ MRN: Fonds de l'Union des Femmes Françaises, Carton no. 6. *L'Union des Femmes Françaises aux Femmes Héroïques Mortes pour que Vive la France*, 18-21.

The extent of an individual woman's involvement in the resistance was not of importance for the booklets. It only mattered that she had believed in the cause and sacrificed her future to ensure there would still be a future for France. In the first four *Livres d'Or* there are more than 24 biographies of women involved in a range of resistance activities. Casanova and 'France' Bloch-Sérazin each had their own brochure dedicated to their memory. Casanova, in particular, remained a *martyre* of the PCF after the war. Stamps were issued in her honour, songs were written about her, exhibitions were dedicated to her and numerous streets were named after her. Women leaders within the communist resistance movement knew that it was vital to share the stories of women resisters, not only to educate the public of what they had achieved, but also to ensure the memory of those women who lost their lives as members of the resistance would not be forgotten.

Conclusion

Women's tasks continued to adapt and expand to meet the evolving demands of resistance over the course of the war. Female communists managed to adapt their knowledge and experience of resistance to correspond to the circumstance in which they found themselves. We have seen that in order to survive internment and deportation women drew strength from their knowledge of communism and their commitment to resistance. Women were dedicated and invaluable members of communist networks. After the war, leaders of female resistance groups recognised that it was important to ensure that women were acknowledged for their resistance. It was also important to communist women that the stories of those who had died as resisters were recorded. In the historiography, the emphasis for definitional purposes should be on the fact that an individual chose to resist, not on what role they performed within a resistance network. What is significant about the communist resistance was the complementarity of roles. This led to the creation of an underground network that could survive for four years despite arrests, betrayals, sting operations and the zealous persecution of the BS. The communist resistance movement was resilient because of the contribution of all its activists.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to investigate and illustrate the extensive contribution of women to the communist resistance movement in Paris during the occupation. We have learnt how and why female communist resistance differed from that of female resisters in other resistance networks across France. As posited in the Introduction, the details of the tasks and initiatives for which women were responsible discussed in this thesis have added to our scholarly understanding of resistance. We have seen that women's groups and activities contributed extensively to the day-to-day functioning of the communist movement as a whole. The early roles women adopted after the party was banned and forced underground detailed the commitment of women to resistance. Articles in the women's underground press gave an insight into the details of what female resisters did and what the PCF and women leaders wanted women to achieve. The journal of Lucienne Maertens gave details of the logistics of organising the women's committees and providing material support for the active units. A discussion of the investigations and arrest of female communist resisters emphasised how the police and occupying authorities perceived the threat of female resisters and their contribution to resistance. The analysis of women's behaviour and coping mechanisms once they were imprisoned has given us a more detailed understanding of women's perception of resistance and its consequences. Combined, these details of female resistance allow us to understand better women's contribution to the communist resistance movement and to resistance as a whole.

The discussion over the course of my thesis has answered the questions posed in the Introduction. The nature of women's resistance in the communist movement can be divided into three, not entirely separate, groups: those in the local women's committees, those who worked with high-ranking male activists, and those who held leadership positions. Women's resistance was a part of the political organisation of the communist movement. Their resistance was politicised because they were members of a political group. Women were mobilised as a part of the political agenda of the PCF leadership. The

goal of the PCF was to rally all the population in a movement of popular resistance. To this end, the clandestine PCF aimed to engage diverse groups to contribute to resistance using a range of tactics. Women were a central part of this plan. The fact that the women featured in my thesis were communists greatly affected their experiences of the French Resistance. Women fitted into the social organisation of the communist resistance movement along gendered lines. The vast majority of female resisters remained as above-ground activists performing roles that were deemed appropriate for women at the time. These were caring and nurturing roles that exploited women's position in the family. Women provided board and provisions for resisters, acted in the interests of their children, and protected their family members.

As the communist resistance movement grew, women provided much-needed lines of communication, dealt with the practicalities of daily life, and used their initiative to find new methods of resistance and encourage others into resistance networks. In all these ways women were essential to the sustainability of the resistance movement. Through their underground press and pre-war contacts, female resisters encouraged other women to join their committees and activities. As the number of resisters grew, and the number of resistance operations increased, the need for communication between agents and groups also increased. With a growing number of resisters there was also greater demand for provisions. Women adopted the roles necessary to fulfil these needs and thereby provided a vital contribution to the growth of resistance. The interdependent structure of the communist resistance movement made the activities of both male and female resisters indispensable to the whole. To succeed, all resistance movements required the contribution of all their members. The division of roles, often along gendered lines, was a key aspect of the organisation of communist resistance. We have seen throughout this thesis that the different groups performed complementary roles as a specific tactic that was intended to increase resistance and combat the occupiers and collaborators from multiple angles. The different groups were dependent upon the support, both practical and moral, of the other groups who made up the communist resistance.

At the start of this thesis we learnt that women were engaged in the public sphere beyond what their legal and political status allowed. The examples discussed in detail in Chapter One established that the status of women in French society during the 1930s was simultaneously regressive and progressive. Women were more capable and independent

than one might expect from their legal status. During the 1930s women were informally engaged in politics to a greater extent than ever before, both through party memberships and pacifist organisations. The Popular Front government marked a new era for women in politics not only because three women were undersecretaries in the cabinet, but also because politicians and political parties began in earnest to mobilise women as part of their political campaigns.

As we saw in Chapters One and Two, the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) drew heavily on its experiences in the Popular Front when organising its resistance movement during the 1940s. The success of Popular Front tactics, both in terms of membership numbers and election results, impacted on decisions made by the underground French communist leadership. The discussion of PCF policies and tactics in the 1930s provided valuable background for the attitude of French communists towards both women and anti-fascism. A commitment to anti-fascism was central to the Popular Front and, later, organised communist resistance. Participation in communist activities before the war, such as anti-fascist campaigns and the all-female Union des Jeunes Filles de France (UJFF), impacted upon the choices made by the women featured in this thesis. The high level of female engagement as communist resisters was partly due to the fact that the political education of women in communist networks during the 1930s gave women an experience and understanding of political activism, as well as the responsibility and independence necessary to embrace resistance. In Chapter Two we saw that communist women were willing to accept resistance as a continuation of the anti-fascist struggle.

The communist resistance movement exploited women's traditional gender roles. Gender was used by the communist network to protect party members, encourage women into resistance and give women specific opportunities as female resisters. In Chapter Two, we learnt how communist women provided invaluable connections between PCF leaders because their gender made them less visible as political activists. We saw in Chapter Three that communist women were able to use their gender to cover the extent of their resistance responsibilities. Women were able to remain as 'above-ground' resisters more often than their male counterparts. For this reason, women were given the responsibility of hiding and caring for resisters or acting as liaison agents and couriers. In Chapter Four we learnt that women, as mothers and wives, had the unique opportunity of protesting in public about requisitioning and rationing. Communist women

leaders exploited the prioritisation of mothers established by the Vichy regime in order to give women a unique opportunity to demonstrate their support of resistance in public.

Women were able to develop their own initiatives and organise their own parallel all-female sub-networks due to the structure of the communist resistance. In France, women were believed to occupy a role that was complementary to that of men. This was reflected in communist resistance. Rather than a case of women being subordinate to men (and therefore not resisters in their own right), women who performed the so-called support roles were able to adopt a gender-specific responsibility that enabled them to contribute to sustaining a resistance network. Thus, as we have seen, women's initiatives were essential to the functioning of communist resistance. For example, those women mentioned in Chapters Three, Four and Five who not only collected much needed money and provisions but also distributed this material aid assumed a complementary, necessary and dangerous role within the structure of the communist resistance network. The local committees of the Union des Femmes Françaises (UFF) mentioned throughout this thesis illustrate the extent to which women could, and did, develop their own initiatives as communist resisters. The range of titles of the women's underground press also demonstrates the activities of the parallel all-female groups and the place of their contribution in the communist resistance movement as a whole.

My thesis demonstrates that women were extensively involved in the communist resistance movement. They were organisers of resistance as well as members of the rank-and-file. The communist campaign to mobilise housewives, as discussed in Chapters Three and Four, provides one example of this. The extensive women's underground press that was the focus of Chapter Four again illustrates the degree of female involvement in communist networks. The existence of UFF local women's committees and the range of their activism provide a unique example of female resistance. As mentioned in Chapter Five, the fact that the French communist movement deployed armed women, albeit on a small scale compared to communist parties in other countries, emphasises the extent of female engagement in communist resistance.

Communist women recognised the value of performing support roles and the importance of women activists. In general, this was thanks to their introduction to politics before the war. Their political education and experience impacted upon their choices as resisters and their understanding of resistance. As we saw in Chapter Five, those women who were arrested and/or deported as resisters and political activists used their political

education and commitment to communist ideology to cope with their incarceration and survive their traumatic experiences. Due to their political education and understanding, communist women knew the value of their resistance.

The communist leadership understood that women could perform activities determined by their gender in order to achieve three goals: to allow the communist resistance movement to expand, to undermine wherever possible the Vichy regime and Nazi authorities, and to attract more supporters to the cause of resistance. After the war, some male communists and many female communists insisted upon recognising women resisters and *martyres* in particular. But during the war, neither law enforcement authorities nor government officials knew how to define women in relation to war, especially when that war was being waged clandestinely on the home front. Margaret and Patrice Higonnet remark upon the fact that when a woman ‘performs a “masculine” function, it cannot easily be read’.¹ Whilst this was of benefit to women trying to escape the notice of Nazi soldiers, it also made it difficult for female resistance to be understood in the post-war period. The Higonnets emphasise that ‘the contribution of those women was, in the postwar period when awards were being made, unreadable for French politicians as well’.² Now that the definition of resistance has been expanded to include a broader range of roles, we have been able to include the contribution of female resisters as essential members of the French Resistance. This thesis has emphasised that women were equally important as men in ensuring the success of a mission, the protection of its members, the longevity of the network, and the growth of that network.

A detailed discussion of female communist resistance contributes to the broad analysis of the ongoing debate about what constituted resistance. As we learnt in the review of the literature in the Introduction, women’s varied contributions to resistance continue to be included on an irregular basis in resistance histories. But we have seen throughout this thesis that women were integral to the communist movement and communist resistance. Over the course of the war, women adopted a range of roles that evolved with the changing circumstances of the conflict. The success of the communist resistance movement depended upon the collective effort of women and men, above-ground and underground operatives. The analysis of female communists in this thesis is a

¹ Margaret R. Higonnet and Patrice L.-R. Higonnet, ‘The Double Helix,’ in *Behind the Lines*, Higonnet et al eds., 38.

² *Ibid.*

further step towards integrating women into the general story of communist resistance. The examples of resistance activities mentioned in this thesis that were undertaken by women highlight how the women's groups interacted with and complemented the male units. Moreover, a discussion of their roles provides insight into the place women occupied within the functioning resistance movement as a whole.

Throughout the thesis we have seen the diverse nature of women's involvement in communist resistance over the course of the war. We have also considered how women resisters viewed their own contributions to the French Resistance and how their opinions contrasted and aligned with the general historiography. This has led us to understand better the place of women's resistance within the dominant narrative. Communist resistance was so widespread because of its broad-based structure. Women activists were pivotal to the organisation of such a structure. Schwartz argues that resistance 'was not an operation conducted by a few, but a system of action supported by many. It was a series of small, nearly imperceptible elements which formed a larger construct. The actions of women clearly reflect this structure.'³ Without a detailed understanding of women's contribution to resistance, we cannot know what it meant to resist and to be a resister.

Danielle Casanova and Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier are examples of women who were able to benefit from the opportunities for political engagement available as members of the PCF. Their political education received as members of the PCF, the Union des Jeunes Filles de France and, more broadly, as participants in the pre-war antifascist struggle, informed their choice to embrace resistance. Casanova continued to adopt roles of leadership and initiative during the war, while the contacts and skills Vaillant-Couturier developed before the war defined her wartime participation as a resister. France Bloch-Sérazin was another woman who chose to resist alongside her friends and contacts within the PCF. She was able to use her professional expertise to perform a specialist role within her unit. All three women were arrested and deported for their resistance activities. As we saw with the group of French women deported to Birkenau, the commitment of female communists to resistance and communism helped them to cope with the consequences they faced as prisoners of the Vichy and Nazi regimes. The politics and idealism of communist women defined their extensive contribution to the communist resistance movement.

³ Schwartz, 'Redefining Resistance,' in *Behind the Lines*, Higonnet et al eds., 142.

As argued throughout this thesis, women were extensively involved in communist networks during the 1930s and 1940s. Their political engagement remained informal but female participation was nevertheless essential to communist activities during the Popular Front era and as a part of the communist resistance movement in particular. The attitude of the communist leadership towards women's involvement in their political organisation affected the participation of women in the communist resistance movement. The pre-war inclusion of women in communist political and social activities set a precedent for the inclusion of women in communist resistance groups. The communist ideology developed during the 1930s accepted and encouraged the involvement of women. This ideology resulted in women being able to be particularly active as communist resisters. Throughout this thesis I have demonstrated that their pre-war political activities affected women's perception of resistance, its consequences and its importance, as well as the choices they made during the war.

Women were not the only social group targeted by the communist resistance. The communists, however, were the only ones to target women as a separate group that could be mobilised in a unique way that was dependent upon their gender and the perception of women. It was this belief, held both by the communist leadership and the women activists themselves, which made women's communist resistance distinct from other women's resistance. Women's contribution to resistance was understood in a different way by communist activists and this necessarily changed how women resisted. The PCF mobilised women to a great extent as essential members of the communist resistance movement. Over the course of my thesis I have argued that some forms of resistance activity should not be prioritised over others. Resistance was a collective movement in which all the elements were equally important because they were interdependent.

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*La Vivandière**La Voix de la Femme Juive**La Voix des Femmes**La Voix des Femmes de Saint-Denis**La Voix des Lilas***Fonds de Famille Maertens****Fonds de l'Union des Femmes Françaises****Fonds de Commissariat de Police – Ivry****Fonds de Mounette Dutilleul****Préfecture de Police de Paris (PP)****G BS2 – 10 : Affaire Sérazin****GB71 BS1 – 23 : Affaire Dutilleul, Andrée, alias Dessart****GB 105 BS2 – 13 : Affaire de la rue Daguerre****GB 129 BS2 – 37 : Affaire Pican****G BS2 carton n° 6 : Affaire de la rue de Buci****Miscellaneous**Blum, Léon. 'Public Opinion in France.' *The Political Quarterly* (1933): 58-67.

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