Women In The French Resistance

by Rebecca G. Halbreich

On 15 May 1945, Mathilde Gabriel Périplo, one of the first women to have the honor of being seated at the Palais Bourbon, which until then had been reserved for men, declared: "If, in this national struggle, we earned something, we earned lucidity and when I say "we" - I mean women. Looming up from this chaos is a new woman."[1] This "new woman," a politicized, enfranchised woman, rose out of experiences in the Second World War, experiences which proved to be pivotal in the history of French women. Women made the progression from having a limited political voice before the war [2] to constituting "5.4% of Deputies elected [to the National Assembly] and 3.6% of Senators"[3] in 1946; a transition in large part based directly on their activities in the French Resistance Movement during the war. Lucie Aubrac, "the only woman at the Consultative Assembly at Algiers, and thus, the first French woman parliamentarian, noted that the 'profound mutation in the thinking and motivations' of women, engendered by their Resistance experience, was an irreversible gain."[4] It is important to examine the motivations of some of these women, as well as their actual activities in the Resistance, in order to track their political development.

As leader of the Vichy Regime, Philippe Pétain initiated a vision of a new moral order for France, firmly based in a traditional structuring of society. It would be the antithesis of the materialism and individualism which he felt had characterize d Republican France, and had led to national catastrophe. As a large part of this vision, under its "femme au foyer" (woman at home) imperative, the government attempted to institutionalize a paternalistic and reactionary definition of the roles and status of women within the family and within French society. This definition of women centered on motherhood and femininity, and found expression "in a wide range of antifeminist policies in education, employment and sexuality."[5]

Under the "femme au foyer", motherhood became a national focus, and a sacred duty for women. While this demographic obsession was not new for France, the birthrate having been well behind that of other industrializing countries in Europe for more than a century, the authoritarian nature of the campaign was clear:

Early in the autumn of 1940 measures were enacted to prevent married women from going out to work. On 07 July, a few days before the existence of the Vichy regime, the government of Pétain told prefects to encourage local businesses to sack their women workers who were married to demobilized soldiers, and this was done even where the husband was unemployed and the family was dependent on the wife's wages. This began a pattern of increased discrimination in the workplace against all women, and their wages for equal work were pegged further than ever behind that of men, while in education, examiners were told to pass fewer girls than boys at the baccalaureate.[6]

These actions were inspired by the "Three K's" of Hitler's doctrine, (initials of the German words confining women to maternity, the kitchen and the church) and it was in this context that vast numbers of French women resisted first the Vichy, and later, the Nazi regimes.
How widespread resistance was in France has been widely discussed. Historian Robert Paxton contends that the number of active Resistance participants officially recognized after the war was "about 2% of the adult French population [or about 400,000]." He goes on to say that "there was no doubt, wider complicities, but even if one adds those willing to read underground newspapers, some two million persons, or around 10% of the adult population, seem to have been willing to take that risk."[7] However, historian John Sweets argues that while "a definition that is limited to active members of organized groups has the advantage of greater precision, such a limitation may prohibit an adequate appreciation of the phenomenon of resistance." Sweets maintains that "the existence of an extensive network of sympathizers and accomplices beyond the framework of the organized resistance has sometimes been overlooked or underestimated in scholarly accounts of the Vichy period."[8]

Further complications in interpreting Resistance activity have emerged with a drive by feminist historians to redefine "Resistance" in a more inclusive way, that is, to make it encompass spontaneous and individual activities, liaison work, clandestine publishing and other work undertaken by women. The goal of feminist historians is to ensure that women's role in the Resistance will be given proper historical credit. Women's activities have been, until recently, largely excluded from mainstream press coverage and, by extension, from history books.[9] This exclusion may, in part, be due to the fact that the image of women's clandestine roles as extensions of traditional female responsibilities tended to 'normalize' their actions and to 'domesticate' their political implications, in the eyes of both postwar chroniclers of the Resistance, and the women themselves.[10]

However, one publication, Femmes Françaises, the Communist weekly newspaper of the Union Des Femmes Françaises (U.F.F.),[11] was an exception because it attempted to help women overcome this image. Femmes Françaises was published on a weekly basis starting in 1945. Amidst its recipes for embellishing rutabagas and the patterns for making children's shoes, there was a considerable amount of information about the roles women played in the Resistance, and in the immediate post-war society. During the war, the paper informed women on ways to resist the occupation more effectively in their lives, and after the war, it attempted to sustain the advances women had made during the devastating conflict. Newspapers like the Femmes Françaises are an invaluable resource for a feminist historian, because they offer a forum that acknowledged women, events and attitudes that might otherwise have been irretrievable. In 1975, the U.F.F. also sponsored and published the proceedings of a colloquium on women in the Resistance. The paper made available to the public first-hand accounts of women's' lives in the Resistance, although following a significant lag of thirty years.

The challenge in examining the diversity of women involved in the Resistance is that the range of their activities were so varied, they almost defy classification. The base of support was very wide, as historian Rayna Kline notes: "The popular movements evolved not only out of ideological, religious and patriotic convictions, but also out of the realities of daily routine."[12] An analysis of the political aspects helps to clarify the extent to which women were immersed in the Resistance from the outset, and to what extent the radicalizing effect of wartime would influence their status in the immediate post-war period.
Resistance was originally "spontaneous, instinctive, and individual; in this immediate reaction women were without a doubt more numerous than men."[13] Eventually, it became more organized. Women began to demonstrate, regardless of their ideological commitment, mainly for economic reasons. They had very practical concerns: shortages of milk, oil, coal, children’s shoes, cloth diapers, etc. As many husbands were away, fighting or working in labor camps, women were faced with obligations for which they were not prepared: to work and to care for the children in the Draconian climate during the occupation. In addition to the double shift of home and work, women had to wait in long lines, and live on a scarcity of ration coupons. These discontented women, according to one Résistante, "harbored a potential opposition to the Nazi occupant and to its servants."[14]

In order to harness this potential, politically active women formed committees of all sorts to organize non-active women (housewives, mothers, prisoners' wives) to resist, "to prevent their surrender to resignation, to prevent them from accepting the 'fatality' of this situation."[15] It became crucial to develop lines of communication and "comités de ménagères" ("housewife committees") in order to keep women informed, to find shelter for illegal friends, and to keep spirits up. As a result, many women became involved in clandestine propaganda. They started with leaflets written by hand, manifolds from carbon paper, and finally, modest newspapers printed on children's printing presses.[16] While some were crudely executed, they were an effective means of conveying the message to resist.

For example, in La Femme d'Eure et Loir (the "Journal of Patriotic Women" from the department of Eure et Loir) dated 20 September 1943, the message was straightforward:

We women, deprived of everything, must raise our voices, unite ourselves by district, between our co-workers at the factory, to set up committees of union and action. Let's go to the town hall and to the police station with our children to make them see the holes in their shoes, their pinafores in tatters, their coats too small. Let's go, women! Rise up![17]

Similarly, the Popular Committee of the Women of Marseilles distributed a notice entitled "Ménagères, Mamans Marseillaises" (Housewives and Mothers of Marseilles):

We are concerned with: Hunger, epidemics of diarrhea and typhoid, long lines, closed bakeries, while these fat men of Vichy eat their four meals a day from the black market. We demand: Bread (without waiting in line), butter and oil, pasta, potatoes, fruit, milk (to which our children have a right). Women of Marseilles: Isolated we can do nothing, united we will be stronger and able to act. Let's form popular committees. Redistribute this list of claims! Show up at the prefecture to better replenish our stores! Down with the Vichy starvers! Long live free and independent France![18]

The clandestine first edition of Femmes Franâaises, published in January 1944, set an important precedent for subsequent editions by appealing not only to very practical concerns, but to intellectual and spiritual ones as well. The heading was "Ou r Daily Tasks", and the article describes these Resistance activities in great detail:

In the home, for example, if your husband or father [was] doing permanent Resistance activity, [you had to] be sure to destroy documents no longer useful or valid,
[you could not] keep names and addresses of your friends, and when you [did] have to keep a document, [you had to] disguise it effectively.[19]

At the same time, the article addressed the need for women to create an atmosphere of courage and of confidence, not of defeatism.

Similarly, when out shopping, socializing or working, women were encouraged to make sure to make that other women were conscious of the miseries the Vichy had brought to France; to make sure that everyone knew that while they arduously searched for 180 grams of cheese for the month, the Germans were exporting tons of gorgonzola to feed their families.[20] Also, for women who worked in factories, there was a detailed account of how to sabotage the machinery and how to create in the workplace an atmosphere hostile to the Nazis. The article ended with the motto, "Be ingenious so that you return home at night with a tranquil conscience because you have done your daily sabotage."[21]

Through involvement in more organized Resistance activity, many women became politicized, and those were not just the ones who were ideologically committed before the war, but also those "passive" women to whom the tracts were distributed. Emeline Gali cier-Lallemand, elected to the Constituent Assembly in 1945, put it succinctly while speaking of the participation of women in the resistance: "All this work, this becoming conscious of the role that they could play in the outcome, led women to participate more intensively in political life... they became aware of the immense role they could play."

There is no doubt that the war had radical consequences. The women who were politically active before the war became even more militant during the war, whereas women who were apolitical, became involved in politics in ways they would not have before the war. In addition, there were many cases of commitments to Communist and / or anti-Fascist beliefs carrying over after the war. Some of these women stand out as compelling examples of fortitude in the face of hardship and despair. How they motivated themselves and others around them, and how they continued their struggle after the war, deserves to be studied.

The first of these was Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier, a reporter and photographer born in Paris in 1912. She was deported to Auschwitz in January of 1942 for her Resistance work, then sent to Ravensbruck.[22] After the war, she returned to France to become a member of the Constituent Assemblies in 1945-1946 and the Vice President of the National Assembly in 1956-1958. She was a witness at the Nuremberg war crimes trials, and was also decorated with the Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur. She was remarkable because she continued her Resistance work inside the death camps, and at the time of liberation, refused to return to France as long as there were sick people to care for, indicating her fervent desire not only to help other women but also to continue her fight against fascism.

The goal of the resistance movement that she helped organize at Auschwitz was to somehow remain human beings and survive through moral and material help, while at the same time maintaining confidence in an eventual Allied victory. Her efforts included trying to furnish clothes and shoes, food supplements to the weakest and medicine to the sickest. She and her supporters also attempted to place the ill and wounded in the
least difficult work posts. She also attempted to save an invalid from extermination by hiding her and substituting her number for that of a dead person.[23]

Vaillant-Couturier also worked on the information network in the camp, because she understood that "news for the prisoners was as important as bread."[24] As an indication of the degree to which the prisoners were able to communicate with one another, an alliance was maintained with the men’s camp, with whom measures were taken "to participate in a collective escape or in a revolt when the front was sufficiently close... because it was believed the SS would annihilate the camp."[25] Communication networks led to hands-on resistance. Some of these measures included the collection of wire cutters, shovels and pickaxes, as well as explosives, which were introduced secretly into the camp by the women who worked at the grenade factory.

According to Vaillant-Couturier, a change in circumstances after six months at Auschwitz played a great part in her survival. She and the fifty-one Frenchwomen remaining from an original convoy of 230 were put in quarantine from typhus for ten months, and were then transferred to Ravensbruck - more a "labor" camp than an "extermination" camp. They were thus spared the almost certain death awaiting them at Auschwitz, because responding to an intensive campaign carried out by the BBC in London, "orders had been issued from Berlin to the effect that French women should be transported under better conditions." This campaign was in connection with four women in particular in the convoy, including Vaillant-Couturier.[26]

When Vaillant-Couturier was moved to the women’s camp at Ravensbruck, she found no "paramilitary organization and the structure of the Resistance was more blurred," made up more by personal contacts. The proportion of political prisoners was much higher at Ravensbruck than at Auschwitz, resulting in "an atmosphere more conscious of the [anti-Fascist] struggle."[27] Their constant preoccupation was to keep the Nazis from profiting from their labor, which was especially important because Ravensbruck produced goods of utmost importance to the Germans. Ravensbruck was considered to be a clearing camp to furnish slave labor for industry all across Germany. The Frenchwomen were not a completely unified group of resisters, but on one issue they were united: They would take every possible means to not help the Nazis, to avoid work, to slow production down, to sabotage the machinery.

The international solidarity demonstrated at Ravensbruck was evident through the actions of an international liaison group, of which the French Resister Martha Desrumeaux was a member. There were several incidents Vaillant-Couturier pointed out worth mentioning, because they show how resistance cut across political and national frontiers:

At Ravensbruck in 1945, in order to disguise and save three Austrian Communist women who were condemned to death, we needed the help of comrades from several countries which had absolutely opposite political opinions to ours. Likewise, when in February 1 945 we learned that the Polish women the SS doctors had used as guinea pigs were going to be sent off in an extermination transport, we needed to save them the complicity of the French N. N. (‘Nacht und Nebel’, or ‘the Secret Block’), and girls from the Soviet army living in the same block, and also the complicity of numerous others in order to permit their survival until the Red Cross evacuation.[28]
This international cooperation, in the eyes of Vaillant-Couturier, was one of the biggest victories in the camp because it was carried off despite the fact the Nazis tried to use national prejudices to tempt ("not without success at first") the prisoners of one country to rise up against those of another.

Vaillant-Couturier seemed to know instinctively that good morale was the most important factor in her group's survival and from the beginning tried to raise spirits. After hearing about a whole transport from Holland that had not survived, she reflected that because "they had bad morale, they hadn't fought back. We [were] political prisoners, we [would not] let ourselves be brought down."[29]

Vaillant-Couturier discussed the Fascist method of oppression with great insight because she had not only experienced it, but had also offered great resistance to it:

The system employed by the Nazi SS of degrading human beings to the utmost by terrorizing them, and causing them through fear to commit acts which made them ashamed of themselves, resulted in their being no longer human. This was what they wanted. It took great deal of courage to resist this atmosphere of terror and corruption.[30]

According to Vaillant-Couturier, to have the ability to resist in this atmosphere, where everything was in place to transform humans into brutes, it was necessary to have an ideal dearer than life. She described her struggle against demoralization, even in those most difficult conditions, saying that the most important thing was to "create an atmosphere of moral and material solidarity; to create an organization which gave the impression to each that she was not alone, that others shared her suffering, and this made the burden less heavy."[31]

Vaillant-Couturier showed her truly heroic nature through her constant striving to overcome apathy, the risking of her life to care for sick companions and the hiding of those the SS wanted to send to death. In his book, Man's Search for Meaning, Viktor Frankl wrote, "the experiences of camp life showed that [woman] [did] have a choice of action... [she could] preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress..." He discussed people like Vaillant-Couturier:

Those who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer[ed.] sufficient proof that everything [could] be taken from a [wo]man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.[32]

Vaillant-Couturier's articles showed that her commitment to anti-Fascist beliefs was the ideal she held more dearly than life itself. While it is unclear what her political affiliation was before the war, Vaillant-Couturier showed a very strong commitment after the war to the Communist Party. She had a long career in politics, where she was elected Deputy of the Seine from 1946-1958, Vice-President of the National Assembly from 1956-1958, Communist Deputy of the Seine in 1963, as well as being a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

In addition to her impressive political career, Vaillant-Couturier continued as a journalist and photographer to advance her ideals. As an example, in the 23 November
In the 1946 edition of Femmes Françaises, she issued an appeal to help the Spanish people fight fascism, saying the terrible repression in Spain was a threat to peace. She also wanted to call attention to the Nazi scientists who were making atomic bombs at Bilbao (near the Franco-Spanish border).[33] Another article she wrote credited the brave and heroic youth of the Resistance for their invaluable role, and discussed the issues which concerned her as a Communist: "The need to create sufficient apprenticeship centers to give young people a career, the need to open up the universities and the Grands Écoles to all those whose aptitudes permit it, and the need to make loans available to help young households establish themselves."[34]

Another committed Résistante was Madeleine Braun. Born in Paris in 1907, she first studied music, then law. She lived a sheltered life and had no political conviction. This changed quickly in 1930, when she was put in contact with the misery of people. She was placed in charge of setting up a national insurance service in a hospital and was challenged to help all the suffering patients. She decided that she would "never cease to exert herself in the struggle to ameliorate the lot of workers."[35] Braun's efforts against fascism began when presented with German refugees fleeing persecution in 1933. She traveled briefly to Spain and Ethiopia; "everywhere there was misery to succor, to organize help and to concentrate energies."[36] She was appointed Secretary of the International Committee for Aid to Spain. She was also named as a member of the Front National Committee for the southern zone of France, where she became a liaison agent. This was a hazardous role[37] that many politicized women took up; a role so new that it had not yet been "gender-tagged"[38] and was thus widely available to women. They acted as intermediaries for members of the Resistance, delivering documents, orders and weapons, coordinating work and coding reports.

Though she cursed the old bicycles on which they had to ride from one rendezvous to another, she emphasized:

Sadness or tension didn't reign among us. We were young, happy, we had humor and could make a book of droll anecdotes. We were clandestine, thus free as the air, and we wanted to stay free. We knew also why we were fighting. Many of us had anti-fascist convictions... we weren't soldiers nor professional politicians, and there was in us a great purity of spirit, no compromising nor electoralism.[39]

Braun became a member of the provisional Consultative Assembly in 1944, was a Communist Deputy for the Seine from 1945-1951, and was the first woman elected to the post of Vice-President of the National Assembly in 1946. She, like Vaillant-Couturier, was decorated with the Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur. She also directed one of the largest morning newspapers,[40] and was co-director of Editeurs Français Reunis. Speaking on the subject of women's advances since the war, she said:

In the action, in the Resistance, women jumped a big hurdle for their emancipation. They were not only made aware of their duties and their rights, but also gave to men another vision of the responsibilities that they were capable of assuming, and the Consultative Assembly of Algeria on 24 March 1944 finally gave them the right to vote (though it was not unanimous).[41]

Braun came out of the Resistance experience as a politician with, in her words, a "great purity of spirit", but did not continue in politics after 1951. Perhaps, she found too much compromising and electoralism in the political arena. She did continue,
however, to promote her anti-Fascist and feminist convictions in her role as a journalist for Femmes Françaises.

The story of Madeleine Marzin, a schoolteacher from a fishing village, who moved to Paris in the late 1930s, is an example of another woman who came out of World War II more political. She was taken up with human misery when she started teaching in the Eighteenth Arrondissement with a class of sixty backward, unbalanced, quasi abnormal children. She was angry with certain children in the class who always fell asleep until she discovered that they had been up since 5:00 AM taking care of their siblings, while their parents were scrounging for food in garbage cans. Realizing the injustice of this, she tried to get Social Assistance to help, but they would not venture into this zone, so she herself tried to resolve the problems posed by their destitution.

Marzin decided that "only in a group could one hope to conquer" so she joined the teachers' union, and this is where she became politically active. In 1940, the U.F.F. found her calling on teachers to unite and fight against the German occupation. In 1942, after her arrest for distributing jars of jam, she was beaten and condemned to death by the Gestapo. She escaped from the transport, and though her photo was posted in every police station, she continued her struggle, going to Lorraine to organize women's resistance. She stayed there until December 1944, continuing to accomplish her liaison missions despite her poor health.

After the war Marzin continued her political work. She was elected Municipal Counselor of the Twentieth Arrondissement, even though she found herself dissatisfied and isolated because her role was "reduced to that of a social assistant." She said she missed teaching because her role was now merely consultative, and she wanted to be a "true" municipal counselor, "to relieve as much misery and sadness as possible."[42]

Yvonne Dumont had been a member of the Communist Party in Rouen since 1935. From the beginning of the war, she worked as a schoolteacher, while working underground for the Party. She found hiding places for their printing presses, received and distributed equipment, and looked for hideouts for clandestine operatives. In the summer of 1941 - just before the Germans declared war on the USSR - she went underground herself when the Police Commissioner came looking for her at school.

Dumont stayed in the Rouen area for six months. At the start of the German Occupation she was busy making anti-Fascist inscriptions on the streets with chalk, and distributing tracts in the middle of the night. When this became too dangerous, in the opinion of the Party, she was put to work organizing Women's Committees. Centered in Paris, she traveled all over the six departments she was responsible for, staying with "simple people... who knew quite well [the risk] they were exposing themselves to," yet still welcomed her in extraordinary ways, especially in the countryside where provisions were easier to come by. She once wrote, "When people had something, a rabbit for example, they saved it for the day when I was coming." In the cities it was more difficult to find a safe place to stay, as in Bordeaux in 1943: "The city was partitioned. There was terrible repression; provocateurs had succeeded in infiltrating the movement. This had created a terrible panic. It was oppressive. I succeeded in renting a filthy room, without heat, almost without light."[43]

Dumont also spoke about her solitude as a clandestine agent, describing her bi-monthly two-day trips to Paris as follows:
During those two days, I had two or three meetings of fifteen minutes or half an hour. The rest of the time, I went to the cinema. When it was nice weather, I would go sit in the park. One found few interesting books... this is why it was so precious to receive a warm welcome. These people who had an obscure role had an admirable role, because it is thanks to them that the Resistance could hold on.[44]

In June 1943, Dumont found out that she was pregnant, and by the sixth month her job became too dangerous. She went to Paris, yet continued some liaison work despite the risk. She gave birth in February 1944, without knowing what had happened to the fat her, who had been imprisoned in Bordeaux. She wanted to give her real name to the baby, but could not declare her identity, having entered the hospital as "Madame X". She worried though that if something were to happen to her, no one could recover her daughter. She went to the City Hall of the Fourteenth Arrondissement with her own birth certificate and the birth papers of the child and declared the baby as hers, thus taking the risk of coming out of hiding for one hour. The next day she drove to the country to the parents of her daughter's father, where she learned he had been shot.

Dumont's commitment to her work was undeterred by the disturbing news. Before returning to Paris, she decided to leave her daughter with the grandparents, and was unable to see or hear news of her until September 1943. Leaving her very young baby for so long showed the extraordinary strength of her convictions. After the war, she continued her involvement in politics, becoming a Senator, the Vice-President of the U.F.F., and a representative of the Women's' International Democratic Federation for UNESCO.

Many women like Dumont were committed to fighting fascism before the war, and for some this process was accelerated by the proximity of the Spanish Civil War. Francine Escande, for example, was the daughter of a Prefect and the wife of a sub-Prefect, and even though she never wanted nor had the opportunity to become politically engaged, she was deeply anti-Fascist because her education conditioned her to be no other way. In the beginning of 1939, she and her husband arrived in the Pyrenees, where they came into contact with its victims, the Spanish refugees, and were made physically aware of fascism.

In Nice, Escande decided that the Nazi occupation was not acceptable so she joined the French Resistance. She claims that she was only like thousands of other women, helping her husband to do his work, thus her specific tasks were not distinguished. She, like others in this work, refused to accept the conditions of the German occupation. Escande was also like a multitude of other women who, in other circumstances, would never have become involved in such political activities. She was not one to pursue a political career after the war; instead, what she took from her experience was "tolerance of the ideas of others... the true sense of liberty".[45]

These various women had very different positions in the French Resistance Movement, yet they were all bound by their political experiences. What made them exceptional was a strong motivation to resist. One woman from Anduze wrote:

It was during this period of clandestinity that I learned to understand, to feel deeply that one could have differing philosophical, religious or political conceptions, and could nevertheless unite, help one another, even love one another, by having the same goal to pursue. It was during this period that I felt how much love of country, love
of children or family, could unite women who appeared to never be able to understand one another.[46]

Their refusal to resign themselves to the "inevitable" forced them to make the transition from passivity to active protest, a radicalization that required them to risk their lives. These were women who were pushed to the extreme, so that they could ignite in less politicized women a sense of urgency. Sometimes this incitation was effortless, sometimes not:

With some women, it was necessary to discuss a lot with them so they'd decide to act, for the return of prisoners, for supplies of food, but others were ready. One woman from the Bellevue quarter saw her son tortured in front of her, it was an atrocious memory. She understood that she could never do enough to chase out the occupant. [47]

The women considered in this work should not be taken as representative of all women in the Resistance, especially since the movement was popular amongst all classes, and only the middle and upper classes are presented here. Nevertheless, an examination of their experiences does illuminate a range of motivations and situations typical of many. It also gives a small glimpse into the discouragement many women seemed to feel in the post-war political situation.

While the war years for women were stressful, exhausting, and often times lonely, many felt at the same time a sense of excitement and courage in their new and independent roles. Some women saw the era immediately following the war as the right time for France to move toward a society of equal participation of all of its citizens, particularly with the acquisition of the right for women to vote. According to one Reésistante, Camille Tauber, the progression was spontaneous:

This audacity, courage and independence express[ed.] itself at the Liberation in the natural access to civic functions: Women became mayors, adjuncts, municipal counselors... as if they had always done this. They [brought] to these tasks the same obstinacy, the same desire to make a success of it as to their tasks of resistance.[48]

However, Tauber proved to be rather optimistic in assessing the ease with which women could glide into French politics. It did not take very long before French politics reverted to its pre-war attitudes that excluded women. Studies of French women in the political process show that they did not retain their gains. Where in 1946 they represented 382 out of a total 2,801 candidates, by 1951 they had fallen to 191.[49] Thus, women's wartime political activities were not sustained after the war, except in the case of the French Communist Party, which through the U.F.F. provided a forum for women to continue their activism. The role of the U.F.F. may have significantly facilitated the successful political careers of women such as Vaillant-Couturier and Du mont. The lack of other such organizations for women may help to explain why women had short-lived and often unfulfilling experiences in the political arena. Lucie Aubrac cut right to the heart of the issue:

If, at the liberation, the assemblies included a significant number of women, that number diminished fast. The return to prewar political structures, the tedious games of a formal and often courtesan parliamentarianism and–why not–male atavism re-established in the old ways of thinking,...alienated women from national representation.[50]
Endnotes


2 Yvonne Dumont states in Actes du Colloque that as a whole, women were not very politicized, that for the most part they didn't "make the connection between the conditions of their own lives, and the decisions taken by the organism of the state concerning the nation."

3 Breton, op. cit., p. 231.


9 Consider that an examination of over thirty miscellaneous regional French newspapers from 1945, running the gamut of political opinion, revealed countless articles and accolades about the role men had played in freeing their country, and not one single mention of the women's role.

Similarly, in Henri Michel's "exhaustive" work on the Resistance, The Shadow War, women were relegated to a two page appendix, where their merits were worded in an ambiguous and sometimes belittling way, for instance: "escapees were convoyed to the Pyrenees primarily by women - they were adept at smiling their way past a suspicious guard."


11 The U.F.F. came into being during the Occupation, when various Resistance elements combined. Shortly after the war the Union had well over 600,000 members, dominated by the French Communist Party.

12 Kline, op. cit., p. 376.


15 Ibid.

16 In Paris alone there were seventeen papers addressing housewives, two for wives of prisoners, and five for wives of deported or killed Resistant; in the provinces there were twenty papers covering the two zones.
22 It is not clear from any source what her exact role was in the Resistance. What is known from her testimony at the Nuremberg Trials is that she was turned over to German authorities by Pétain's French police and questioned on 09 June 1942. She refused to sign a statement which was inconsistent with what she had said. The officer who had questioned her threatened her, to which she said that she was not afraid of death nor of being shot. He replied that they had at their disposal means for killing far worse than mere shooting, to which the interpreter added that she didn't know what she had just done. He said she was going to be sent to a concentration camp in Germany, from which no one ever returned.


24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Testimony of Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier, *Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal*, Nuremberg, 28 January 1946 (Nuremberg, 1947), p. 219. (Hereafter cited as Nuremberg Testimony). The three other women were: Maïa Politzer (a doctor and the wife of philosopher Georges Politzer), Danielle Casanova (a dental surgeon, who was very active in the Resistance), and Hélène Solomon-Langevin (the wife of the physicist Jacques Solomon and the daughter of Professor Langevin).

27 Vaillant-Couturier, op. cit., p. 41.

28 Ibid.


30 "Nuremberg Testimony", p. 213.


33 Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier, "Marie-Claude nous lance un appel", *Femmes Franáaises* No. 112, 23 November 1946.


35 Josette Lépine, "Trois Femmes de la Résistance", *Femmes Franáaises* No. 94, 20 July 1946.

36 Ibid.
An agent was in permanent danger because many people knew every detail of her life, contrary to the cardinal rule of a clandestine operation - secrecy. She almost invariably had compromising papers on her when caught by the Gestapo; her average "life" as an agent was only a few months.


Lépine, op. cit.

Braun, op. cit., p. 34.

Lépine, op. cit.


Ibid., p. 190.


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