

3-24-2017

France's Liberation, Women's Stagnation: France's Societal Advancement Hindered by the Incarceration of Women to Traditional Gender Roles Following World War II

Helena Gougeon
Portland State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/honorsthesis>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Gougeon, Helena, "France's Liberation, Women's Stagnation: France's Societal Advancement Hindered by the Incarceration of Women to Traditional Gender Roles Following World War II" (2017). *University Honors Theses*. Paper 371.

<https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.364>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in University Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

**France's Liberation, Women's Stagnation: France's Societal Advancement Hindered by
the Incarceration of Women to Traditional Gender Roles Following World War II**

a thesis presented by

Helena Gougeon

An undergraduate honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Bachelor of Arts

and

Sociology

and

History

Portland State University

Thesis Advisor

Doctor Emily Shafer, Department of Sociology

2017

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	2
Introduction	3
Historical Background	5
Vichy's Reinstallation of a Patriarchy	7
Women's Experience during the War.....	9
Women's Right to Vote	14
Les Femmes Tondue	18
Conclusion	25
References	30

ABSTRACT

In the early 20th century, the reputation of Western nations as conductors of morality and progress was dismantled during a period that was categorized by turmoil and pandemonium created by the World Wars. World War II marked the zenith of this global crisis. France, in particular, suffered severe blows as a supreme power after the humiliating defeat to German forces eight months after WWII was declared. The defeat was followed by German Occupation throughout France and an ushering in of an authoritarian state known as the Vichy Régime. Following the war, French citizens were mobilized towards a political agenda that was targeted at reconstructing the French state that had endured significant devastations for four perpetual years (1940-44). I will analyze how women's roles in society were impacted by the Liberation following WWII in France through an examination of the literature surrounding this topic and firsthand accounts outlining women's perspective during and after the war. I will discuss women's experience during the war in which many women became the sole guardian of the household and through this process adopted increased responsibilities as men were held as prisoners of war away from the home. In addition, I will then explore the implications of women's enfranchisement granted in 1944 and the repercussions of shorn women (*les femmes tondues*) who were condemned for obtaining sexual collaborations with German officials during the context of the war. I argue that gender equality was not at the forefront of national reconstruction, which instead prioritized establishing a stable society upholding conservative gender roles. The intention of rebuilding the nation's identity was to design a society that would not crumble under the pressures of cataclysmic events and avoid another surrender at the hands of the enemy through the creation a powerful nation. As a result, the period swiftly following the Liberation is described as a time of women's stagnation towards equality because human rights were not considered essential for the rebuilding of the French state.

Keywords: France, Liberation, World War II, Vichy Régime, German occupation, women's enfranchisement, *Les Femmes Tondues*, gender roles

INTRODUCTION

The rebuilding of the French state following France's Liberation after World War II resulted in the subordination of women. The focal point of reconstruction was to create dissociation between the French Fourth Republic, the reigning government following WWII, and the Vichy Régime, the authoritarian government that collaborated with the Nazi Occupying forces installed in France during the war (Diamond 1999). The widespread discourse propagated at the end of the war depicted the Liberation "as the moment in which old antagonisms could finally be set aside, because a political will and force existed to overthrow the economic structures, social relations, and political forms that had contributed to class warfare and military defeat," (Jenson 1984: 273). Gender equality was not at the forefront of national restoration following the Liberation, which focused on nourishing infrastructure as the foundational groundwork of regenerating the French identity.

Immediately following the Liberation, France entered a period of reconstruction through political and social legislation targeted to refurbish the French identity that had been lost during German Occupation. During this time, women gained political emancipation when they were granted the right to vote in April of 1944, which was a tool devised to proffer support to the conservative party and advance their political party agenda of maintaining significant control of the state (Diamond 2000). However, women's vote was advertised as an award to women for their valiant efforts in accordance to the Resistance throughout the occupation (Weitz 1995). The intended purpose of this liberal stature as a form of enhancing gender equality was devised to provide a significant wedge between the Fourth Republic and the Vichy régime by revoking the authoritarian legislation employed by Vichy.

The same desire that drove the political agenda centered on reconstruction also fueled the shavings of collaborators. The shavings were a phenomenon that occurred swiftly following the

Liberation in which women suspected of sexually collaborating with Germans under the Occupation were publically shaved and humiliated as a punishment for their crimes (Virgili 2002). The idea was to shed France of all the corruption corresponding to the German Occupation and Vichy Régime. The shearings of French female collaborators following the war, also known as the *tonte*, was instituted as a form of punishment against women who betrayed the country through their deviant behavior against the traditional female role through the act of promiscuity with the enemy (Kelly 2004). The motive behind this humiliating parade of female shame was provoked by men's guilt affiliated with France's hasty defeat at the hands of German forces, which permeated the notion that men were incapable of defending France and protecting its women and children (Kelly 2004).

The public shavings of female collaborators coincided with the enfranchisement of women that followed a period of societal and economic distress that was the result of the German Occupation. The shavings were a reflection of the reestablishment of a patriarchal power structure that nurtures male dominance (Virgili 2002), while state legislation concentrated on progression and innovation designed to evade the constraints of extreme conservatism that was bestowed by the Vichy Régime. The language employed by the government and the misogynistic actions carried out by civilians created a dissension in regards to women's status. Nevertheless, both patriotic sources of advancing the reconstruction of the state were intended to purge France of the ills that contaminated the foundational pillars of the Republic caused by the German Occupation (Duchen 2005).

In this paper, I will analyze the historical implications following the Liberation in France on women's roles in society and how current events daunting the era of the war shaped women's status in society. First, I outline a brief history of the events of the Second World War. Next, I

trace the quotidian struggles perpetrated by the conditions of the war on French women. I will finish with the examination of the effects of women's enfranchisement and the events surrounding shorn women. Both phenomenon reflected progressive efforts to sever all ties to the Vichy Régime, while maintaining a desire to return to prewar conditions of stability based on traditional gender roles embedded in inequality that oppress female citizens. I argue that the Liberation explicitly freed France from German occupants, however, it did not free women from entrenched gender roles, and specifically masculine chauvinism defined as the belief that men are superior to women, which had dictated France's societal power structure. Though social movements aimed at egalitarian efforts of marginalized groups would come to dominate the sphere of politics in the decades following the German occupation, the period ushered in swiftly after the Liberation would prove to be stagnating for gender equality.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

September 1st, 1939 marks the day Germany invaded Poland, signifying the catalyst that would launch the world into the infamous Second World War (Pollard 1998). A few days later, acting as loyal allies, France and Great Britain declared war on Germany. The commencement of the war was followed by a prolonged duration of inactivity known as "the Phony War", categorized as a period of despondency and uncertainty for the French soldiers on the front line (Shachtman 1983). The Allied powers employed a defensive strategy against the German army assuming they would be unable to penetrate what the French believed was the unassailable Maginot line (Shachtman 1983). The Maginot Line was a fortified border, constructed of weapons between France and Germany that distinguished the boundaries of each country that eventually proved to be penetrable by German forces during WWII (Christofferson & Christofferson 2006). On May 10, 1940 Germany initiated an attack on the Western Front

against Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands (Christofferson & Christofferson 2006). France and Britain rushed to their aid in hopes to prevent fighting on French soil (Christofferson & Christofferson 2006). Shortly after significant defeats of the Allied Powers, countries against Germany and their alliances, Germany began their scheme to subdue France's allegiance in the war. Hitler concentrated the brunt of the blitzkrieg on the Ardennes forest, assumed to be impregnable, while the concentration of French forces were occupied with assisting their allies in the north leaving this area nearly vacant of protection (Shachtman 1982). Within five days, Germany had captured five key cities and had successfully broken a ninety-kilometer gap through the Allied front (Christofferson & Christofferson 2006). France suffered their final military blow on May 26 in which German forces annihilated the remaining armies and captured a significant number of prisoners. The French government surrendered the capital by June 10 and on June 20, France succumbed to German forces (Christofferson & Christofferson 2006). On the 22, France officially surrendered to the Axis powers by signing the armistice, an agreement that officially recognized France's surrender to German forces, which ushered in the German Occupation over northern France (Christofferson & Christofferson 2006).

As a result of the Nazi invasion in the capital (Paris), the French government decided to resituate itself in a city called Vichy, located in the south of France in the Zone Libre ["Free Zone"], outside of the control of German Occupation (Rosbottom 2014). Marshal Philippe Pétain was a French general during World War I and the prime minister during the Third Republic before he was ordained as Chief of State under the Vichy Government (Griffiths 1972). During this week that Pétain signed the armistice, Germany imprisoned nearly one million soldiers as captives (Fishman 1991, 26). The humiliating defeat that defined France as incapable of protecting itself due to its essentially weak political and social infrastructure (Duchen 2000),

insinuated that a Republic was inefficacious of military victory and incapable of leading France. Pétain replaced the French Third Republic with the French State controlled by an authoritarian regime (Griffiths 1972). During this time Pétain and the Vichy government maintained direct collaborations with Germany during World War II, and by 1942, German Occupation was widespread in France after they vanquished the Zone Libre (Rosbottom 2014). The Vichy government cultivated nominal sovereignty that disguised the German Reich's de jure power over the entirety of France throughout the war.

German Occupation ignited a resistance force made up of both French men and women to fight off the German Occupation internally that consisted of approximately 2.3% of the total French population (Weitz 1995). They used guerilla tactics, published underground newspapers, guided escape routes for French militants, and provided intelligence on Germans to the French Provisional Government (Weitz 1995). External French forces established at the beginning of the war were collectively united under the French Provisional Government, situated in Algeria, which later served as an interim government after the liberation.

June 6, 1944, the D Day landings indicated the beginning of the Liberation in France (Christofferson & Christofferson 2006). On August 25, Germans relinquished the city of Paris from its realm of control (Christofferson & Christofferson 2006). The end of World War II, ending the wrath of German atrocities, was signed officially in 1945 with the Armistice of Reims (Duchen 2000). The Provisional Government oversaw the initial reconstruction of the French State following the devastations of WWII until the elections of 1947, which ushered in the French Fourth Republic (Christofferson & Christofferson 2006). The leaders of the Vichy government either fled the nation or were subject to show trials. Often these trials resulted in verdicts of treason and subsequent execution (Christofferson & Christofferson 2006). The

progressive political agenda that was aimed at national reconstruction was concentrated on distancing itself from Vichy's heinous regiment employed during the war.

VICHY'S REINSTALLATION OF PATRIARCHY

French officials of the Vichy régime were considered apostates to the Republic of France, who renounced the core ideals it was established upon: "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity". Instead they replaced this motto with a new one that would reinforce a return to pre-1789 greatness that held patriarchal power on the pedestal of national success: "Work, Family, Fatherland" (Perrot 1987). The traditionalist viewpoint held by Vichy officials "maintained that France had been a great power under the Old Régime" (Fishman 1991). They believed democracy had dismantled France's greatness by endorsing an omnipresent "false idea" of the natural equality of man, which plagued the nation of egoism, materialism, and individualism, that they believed were the ingredients of a deteriorating state (Pollard 1998). Pétain believed the French State was in need of a 'national revolution' that would restore France's former glory of the Old Régime. The foundation of the French State was structured upon a paternal vision of power that revolved around a strong, authoritarian father figure in the image of Pétain.

Patriarchal societies are founded on the oppression of women in order to preserve the power of male superiority that are the controllers of the state (Sultana 2010), and Vichy was no exception. With the absence of a significant portion of the male population due to captivity, Vichy intentionally adopted a strong male apparition projected by the state in order to compensate for decreased male presence in France during the war. The anti-feminist principles practiced by Vichy barely deviated from the precedent Republic's rhetoric that continually confined women to the household away from the public sphere of government control (Pollard 1998). The component of continuity "was represented by the absolute conventionality of Vichy's

public anti-feminist ideology and by the historical constructions of sexual difference on which it depended,” (Pollard 1998: 202). Vichy expanded and intensified a male chauvinistic approach to governing in order to maintain their power and cultivate greater control.

The Vichy Régime relied on gender politics that was instituted in the prescriptive knowledge of sexual differences in France established before WWII. According to Miranda Pollard (1998), patriarchy is sustained by preserving rigid gender roles dependent on strict conceptualization of domesticity and femininity. Women were continually seen as the guardians of the household and the conservators of the family, necessary for sustaining their inferiority to men in the public sphere (Pollard 1998). It is vital to understand the effect the Vichy’s reinstatement of an inflamed patriarchal ideology played on the aftermath of the Liberation in France. The political climate of legislation reform that describes the period following the war is exemplified in the paradox of the Fourth Republic adopting a progressive agenda, while simultaneously promoting the return to the stability provided by traditional ideologies (Pollard 1998). Both platforms employed to prevent another outbreak of global warfare and to reconstruct the French identity that had defined its prewar Western superiority and societal stability. Though Vichy provided a break from Republican ideologies, it continued its fervent gender ideologies designed to sustain patriarchal power that would still loom the years swiftly following the Liberation (Pollard 1998). It also exemplifies that conservative gender norms are not bound to governmental régimes, but rather to male chauvinistic attitudes that thrives on the inferiority of women in order to preserve male power in any form of government.

WOMEN’S EXPERIENCE DURING THE WAR

An approximate total of 1,850,000 men were taken as captives after their surrender to German forces (Diamond 1999). This left a vacuum in the labor force, which needed to be filled

in order to avoid economic and social turmoil of the nation. To remedy this issue, women were mobilized into factories or other sectors of the workforce that needed to be filled (Pollard 1998). During the German Occupation, women amassed functions that were exclusively men's prerogatives under France's Civil Code, such as "acting as heads of their households, making decisions about housing and the family budget. Women had to raise their children alone, impose discipline, and decide about educational plans" (Fishman 1991: xv). Households had been disturbed and women had to assume increased responsibility in order to survive. During a period of crisis under the Occupation, "women's role as protector of the family included taking such extraordinary measures as working outside the home for the sake of the family," (Fishman 1991: 58). Though women were not particularly thrilled to cumulate increased responsibilities (Diamond 2000), women valiantly accepted their duty to serve their family and their country during a tumultuous time.

During the war, survival dictated women's circumstances. This survival instinct to provide for the family prompted the majority of women to join the workforce, which changed the social groundwork of France's societal structure that had been heavily dictated by rigid gender roles (Pollard 1998). As a result, women become de facto heads of the household and accumulated a vast amount of independence whether they wanted to or not (Duchen 1994). This unaccustomed independence bestowed upon women during this time was caused by the absence of men and the need to survive during a period of national decay caused by the German Occupation.

Physical survival was a constant concern among women and played a significant role in women's experience during the Occupation. Food shortages began to manifest among the population during the summer of 1940 following the defeat of French forces (Diamond 1999).

Obtaining food became a prominent preoccupation among civilians, particularly women (Rosbottom 2014). It was another obstacle women had to learn to circumvent in order to ensure the survival of their family. There were two official forms of supplying food in German occupied France: rationing and queuing, methods the state instituted to attempt to assure the survival of the French population (Diamond 1999).

Rationing was introduced in September of 1940, just three months after the German Occupation (Diamond 1999). The government allocated a certain amount of resources to each citizen by supplying tickets that would be exchanged for food and supplies (Diamond 1999, Pollard 1998 & Rosbottom 2014). Ration cards were distributed monthly from the local town halls and often women had to travel quite a distance to retrieve them. “Everyone, rich and poor alike, had a quota of what they could buy to eat, as well as how much heating fuel they were allowed and the clothes they could acquire,” (Diamond 1991: 50). Pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers were given special cards that gave them a more generous milk ration and allowed them to go directly to the front of the queue (Pollard 1998). Throughout the years of 1940 and 1941 various legislations under the Vichy Régime permitted certain families that met specific qualifications to obtain a card that allowed them to jump to the front of the queue and provided certain rations (Pollard 1998). These qualifications were often determined based on number of children inhabiting the same household and of a certain age (Pollard 1998). It was also based on employment of parents (Pollard 1998).

Deliveries of products were irregular and frequent delays of resources were not uncommon (Diamond 1999). This was a frustrating process because no one was ever aware of when deliveries would arrive, which resulted in a “first come, first serve” system rather than respecting the rationing tickets (Rosbottom 2014). This process was another struggle for women

in their daily schedules which were preoccupied with providing support and stability for their families. The only way to legally accrue rations was to shop before goods would run out and because everyone had the same idea it axiomatically led to queues (Diamond 1999). In order to procure resources, queuing was a necessity for women's survival. Queuing meant losing several hours from one's day, hours that could have been delegated towards other tasks. It was not uncommon to arrive at the front of the queue to be informed there are no longer any goods available (Diamond 1999 & Rosbottom 2014), losing precious hours to come home empty handed and required to restart the next day in order to feed and dress their families.

It was made a requirement for citizens to register with their local shopkeeper in order to prevent interminable lines and create a more just system that would adequately distribute resources fairly (Diamond 1999). Lines were exhaustively long and often pregnant women and mothers of large families would not benefit from jumping to the front of queues because it caused much resentment from other women (Diamond 1999). It was commonly known that one who invested time queuing would obtain something. It took effort to reorganize one's day around queuing and adapting to the process of rationing generated encumbrance among women (Pollard 1998).

The private and public sphere converged during the years of the Occupations and gender norms dissipated as life became increasingly concentrated on daily survival. The doctrine of separate spheres is a term used to describe the distinction between the separation of home and work that have inherent social status and stigmas associated to both domains (Wharton 2012). Before the war, the doctrine of separate spheres was an integral part of French societal infrastructure and it fueled continual subordination of women in relation to men (Kelly 2004). However, the war changed the groundwork of society as the majority of men were absent and

women shouldered the brunt of societal obligations previously held by their male counterparts, essential for the survival of the nation and the family (Perrot 1987). As a result, the doctrine of separate spheres was dismantled in accordance to women becoming not only caregivers of the household but also of the nation, which generated greater independence and welded female dominance during this period (Wharton 2012). Nonetheless, this female empowerment does not necessarily mean it was embraced by women as a whole (Fishman 1991). The mindset of women was concentrated on their survival and the survival of their family; increased independence was an unintended consequence that was not necessarily welcomed or cherished among all French women of this era.

Predating World War II, France, alongside her Western neighbors, was an incredibly androcentric society (Weiner 2001). As previously mentioned, France sustained a doctrine of separate spheres in which patriarchal ideals controlled social norms. These social norms were tethered to a gender hierarchy in which women were subordinate to men. Consequently, men and women were socialized in this context of male breadwinner and female caregiver relationships where men maintained significant influence in society and the household (Colvin 2012). Citizens internalized gendered characteristics that regarded women as second class citizens in a society that attributed male normativity as the status quo (Sultana 2012 & Weiner 2001). This internalization resulted in citizens acquiring a sense of self based on gender differences and inequalities. This concept sheds light on women's mindsets following the war and their willingness to disown their independence they had accumulated during the Occupation. Instead of building upon their independence and cultivating female empowerment by embracing female autonomy free from misogynistic ascendancy, women readily relinquished their position in the workforce and returned to their previous roles within the walls of the home (Colvin 2012,

Duchen 2000 & Weiner 2001). Hanna Diamond (1999) argues that “women had learnt to deal with responsibility, going to work, making decisions and resolving material and administrative problems” (p. 159). This heightened responsibility resulted in women’s willingness to renounce their position in society to the returning prisoners of war (POWs) because these accumulated responsibilities were not chosen by women but bestowed upon them from men’s absence. The Occupation unintentionally paved a path towards equality among genders by providing the opportunity for women to demonstrate their equality. However, following the Liberation, rather than crusading towards female independence, women receded towards the previous model of oppression under a patriarchal power structure (Fishman 1991). The majority of women resorted to a familial societal structure that had sustained stability and comfort, unlike the war years that instituted abiding turmoil and despair among women.

Perpetual worry existed among women for the men who had become war captives and the prognosis of France’s future without them. Sarah Fishman (1991) documented the responses of the wives of prisoners of war; one respondent, Louise Cadieu, noted that “for six years experienced a great anxiety for my husband,” (p. 64). Another respondent, Francine Louvet, described the burdens of her anxiety began to inflict stress upon her children because she was “rarely available and irritable due to the heavy responsibilities of the very difficult life I had to lead” (Fishman 1991: 72). The pressures of women accumulating double the responsibilities by inheriting the position of their husbands as head of household as well as maintaining their role as caregiver, generated considerable anxiety within the family and the daily lives of women. The constant fear and anxiety produced during the war created a desire among women for stability that had been innate to men’s role in society as the breadwinners of the household.

During the war, women underwent grueling experiences that perpetuated a great ordeal of

hardships, heavy burdens, and overwhelming responsibilities. As a result, in lieu of generating a desire to maintain independence following the Liberation, this experience induced a widespread inclination for the idyllic prewar family structure in which women would have emotional support and shared responsibilities with their husbands. According to Fishman (1991), women began to yearn for stability and support that was absent due to husband's military obligation to serve away from the home, many becoming prisoners of war after the Armistice, resulting in their absences for well over five chaotic years.

WOMEN'S RIGHT TO VOTE

The Liberation was the watershed moment for France during WWII, which was accompanied by an inundation of policy legislation and administration reform that was largely concerned with reconstruction. The pinnacle of these social reforms through political legislation was women's enfranchisement enacted by General Charles De Gaulle in 1944 (Jenson 1984). Women were officially granted the right to vote by the provisional government in April, just several months before the D-Day landings in June that would mark the inauguration of the Liberation to free France from German Occupation (Duchen 2005).

Historians argue that women's political emancipation was a strategic ploy initiated to proffer support to the conservative party whose political agenda was to return to prewar conditions of a patriarchal authority formulated around a gender power structure (Weitz 1995 & Diamond 1999). De Gaulle represented the conservative party during the elections of 1947. Granting the right to vote meant securing a wealth of support by female voters who "would be tantamount to giving a vote to the Church and therefore to the political right," (Diamond 2000: 730). France had been straggling behind other Western nations in the realm of women's suffrage for the past decade; when they did decide to accord women the right to vote near the end of the

war it “was probably no more than a measure aiming to correct this anomaly; as well as to provide electoral support for General de Gaulle, in whose gift the vote seemed to be,” (Duchen 1994: 34). Granting women suffrage was a political advantage for France and more specifically the conservative right.

Women’s suffrage was publicized as a reward to women for their valiant contributions as resisters to the war in the name of the Fatherland (Weitz 1995). The euphoria associated with female enfranchisement perpetrated a sense of patriotism in which women as a group of citizens were seen as gallant resisters against the German Occupation (Kelly 2004). This clouded the true political premise of granting this ordinance that attempted to benefit a small group of right-winged men initiated to maintain a seat of power of the nation. The rhetoric employed to advertise women’s enfranchisement contributed to the nationalistic political agenda that would attempt to guarantee “France’s prominence as a world power and to ensure harmony,” (Weitz 1995: 305). The propaganda of this rhetoric was to disseminate the notion that France was a country of resisters and were working together to reconstruct the nation (Colvin 2012). This concept also alleviated the guilt felt by France after their humiliating defeat at the beginning of the war, which led to four dreadful years of despair under the German Occupation, by promoting a sense of unity through strength (Kelly 2004). This exchanged the abiding shame perceived during the war with the idea that France was a collective front, assembled of citizens who worked together to defeat the enemy and rebuild their country. The political rhetoric surrounding women’s enfranchisement that circulated following the liberation constructed the idea that defeat did not crumble morale nor did it destroy hope (Weitz 1995). This discourse curtails women’s efforts precedent to WWII who fought for equality and ignores the history of female activism that crusaded for these rights as an inherent obligation to mankind.

According to the language employed by the government, progression was seen as the ultimate solution in order to cleave itself from the precedent power structure controlled by the German occupation. It became commonplace to deduce that women were “awarded” the right to vote by De Gaulle for their gallant contribution towards the war effort (Weitz 1995). An example provided by a newspaper article in Toulouse exemplifies the language broadcasted in correspondence to women’s rights:

The considerable role played by women in the Resistance had the effect of breaking down old prejudices. By showing that they knew how to fight and die for their ideal as well as if not better than men, women had convinced even the most skeptical of their attitude to participate in political life (Latapie 1944: 15).

This promulgated discourse devalued women’s inherent equality with men by insinuating that women before the war were not seen as worthy of the vote nor of having the ability to adequately exercise the same rights as men (Duchen 2000). Another newspaper article illustrated how women during the war had proven they could fight alongside men, not as inferior, but as equal combatants. It proclaimed, “French women led, for four years, side by side with men, the war against oppressors. They revealed themselves to be [men’s] equals in the hours of danger. They have won the right to be [men’s] equals in liberated France” (*Combat* 1944: 2). This language insinuates that women had never been equal to men until they had to prove their worth during WWII because they had the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to valiantly fight for their country alongside men. Only when society was in perilous danger, women were given the chance to fight for their nation without being condoned as inferior or ridiculed as ludicrous (Weiner 2001). The dominant patriarchal society structure was dismantled during the German occupation when French men were largely absent, which provided women the opportunity to display their inherent ability to show courage and intelligence equal to their male counterparts.

The renewed Constitution of the Fourth Republic instituted in 1946 was established by

the Provisional government following the retraction of German troops thus eradicating the German Occupation (Christofferson & Christofferson 2006). The outset of the refurbished constitution clearly states the equality among all citizens and the vitality to cultivate an egalitarian society after the devastation of the war. The following sections were incorporated into the French Fourth Republic's constitution that stated:

“[Section 3] the law guarantees women equal rights to those of men in all spheres. [Section 12] The Nation proclaims the solidarity and equality of all French people in bearing the burden resulting from national calamities,” (Preamble of the French Fourth Republic's Constitution 1946).

These clauses illustrates that French women had come to possess full political rights as citizens of their nation. Women were legally recognized as equals to men and thus worthy to the same opportunities and rights that had been long deprived to them. The new constitution was drafted by the National Assembly and was elected by all adult French men and women (Duchen 1994). This further highlighted the sovereignty of the people in solidarity to promote equality and more prominently, to detach any association to the Vichy political reign.

Many women did not completely exercise their newly founded political rights once granted suffrage in France in 1944, which was due to women's distractions with other priorities in their daily lives that they did not perceive as requiring political attention (Diamond 2000). Therefore, most women did not seek a greater political platform to voice their concerns because women considered the household as an external entity from the reigns of politics and thus saw no reason to participate if it did not apply or impinge on their role as caregiver (Jenson 1984). Women during this era had been socialized as young girls to view the division of separate spheres unique to both men and women, in which neither realm impeded on the other's ability to properly fulfill their roles (Weiner 2001). Consequently, femininity was categorized as antithetical to politics (Colvin 2012). As a result, when women were granted the right to vote,

alongside other political rights through legislation, they did not perceive it as a tool to ameliorate their aptitude for caregiving and thus did not feel the need to expand their political rights outside of those granted following the Liberation. The provisional government and later the French Fourth Republic did not seek to promote women's political activism because men in power also did not perceive women's participation as incremental to the reconstruction of the state (Jenson 1984). Hence the campaign for gender equality was a torpid movement that resulted in stagnation succeeding the war because it was seen as a trivial pursuit in comparison to the reconstruction of France.

Women's enfranchisement did not come from a place of justice, but instead from a subconscious discriminative tendency to appeal to the male chauvinistic mentality designed to uphold male dominancy (Weitz 1995). Nevertheless, this legislation with misplaced intentions of promoting patriarchal power rather than egalitarian efforts would eventually prove to be incremental towards gender equality in the social movements of the 1960s, though it was not an instantaneous process that was seen directly after the war.

LES FEMMES TONDUES

French citizens felt the need to purge the nation from any affiliation with the Vichy régime and the Nazi Occupiers by punishing individuals who had created relations and aided the enemy during the war (Kelly 2004). The French Fourth Republic repudiated any connection with the Vichy government by purging the perfidious officials who plagued France of social and financial instability (Ducheb 2000). Ordinary citizens who had collaborated were also targeted criminals seen as renegades against France. French citizens who collaborated with the Nazi infiltrators during the *Années Noir* (the Dark Years) were seen as traitors to the French state, enablers of the enemy's power and contributors to the depletion of morale (Duchen 2005 &

Diamond 1999). The majority of female collaborators were incriminated by an informal tribunal who would deem any form of suspected ‘intimate’ involvement with a German as an act of betrayal to the nation (Virgili 2002). Sexual relations were not seen as equitable reason for incarceration in terms of judiciary law and they were “not included in the definition of ‘national indignity’, punishable by national degradation, and usually did not reach the courts” (Duchen 2005: 234). Nonetheless, they were punished for being an adversary of France. Women guilty of collaborating were often tried by unofficial tribunals created to launch trials that would persecute individuals who committed treason not recognized by state law (Virgili 2002). The panels were often constructed by men of organized resistance groups (Virgili 2002). The accused women were frequently punished informally by shaving their heads followed by parading the repugnant individuals around villages as a tool of humiliation and deprecation (Kelly 2004). Below is a vivid description of an instance detailing the process of the shameful assault against women accused of sexual collaborations with the enemy:

“With hardly any clothes on, branded with the sign of the swastika and smeared with a particularly sticky tar, after having received cutting jibes, they would go and have their heads shaved in the regular way and would then look like so many strange convicts. Begun on the evening before, this merciless hunt would go on throughout the day, much to the great pleasure of the local people who would form ranks in the streets to watch these women walk past wearing Wehrmacht caps,” (Comité départemental de la Libération, 1944).

These women were subjected to the insults and blows from the crowd who condoned their behavior and actions during the war. The punishment was meant to disgrace the perpetrators of treason and infiltrate a sense of inferiority among women (Duchen 2005). The act of shaving a woman's head was a tool to permeate ignominy among female collaborators in France.

The homes of women who were suspected of ‘horizontal’ collaborations became primary targets of repossession of the locality to purge the French households from the condemnation bestowed upon French patriarchy by these “loathsome female culprits” (Mémoires de Civils

2015). The arrest of these women often took place in front of their homes while crowds gathered out front to witness the denunciation of these women's betrayal to their country (Virgili 2002).

Below is a personal documentation of a woman's experience as she was arrested and persecuted for her crimes of obtaining sexual relations with German occupiers:

They came back at 21:20 hrs accompanied by three men and many other people from the town. When they arrived they attacked me first. B and someone I didn't know held me by the arms, while another I also did not know, cut my hair off with scissors. When they had finished cutting off my hair, A and B took a paintbrush and plastered my face with coal tar. After that these men set about cutting off my mother's hair and didn't do anything else to me. As a result my arms and legs are covered with marks from their blows (Police report in Chemillé, 1944).

The passage above reflects the experience and humiliation of the punishments against female collaborators that were incredibly demeaning.



Figure 1: A photograph of an anonymous women being shaved by two men in front of an audience.

Women who were accused of sexually collaborating with Germans were seen as citizens who had renounced their morals and ethical principles that represented the foundation of female demeanor in France (Duchen 2005, Kelly 2004 & Virgili 2002).

“[Female Collaborators] played the same role as the killer, a hired assassin. And when they sold their bodies to the men of the Gestapo and of the militia, they sold

the bloods of their French brothers, because there was nothing left in them that was representative of true French woman,” (*Travailleur alpin* 1944).

The snippet in the newspaper editorial above depicts the resentment the population of France held against women who had collaborated because they had disgraced not only their male counterparts but also their country. In the eyes of France, their contemptible actions stripped them of their womanhood and shamed them of their humanity and they were no different than the enemy's reprehensible actions carried out during the war (Duchen 2005 & Kelly 2004). Consequently, citizens believed female collaborators were deserving of their punishment appropriate for culprits of treason (Virgili 2002).

Men who carried out the humiliating punishments against female collaborators feared that women's enfranchisement would create societal instability that would create a fragile political and economic system (Kelly 2004 & Virgili 2002). The indicted female collaborators were paraded as individuals who would uphold corrupted beliefs that would be translated into their ballot, which would infiltrate mayhem across France if given the right to vote. Thus the shavings were a tool used to dissuade them from submitting a ballot because they would be distinguished by their shaved heads and would be too intimidated from voting out of fear of further humiliation (Cobb 1983). The reversion towards conservative gender roles triggered by shorn women that was relatively tied to the political ramifications of women suffrage in France created a solidified anxiety among men that was provoked by the fear of the collapse of the doctrine of separate spheres that would potentially diminish male power in the public sphere.

The head-shearing episodes embraced a symbolic message that warned women they should “revert to their pre-established patriarchal defined roles,” (Diamond 1999: 141). Women had to apprehend their position in society as second to the male patriarchal order that needed to be reestablished following the Liberation in order to restore stability of society (Kelly 2004).

Women's tremendous contributions during the war towards the economy and Resistance movement irritated men's sense of incompetency to fulfill their role as protectors of the nation. Men's response to their humiliation and women's increased independence was to relinquish their anger on the women who were suspected of betraying the country, which men condemned as worse than failing the country in order to alleviate their guilt and reprimand women's failures to uphold their morality (Diamond 2000; Kelly 2004; Weitz 1995). The crystallized images of shorn women disseminated throughout newspapers expressed the cautionary message to all French women to not divert from their prescribed role because there would be severe consequences (Kelly 2004). The shavings were a misogynistic tool employed to reinstate men's superior position in society.



Figure 2: Two anonymous women paraded on the streets of a village surrounded by a group of armed men in the Resistance. They are marked with the emblems of a femmes tondues (shaved head, painted swastikas, partially unclothed)

People regarded collaborators as individuals who betrayed not only France, but also the patriarchal society by defying traditional gender roles through the solicitation of promiscuous behavior to the enemy (Virgili 2002). The act of shaving collaborator's head became a

widespread act of solidarity against impure women who contributed to the ruination of France's dominant infrastructure rooted in traditional gender division of labor, emanating the dominance of male authority at the expense of the subordination of women (Colvin 2012). Fabrice Virgili (2002) proclaims that "the parading of women in the street acted as a way of reappropriating public space which had been taken over by the Vichy régime and the Germans with their propaganda posters and posted commands to the population," (p. 62). The intentions of the *tonte* was to cleanse France of the abhorrent malice imposed by the Vichy Régime and German Occupation that had contaminated the country for four devastating years.

The shavings served to rectify men's self-contempt as inadequate servants to the state (Kelly 2004). The majority of the perpetrators for the *tonte* were men suspected to have participated in collaborations themselves and were anxious to prove their allegiance to France (Kelly 2004 & Virgili 2002). Diamond (1999) contended that the precipitated defeat of the French by German forces at the beginning of WWII, followed by the Nazi occupation made French men feel emasculated. Manhood had been acutely undermined by the war and thus, after the Liberation, men felt obligated to reinstate their male normativity in society that had allowed them to "exercise their rule over women as the natural order of things," (Kelly 2004: 117).

Women who were accused of 'horizontal collaborations', did not necessarily commit acts of sexual fraternization with the enemy. According to an interview conducted by Hanna Diamond (1999) of individuals inhabiting German occupied France during WWII, one respondent noted that "for many people, to have seen a woman with a German was enough to condemn them" (p. 82). This reveals how shavings of suspected sexual collaborations were incredibly symbolic. French women who were accused of surrendering their body or simply chastely consorting with Germans during the war were a metaphorical representation to France's

surrender to German enforcement. French woman encapsulated the image of France (Weiner 2001). Consequently, the shavings were figurative purge of France's ineptitude to sustain purity and allowed France to cleanse itself from the remnants of the German Occupation.

The shavings enabled "French people to rediscover their true identity in an image of their country, which had become ill-defined and elusive" due to the German invasion of France (Virgili 2002: 219). It was an integral part of restoring the Republican patriarchal order that was seen "as a catharsis necessary for the reconstruction of the country," (Duchen 2005: 241). The purges paved the path towards the reassertion of male dominance and intensified the image of men as the protectors of the nation from enemies who had poisoned the country by imposing turmoil and dismantling the ideals of the Republic.

The French population was profoundly humiliated by the Occupation and the defeat (Kelly 2004). As a result, the Liberation served the necessary means required to reconstruct a national identity that had been destroyed by shame and anguish due to the war. The social shame fueled a strong sense of misogyny and violence towards women who were the targets of patriotic anger and male embarrassment (Virgili 2002). The desperate desire to rebuild a national identity rooted in virile masculinity essential to returning to male domination motivated the shearings of female collaborators. This explains the reason the *tonte* was incredibly urgent at this moment in order to reconstruct a national identity in which French men reclaimed their position in society (Virgili 2002). This form of punishment bestowed upon on the female body condones the perpetrator's body that is accused of betraying the country and thus this "grotesque carnival" insinuates that women have the right to vote now that they were granted suffrage but their bodies do not belong to them (Kelly 2004). The female body of a collaborator came to symbolize "a stain by the enemy, the loss of national identity, the dangers of cultural assimilation and even

more virulently, the fear that the French nation would disappear altogether,” (Virgili 2002: 239). The shearings of female collaborators represented the wash needed to remove the ‘stain’ left by the enemies. The intense rationale for cleansing and a purification of society is seen as a desire for a better future rooted in virility.

CONCLUSION

Four perpetual years of occupation with the French economy entirely tailored towards the German war efforts, plus the desecration precipitated by the Liberation and German withdrawal from power had left France in a state of disrepair. France desired a moral coherence while simultaneously dealing with the aftermath of the German occupation, which yielded the inclination towards conservative gender roles and a nostalgia for stability. “The Liberation was a key moment of transition, its identity belonging neither to the past nor the future, but implicating both,” (Duchen 2005: 233). The period following the Occupation and the yet unknown future of the nation created a limbo of uncertainty and anxiety among the population who craved for a fresh start that separated them from the *Années Noir*, while also desiring the return to normality of pre-war conditions. This created a paradoxical period that was defined by a crusade for progressive innovation of the state and a determination to return to a stable society seen before World War II.

Wartime did not empower women by assigning increased independence under chaotic circumstances, but instead instituted a visceral craving for stability deriving from an unavailable husband not present in the household during the war years, which consequently proliferated female anxiety during this period (Fishman 1991). The experiences of the war on women did not empower them in the sense of encouraging gender equality because men reclaimed their role as the dominant figure of power in society and the majority of women did not hesitate to relinquish

their position (Fishman 1991). Many believed that returning soldiers was synonymous with returning to the stability produced by the delegation of responsibilities among both male and female citizens.

The day-to-day struggles of the oppression women dealt with during the pre-war era transcended to the post-war period. Further, legislation that was introduced to expand women's rights did not bring substantial change to their lives. Following the Liberation, women lost a significant degree of autonomy they had gained during the war when men returned from captivity (Fishman 1991). Men recovered their position in society as the breadwinner of the household and the archetypal figure of the superiority complex long cherished in a patriarchal society. Women gained significant rights granted to promote equal status to men in the eyes of the state after the war, however, French society remained immensely conservative that sustained attitudes corresponding to the period before the war, which upheld a traditional division of labor appropriate for citizens gender (Diamond 1999).

The Liberation and women's enfranchisement in France that was swiftly initiated following the end of WWII would prove to have little significance in a collective, revolutionary movement of gender roles. On the contrary, there would be a re-establishment and enforcement of gender-specific boundaries promulgated by media and political rhetoric (Colvin 2012). The Provisional Government attempted to dissuade and prevent a solidified women's movement to enter the public sphere of politics in order to sustain a male dominant sphere of influence by returning to pre-war conditions of governing France (Weitz 1995). Lucie Aubrac was a distinguished female activist and a prominent French resistor during WWII. She noticed a restoration of male superiority in the political realm of government following the Liberation when she noted that, "The return to prewar political structures, the fastidious games of a formal

and often fawning parliamentarism, and - why not - the masculine atavism which returned to ways of thinking, distanced women from becoming representatives of the country,” (Aubrac 1977: 21). The patriarchal reversion in politics distanced women from becoming active political agents for the government by maintaining chauvinistic attitudes that oppress women away from the public sphere. The state propagated the return to traditional gender roles, which they advertised would restore stability because society would be built upon the pillars of a patriarchal power structure and sexual division of labor tethered to a gender hierarchy in which females are subordinate to males (Weiner 2001). The exclusion of women in political discourse following the Liberation illuminates the long-standing oppression of women who were seen as a threat to the patriarchal, capitalist structure of power within the state (Perrot 1987 & Weiner 2001). This exclusion of women also prevented the nation from progressing towards global eminence because it produced an imbalance within the power structure that would later create popular rebuke of the French government.

A fervent gender ideology was reintroduced in society following the Liberation for political means, in order to maintain a patriarchal power structure and a national rejuvenation, which would overthrow a poisoned system imposed by the Germans during their occupation of France (Pollard 1998). The purpose was to purge France of the execrable ties with Germany, including citizens whom committed odious acts of treason through various forms of collaborations.

The punishments inflicted upon French women who had been suspected of having sexual liaisons with a German official was intended to eliminate any correspondence of the newly founded French Fourth Republic from the German Occupation and Vichy Régime (Virgili 2002). It was an unofficial systematic attempt to persecute women for their betrayal and designed to

reconstruct male superiority by producing a message to women that if they do not align with traditional gender normativity there would be consequences. It was a tool created to compensate men's guilt for failing the country as guardians of the nation and the household after the surrender to German forces at the beginning of the war, which escorted the German Occupation in France resulting in perennial disorder for four years.

The dreadful experiences of war for France came to represent a catalyst for national renewal. Despite the pain, loss, and death that corrupted this period for all civilians, the Liberation provided a gateway towards reconstruction of the French state in order to restore their dignity. The post-war period was designated to restore "the moral order of the country by endeavoring to apportion blame and mete out punishments," (Diamond 2000: 731). Nonetheless, equality among men and women was not at the forefront of the French reconstruction agenda following the upheaval perpetrated by the War (Diamond 1999).

The Liberation was not a "liberation" for women; in contrast, the price of reconstructing the French nation meant restoring subordination of French women (Colvin 2012; Diamond 1999; Fishman 1991; Kelly 2004). France was interested in augmenting its status as a superior Western power and reinstating a powerful society created to champion righteousness nationally and globally (Kelly 2004). During the process of reconstruction that focused on "glossing over less salubrious aspects of the war, celebrated glorious ones, and presented France as a stable nation, one with a firm commitment to liberal democracy and a long history of glory," (Colvin 2012: 91). Gender equality and human rights did not create a vanguard movement after the liberation but would later be established by the children of the war in the social movements of the 1960s.

REFERENCES

- Aubrac, Lucie. 1977. *Les Femmes dans la Résistance*. Paris: Union des Femmes Francais (UFF).
- Christofferson, Thomas R. & Mihael S. Christofferson. 2006. *France during World War II: from Defeat to Liberation*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Colvin, Kelly Ricciardi. 2012. "Solidarity or Suspicion: Gender, Enfranchisement, and Popular Culture in Liberation France." *Journal of Women's History* 24(2): 89-114.
- Cobb, Richard. 1983. "Paris Collaborationism: French and Germans." Pp. 57-144 in *French and Germans, Germans and French: A personal interpretation of France under two occupations 1914–1918/1940–1944*. Hanover, PA: University Press of New England.
- Combat. 1944. "Mme Fillatre adjointe au maire et dont le mari fut fusillé comme otage a célébré hier un mariage à la mairie du XVIIIe." September 24, 2.
- Comité départemental de la Libération (CDL). 1944. *La Libération de Troyes*. 25-27 August, Troyes.
- Departmental Archives of Maine-et-Loire. 1944. Police report in Chemillé. September 5, 95W.
- Diamond, Hanna. 2000. "A New Dawn? French Women and the Liberation." *Women's Studies International Forum* 23(6): 729-738.
- Diamond, Hanna. 1999. *Women and the Second World War in France, 1939–1948*. Philadelphia: Trans-Atlantic Publications.
- Duchen, Claire. 2000. *When the War Was Over: Women, War, and Peace in Europe, 1940-1956*. New York: Leicester University Press.
- Duchen, Claire. 2005. "Crime and Punishment in Liberation France: The Case of les femmes tondues." Pp. 233-250 in *Women's Rights and Women's Lives in France 1944-1968*, edited by C. Duchon and I. Bandhauer-Schoffmann. New York: Routledge.
- Fishman, Sarah. 1991. *We Will Wait: Wives of French Prisoners of War, 1940-1945*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- French Fourth Republic Constitution, Preamble, Sections 3 & 12.
- Griffiths, Richard. 1972. *Pétain: a biography of Marshal Philippe Pétain of Vichy*. New York: Doubleday.
- Jenson, Jane. 1984. "The Liberation and New Rights for French Women." Pp. 272-284 in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, edited by M. R. Higonnet. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

- Kelly, Michael. 2004. "Regendering the Nation." Pp. 106-126 in *The Cultural and Intellectual Rebuilding of France after the Second World War*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Latapie, Danial. 1944. "For Women's access to Political Life," *Libérer et Fédérer*, January, p. 15.
- Mémoires de Civils. 2014. "Les femmes tondues." Youtube website. Retrieved January 27, 2017 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=toKdvc-q1Ww>).
- Perrot, Michelle. 1987. "The New Eve and the Old Adam: Changes in French Women's Condition at the Turn of the Century." Translated by Helen Harden-Chenut. Pp. 51-60 in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, edited by M. R. Higonnet. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Pollard, Miranda. 1998. *Reign of Virtue: Mobilizing Gender in Vichy France*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Rosbottom, Ronald C. 2014. *When Paris Went Dark: The City of Light Under German Occupation, 1940-1944*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Shachtman, Tom. 1982. *The Phony War, 1939-1940*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Sultana, Abeda. 2010. "Patriarchy and Women's Subordination: A Theoretical Analysis." *The Art Faculty Journal* 4: 1-18.
- Travailleur alpin*. 1944. Newspaper editorial. September 15
- Virgili, Fabrice. 2002. *Shorn Women: Gender and Punishment in Liberation France*. Translated by John Flower. Oxford, UK: Berg.
- Weiner, Susan. 2001. *Enfants Terribles: Youth and Femininity in the Mass Media in France, 1945-1968*. Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Weitz, Margaret Collins. 1995. *Sisters in the Resistance: How Women Fought to Free France, 1940-1945*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Wharton, Amy S. 2012. *The Sociology of Gender: An Introduction to Theory and Research*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.