

## The Journal of the Communist Resister, Lucienne Maertens

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The focus of this article is an analysis of the journal of the communist resister, Lucienne Maertens. Maertens kept a journal detailing her activities in Paris from October 1943 through to July 1944. For the first five months of this time she was liaison for the Union des Femmes Françaises (UFF) and after that she worked with the Francs-Tireurs et Partisans (FTP). Throughout the course of her journal she discusses the activities of hundreds of women working as part of the women's branch of the communist resistance. The sheer range of women's jobs and responsibilities evidenced in Maertens's journal illustrates the need to investigate further female resistance. Her journal is significant because Maertens was a leader of local women's resistance groups. Her detailed notes provide evidence of the extent to which women were engaged in communist resistance networks. A discussion of Maertens's journal can provide confirmation and a broadening of the knowledge of women's involvement in resistance networks. The aim of this article is to give an overview of Maertens's journal and demonstrate how it can be used in a detailed study of women in communist resistance networks. This will illustrate that women were engaged to a greater extent than what the historiography has currently established. Resistance networks used women differently than men. Women's movements were subject to less suspicion than men's which allowed them to attend more meetings and gave them the opportunity to collect supplies. Furthermore, women were not searched as men were by the French police or German soldiers, allowing them to carry papers, weapons or equipment such as typewriters more safely. In order to understand how the work of female and male resisters complemented and differed from

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each other it is important and necessary to further investigate female resisters. Research that reveals female resistance in greater detail can expand the knowledge of the realities of resisters' lives. It can bring to light the techniques they used to protect their identities and their subversive behavior as well as how they managed to survive in the difficult conditions of Occupied France. Through a discussion of Maertens's journal this article will demonstrate how research concerning women in communist resistance networks can contribute to a broadening of the knowledge of resistance. The large numbers of women and the responsibility and initiative adopted by them as part of communist networks in particular is not yet clearly established by the existing historiography.<sup>2</sup> Communist women's organization of their own gender-specific groups to complement the work of active male units was a tactic unique to them. The experiences of women in communist networks will thus provide a different and informative study of women resisters.

Studies such as that of Henry Rousso, Pierre Nora, John Sweets and Richard Golsan have emphasized the complexities of the memory and historiography of France during the Second World War.<sup>3</sup> The historiography has gone through many different periods due to French citizens' extremely diverse wartime experiences. Distinct periods have seen the research focus shift to different aspects of life during the Occupation. In the immediate post-war period the focus was on armed resistance groups, external resistance and how these groups functioned and were organized.<sup>4</sup> The next stage began in the late 1960s and focused on the collaboration of the French authorities and people with the occupying German authorities. The post-war "resistancialist myth" was exchanged for the perception that the majority of the French population had been at best tacit collaborators and at worst overt collaborators.<sup>5</sup> Works examining the history of the Holocaust also appeared in the later stages of this historiographical period.<sup>6</sup> Women were virtually non-existent in the literature

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<sup>2</sup> Works concerning communist resistance mention women only in passing rather than drawing attention to their involvement as a unique aspect of communist resistance networks. See for example: Stéphane Courtois, *Le PCF dans la guerre: De Gaulle, la Résistance, Staline...* (Paris, 1980); Charles Tillon, *On chantait rouge* (Paris, 1977); Albert Ouzoulias, *Les fils de la nuit* (Paris, 1975).

<sup>3</sup> See Henri Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass, 1991); Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire* (Paris, 1997); John F. Sweets, "Hold that Pendulum!: Redefining Fascism, Collaborationism and Resistance in France," *French Historical Studies* 15, no. 4 (1988): 731-58; Richard J. Golsan, *Vichy's Afterlife: History and Counter History in Postwar France* (Lincoln and London, 2000). See also Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944* (Oxford, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> See for example, Dominique Veillon, *Le Franc-Tireur: un journal clandestine, un mouvement de Résistance, 1940-1944* (Paris, 1977); Henri Michel, *Les courants de pensée de la Résistance* (Paris, 1962); H. Michel, *Jean Moulin: L'Unificateur* (Paris, 1964); Marie Granet and Henri Michel, *Combat: histoire d'un mouvement de Résistance* (Paris, 1957); Marie Granet, *Ceux de la Résistance* (Paris, 1964); M. R. D. Foot, *Résistance* (London, 1976); M. R. D. Foot, *SOE in France: An Account of the Work of the British Special Operations Executive in France, 1940-1944* (London, 1966); Robert Aron, *Histoire de Vichy* (Paris, 1954).

<sup>5</sup> See Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order 1940-1944*, Morningside Edition (New York, 1982); Marcel Ophuls, *The Sorrow and the Pity: A Film* (New York, 1972); Ted Morgan, *An Uncertain Hour: The French, the Germans, the Jews, the Klaus Barbie trial, and the City of Lyon, 1940-1945* (New York, 1990); Philippe Burrin, *France under the Germans: Collaboration and Compromise* (New York, 1996); Carmen Callil, *Bad Faith: A Forgotten History of Family and Fatherland* (London, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> See Michael Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews* (New York, 1981); Donna Ryan, *The Holocaust and the Jews of Marseille: The Enforcement of Anti-Semitic Policies in Vichy France*

throughout these early periods, but two things happened to change this status quo in the late 1980s. First, social histories began to broaden the focus to include the day-to-day experiences of French citizens. A debate began which resulted in the expansion of the definition of resistance. Second, the wave of popular and academic feminism meant that women began to be the subject of historical research throughout all periods of history. With an expanded definition of resistance that included the support tasks often performed by women, the development of the historiography had reached a point by the late 1980s that women's broader contribution to resistance could feature throughout the 1990s.

Historians such as Margaret Collins Weitz, Hanna Diamond, Claire Andrieu, Marianne Monestier and Ania Francos published research that brought women in the resistance to the fore.<sup>7</sup> During the 1980s and 1990s substantial works were written focusing entirely on female resisters in various resistance movements.<sup>8</sup> During the 1990s and into the 2000s general histories of the resistance incorporated the contributions of female resisters.<sup>9</sup> Local histories throughout this period also included women's experiences of the Occupation of France.<sup>10</sup> The historiography of women's resistance, however, still needs development. Recent works that focus solely on women's contributions continue to argue for women's widespread inclusion as essential resisters.<sup>10</sup> Women's involvement has been established to the extent that general histories acknowledge their contribution as resisters, yet women are still not included in general histories in a meaningful way that accurately reflects their day-to-day contributions.<sup>11</sup> For example, Paula Schwartz's work in the 1990s focused on women in communist resistance networks.<sup>12</sup> She concentrated on a number of different roles women performed as members of the communist resistance but her conclusions have not been meaningfully developed since. My research, of which this article is a small part, focuses on women in communist networks with the aim of developing further what is known of women resisters. In order to contribute to the continued development of the historiography of women's resistance this article will focus on the extent of women's

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(Urbana, IL, 1996); Serge Klarsfeld, *Memorial to the Jews Deported from France, 1942-1944: Documentation of the Deportation of the Victims of the Final Solution in France* (New York, 1983).

<sup>7</sup> See Margaret Collins Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance: How Women Fought to Free France, 1940-1945* (New York, 1995); Hanna Diamond, *Women and the Second World War in France 1939-1948: Choices and Constraints* (Harlow, 1999); Claire Andrieu, "Les résistants, perspectives de recherche," *Le Mouvement Social* 180 (1997): 69-96; Marianne Monestier, *Elles étaient cent et mille...* (Paris, 1972); Ania Francos, *Il était des femmes dans la Résistance...* (Paris, 1978).

<sup>8</sup> See Marie-Madeleine Fourcade, *Noah's Ark*, trans. Kenneth Morgan (London, 1973); Lucie Aubrac, *Outwitting the Gestapo* (Lincoln and London, 1993); Miranda Pollard, *Reign of Virtue: Mobilising Gender in Vichy France* (Chicago, 1998); Francine Muel-Dreyfus, *Vichy and the Eternal Feminine: A Contribution to a Political Sociology of Gender* (Durham, NC, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> See Robert Gildea, *Marianne in Chains: In Search of the German Occupation, 1940-1945* (London, 2002); Richard Vinen, *The Unfree French: Life Under the Occupation* (London, 2006); *CLIO: Histoire, femmes et sociétés*, 1: Résistances et Libérations France 1940-1945, 1995.

<sup>10</sup> See H. R. Kedward, *In Search of the Maquis: Rural Résistance in Southern France, 1942-1944* (Oxford, 1993); Raymond Fournier, *Terre de Combat: Récits sur la Résistance* (Maury, 1973). <sup>10</sup> See Carol Mann, *Femmes dans la Guerre, 1914-1945* (Paris, 2010); Corinna von List, *Résistantes*, trans. Solveig Kahnt (Paris, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Olivier Wieviorka, *Histoire de la Résistance, 1940-1945* (Paris, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Paula Schwartz, "Redefining Resistance: Women's Activism in Wartime France," in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, Margaret Randolph Higgonet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel and Margaret Collins Weitz, eds (New Haven and London, 1987); Paula Schwartz, "Partisanes and Gender Politics in Vichy France," *French Historical Studies* 16, no. 1 (1989).

contributions to resistance networks, the varied roles adopted by female resisters and the opportunities women had in communist resistance networks. This analysis of Maertens's journal will establish that women were engaged in larger numbers and more varied roles than what has already been suggested in general texts. Maertens's notes also evidence the co-operation between female resisters and various other groups belonging to the larger communist resistance network. This consequently provides an insight into the substantial role that women played within operating networks.

The journal of Lucienne Maertens is ideal for this manner of research. A discussion of Maertens's journal provides an opportunity to establish the scope of women's resistance. Very few personal journals that date from the years of Occupation exist, which makes this source invaluable. What is even more significant, however, is that Maertens described her resistance activities in considerable detail. Her journal provides a wealth of information concerning her activities, opinions and her place within the resistance network. Her work involved engaging with many different women in dozens of different roles as part of the female branch of the communist resistance. Maertens's journal is a new source, having been donated to the archives of the Musée de la Résistance Nationale in 2012. Little other information is available concerning Maertens's activities before or during the war. Her entry in *Le Maitron Dictionnaire biographique* describes her as having a communist background, most likely influenced by her mother, her sole living parent, who was a concierge and militant communist.<sup>13</sup> Maertens's husband was also a communist who volunteered during the Spanish Civil War. Maertens had a political career after the war working as deputy mayor in the Seine, Val-de-Marne area. Her entry for the *Maitron Dictionnaire biographique* includes her work with the FTP-FFI but does not mention her leadership of the UFF, the branch of the communist resistance run by and for women. She began writing her journal in October 1943 when she was made liaison for the UFF. In February 1944 she changed roles and dedicated herself to working with FTP active units and *réfractaires*, men who had escaped being sent to work in

Germany. This new job involved her coordinating women's efforts with the FTP to ensure units' accommodation, food, clothing and funds. After the Liberation she was made a lieutenant of the FTPF and received a Croix de Guerre 1939-1945.<sup>14</sup>

Maertens began her journal with a sentence of explanation: "Being made the UF liaison, I have decided to write my activities in this notebook almost day by day to keep myself up to date of the progress made by my organization."<sup>15</sup> With that she launched into the first fifteen days of October 1943. She structured the journal by months making a total of sixty-one pages of handwritten notes. Each month she listed her meetings, her activities and the activities of the groups and members for whom she was responsible in considerable detail. Maertens was based in Paris and so the city and the surrounding area were the focus of her resistance work. An in-depth look at her notes provides valuable evidence of female resisters on a large and active scale. A journal was an exceedingly dangerous document for a resister to produce, though Maertens does not

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<sup>13</sup> Emmanuel Hagen and Claude Pennetier, "Maertens, Lucienne," *Le Maitron dictionnaire biographique mouvement ouvrier mouvement social*, [www.maitron-en-ligne.univ-paris1.fr](http://www.maitron-en-ligne.univ-paris1.fr).

<sup>14</sup> Hagen and Pennetier, "Maertens, Lucienne".

<sup>15</sup> Paris, Archives du Musée de la Résistance Nationale (hereafter AMRN), Fonds de Famille Maertens, Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 1.

refer to this danger.<sup>16</sup> She wrote notes on her activities and her ideas in the journal without sentiment or emotion. As a result her journal focuses exclusively on the women's activities.

Women within communist networks have not been studied as a separate group in great detail. Other material such as underground papers and memoirs have provided information concerning these women, but Maertens's journal is a useful new source for confirming and expanding what is already known. In order to analyze her journal in a coherent manner, I have chosen four aspects around which to structure the discussion. They are: the varied activities of Maertens herself as a woman in a leadership position in the communist resistance; women's diverse roles and responsibilities; the amount of money and supplies collected and distributed by the women; and the interactions between men's units and women's units. I have chosen these four aspects in particular because they provide a good overview of the large numbers of women involved in the UFF network and the specific jobs adopted by women in communist resistance networks. These aspects highlight the importance of women resisters within their networks and why continued research of women, such as those mentioned by Maertens, contributes to a more detailed understanding of France during the Occupation.

Maertens described a range of jobs she performed during her time as a subnetwork leader responsible for organizing the UFF female resisters. While women were members of the majority of resistance networks, and women in Jewish networks at times acted separately from the men it was only in communist networks that women had truly separate and effective units.<sup>17</sup> Women were targeted and encouraged to form their own local women's groups, a tactic unique to communist networks. These became the local committees of the UFF. Once committees were established, communist women such as Maertens acted as coordinators, organizers and logistical support. Being responsible for the UFF meant that Maertens had to coordinate the local committees of women with the larger communist resistance network. Maertens wrote descriptions of her attendance at meetings with representatives from the different groups involved in the larger network. These could include members of the party leadership, the Front National and the FTP. Her reports of meetings included lists of the organizations whose representatives were present and the results of the discussion. She also conducted individual meetings with the women in charge of separate local committees. She received regular reports from local UFF leaders which allowed her to keep up to date with their separate collections, press distributions, membership numbers and the matters in which each group needed extra support or guidance.

Maertens was overseeing a large number of people. At the end of January 1944 she listed the total number of women involved in UFF committees as 775, with the number of *réfractaires* controlled by women's groups as 437. This was a large number of people to supervise and coordinate. In her conclusion to the January entry she wrote "the experience was convincing, in four months [which was as long as she had been in the role] across 5 regions the number of adherents went from 200 to 775."<sup>18</sup> She placed a strong emphasis on increasing activities and membership numbers. The figures are substantial; not only for the women involved but also for the number of men for whose

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<sup>16</sup> The only mention of negative consequences is her entry for December 1944 where she accounted for the lack of activity over the last few days due to "the arrest of my family and the necessity to move location immediately." Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 12.

<sup>17</sup> See for example von List, *Résistantes*; and Paula Schwartz, "Women, Resistance and Communism in France, 1939-1945" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1998). <sup>18</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 26.

wellbeing and safety they were responsible. The women's underground papers called on women to encourage men they knew to become *réfractaires* and join the resistance. Marie-Louise Coudert highlights the testimony of Georgette Wallé who was involved in supplying the FTP. Wallé is quoted remembering the courage of women who went to train stations to discourage men from leaving for Germany. German authorities did not suspect this subversive behavior from women; instead, according to Wallé, they were "stupefied to learn that women were organized and effective."<sup>18</sup> Maertens's journal provides further evidence that women were organized and effective in their resistance activities. Women were not merely encouraging men into resistance but were officially responsible for the well-being of *réfractaires*.

Maertens was in charge of coordinating contacts between people and groups. This meant finding grocers who would accept their food vouchers, laundry women to do the washing for the men in their charge and printers for their clandestine material. She wrote that she had found a "grocer who will honor all tickets even detached ones and will procure food supplies."<sup>19</sup> She was also responsible for handing *réfractaires* over to FTP units or employers that were willing to provide the men with safe work. In the first week of April 1944 she wrote of a meeting with a factory boss who was employing twenty-nine *réfractaires* for whom he had been able to get identity cards and whom he already paid a proper wage.<sup>20</sup> She had to meet with him to organize identity and ration cards for a new batch of *réfractaire* workers. Maertens coordinated with large organizations as well as individuals. In October 1943 she wrote to the French Red Cross informing them of their women's organization.<sup>21</sup> This was the first step in implementing plans to work together. Later that same month she wrote of their joint plans to deliver an estimated thirty to forty thousand Christmas packages to deportees in Germany.<sup>22</sup> The Red Cross was engaged in volunteer humanitarian work which meant sending parcels to POWs, deportees and prison internees, including those in France. The clandestine paper of the communist internees of the women's Prison de la Petite Roquette mentioned the items they received courtesy of the Red Cross. The edition of February 1944 recorded that as well as the monthly packages the French Red Cross had sent twenty-nine outfits including underwear and ninety-six balls of wool that would allow them to knit thirty-two pairs of socks and nine jumpers. It also gave money to the families of those in the prison who had children or elderly parents.<sup>23</sup> The Red Cross was an established group which had been accepted by the Vichy and German occupying authorities as a non-political movement that was not a threat to their agenda. Working with the Red Cross provided cover for the UFF among the many female volunteers. Individuals who tried to support prisoners' needs were more easily identified and prosecuted. Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier was arrested after being found to have organized a previous activist to pose as an internee's aunt in order to send supply parcels and money from the communist network. Once her connection with communist activities was confirmed through another investigation Vaillant-Couturier was deported to Ravensbrück.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Marie-Louise Coudert, with Paul Helene, *Elles, la résistance* (Poitiers, 1983), 162.

<sup>19</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 30.

<sup>21</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Paris, AMRN, Presse Clandestine, 85AJ/1/1/33, *La Patriote Enchaînée*, 1 February 1944, 2. <sup>25</sup> Dominique Durand, *Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier: Une femme engagée, du PCF au procès de Nuremberg* (Paris, 2012).

Women volunteering through the Red Cross were protected by the assumption that they were motivated by personal and humanitarian reasons rather than political ones. The UFF coordinated with individuals and groups outside of the communist resistance networks in order to expand their activities and fulfill their responsibilities.

Maertens was involved in every stage of the production of clandestine papers. In December she wrote two articles for *L'Humanité*, the communist newspaper that was forced underground when the French Communist Party, the PCF, was banned in August 1939. In April 1943 she requested that three different regions write papers with articles concerning both *partisanes* and the Milice.<sup>24</sup> In December 1943 Maertens wrote of a joint report to be published concerning the Brigade Spéciale, the branch of the Paris Police charged with investigating resistance groups. She continued that the Comité Parisien de la Libération had assigned the Assistance Française with researching the investigation methods of these officers. The results were to appear in the paper of the Comité to warn and educate the public.<sup>25</sup> Maertens wrote on various occasions of the distribution of papers and tracts. In October 1943 she listed eight thousand tracts being distributed concerning protests on issues of meat and bread.<sup>26</sup> Corinna von List emphasizes the unique role of women in the communist underground press. She writes, “the PCF addresses itself to women in a targeted manner: it is the only movement to publish – at irregular intervals, certainly – a clandestine journal specially destined to a female public: *L'Humanité – Edition spéciale féminine*.”<sup>27</sup> Von List continues that because of the efforts of the local committees of the UFF, only the communists distributed a local and regional women’s press with details of day-to-day problems and the supply of provisions. She writes that the printing and distribution of the clandestine press aimed at women indicates the highest level of feminization of any French resistance network.<sup>28</sup> Maertens’s journal makes it clear that there were a large number of women’s underground titles with which she was involved and coordinated. As von List highlights, their involvement in the clandestine press is a significant aspect of women’s resistance in general and illustrates the level of involvement of women in communist networks in particular.

As a female leader within a resistance network Maertens was not performing tasks typical of the majority of women. Being responsible for coordinating the women’s groups meant that Maertens did, however, write about the various roles women occupied. The second aspect to be discussed in this article is the range of jobs performed by women within communist networks. Maertens’s journal confirms roles previously established as the work of women resisters: that is women as liaison agents, involved with the clandestine press, or as typists. Maertens’s notes go further, however, and provide evidence of women engaged in more varied roles. One example is those women sheltering *réfractaires* before a suitable unit or occupation was found for them. One woman sheltered fifty men who were all given identity cards and fed thanks to the UFF’s network of women.<sup>29</sup> Women were also responsible for collecting money to support the FTP units. Sometimes this was done through the sale of small hand-crafted items. On national days, such as the first of May, they would sell small bouquets and *tricolores* as

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<sup>24</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 32.

<sup>25</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 15.

<sup>26</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 4.

<sup>27</sup> Von List, *Résistantes*, 124.

<sup>28</sup> Von List, *Résistantes*, 131.

<sup>29</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 7.

well as items made by communist interneers of the women's Prison de la Petite Roquette. Maertens mentioned that a total of five thousand francs was raised specifically from the sale of items made by the women in the prison, including a box.<sup>30</sup> On 1 May 1944 they collected 46,920 francs:<sup>31</sup> a significant amount when in 1941 it cost seven francs for a pound of carrots.<sup>32</sup> They would also collect clothes, food and medical supplies to be used by FTP units, *réfractaires* or others sheltering resisters. Maertens made lists of what was collected in each region.

The local leaders of UFF committees were mentioned in a number of different contexts. At the end of October 1943 Maertens wrote that she planned to distribute "some words of explanation for each UF allowing them to remind themselves of their work."<sup>33</sup> She wanted local leaders to come up with their own appropriate initiatives and be able to lead other women into action. Maertens often commented on individuals' suitability, ideas or performance. Other times she described their lack of energy to be suitable for the job or their lack of understanding of the mass movement. In the second week of April 1944 Maertens met with a new UFF leader and wrote "she is intelligent but I fear that she is not a woman of the masses. Waiting for the results of her work in order to be able to judge her."<sup>34</sup> In February 1944 Maertens commented on a new *marraine*, the title given to women who took the responsibility of caring for *réfractaires* by providing food, clothes, washing and, in some cases, accommodation. Maertens wrote that this *marraine* did not have many wider contacts but her will to get started was evident.<sup>35</sup> Maertens had meetings with UFF committee leaders and from their conversations she was able to decide what work would be most suitable for them. She took responsibility for hiring and directing the local leaders. She spent time analyzing and searching for women who would be able to do the best job. These examples illustrate that taking on the role of local leader of a UFF committee was a position of responsibility and initiative. In June 1944 Maertens referred to a militia unit in Emery that included forty women.<sup>36</sup> It was extremely rare for women to join armed militia groups but this example again highlights the responsibility and initiative women were afforded in communist networks. Maertens's notes illustrate that women in communist networks had multiple opportunities to adopt various leadership roles.

Maertens also mentions numerous occasions when women were involved in protests outside mayors' offices and local town halls. Both von List and Olivier Wieviorka mention that these protests are now considered to be acts of resistance.<sup>37</sup> Due to the early, narrow definition of resistance this was not always the case. The debates of the 1990s caused the expansion of the definition of resistance and broadened the understanding of acts of resistance. Wieviorka writes that public protests and strikes provide examples that resistance was not performed solely clandestinely.<sup>38</sup> Women were able to protest publicly whilst being protected by their roles as wives and mothers.

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<sup>30</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 48.

<sup>31</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 48.

<sup>32</sup> Paris, AMRN, Presse Clandestine, 85AJ/1/1/31, *Nous, les Femmes*, Journal des Femmes Communistes du Canton de Villejuif, March 1941, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 5.

<sup>34</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 33.

<sup>35</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 28.

<sup>36</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 54.

<sup>37</sup> Von List, *Résistantes*, 173-196; Wieviorka, *Histoire de la Résistance*, 103.

<sup>38</sup> Wieviorka, *Histoire de la Résistance*, 103.



This was a specific tactic of resistance. Jacques Semelin underlines that unarmed groups were rarely met with armed repression. He writes,

“when repression strikes unarmed resisters or people who are not even implicated in opposition activities, it is much more difficult to justify.”<sup>39</sup> Women demanding more rations for their families were unarmed and protected as non-political actors so as to avoid repression. Evidently not all the female protestors would have been motivated by the political need to protest. Many would have joined the protest solely because they wanted more supplies. These protests were organized by communist resisters as an act of resistance but they were disguised by the actual need of non-political women for more provisions. This unique contribution of women to resistance activity allowed the public expression of a negative view of the Vichy regime. The communist organizers saw these protests as creating discontent and uniting the population against the regime whereas apolitical mothers and the Vichy authorities accepted the protest as solely an expression of the need for more provisions.

Maertens noted a number of different protests, both successful and unsuccessful, in her journal. In November 1943 she wrote of a protest in the SaintDenis area that failed due to a lack of preparation. The same month, a delegation of ten people protesting the lack of available food provisions was seen by the Mayor in Épinay.<sup>40</sup> A delegation in the nineteenth Arrondissement, also in November 1943, was successful in obtaining shoes and overalls for local children.<sup>41</sup> In the twentieth Arrondissement a delegation did not receive any of their demands due to their negative reception by the mayor. One local protest that was calling for an increase of the bread ration was attended by two hundred housewives in July 1944.<sup>42</sup> These examples from Maertens’s journal are evidence of the greater extent of women’s involvement as resisters than that already established in the historiography.

The third aspect for discussion in this article is the large amount of money and supplies collected and distributed by the UFF committees. Interestingly, the supplies collected changed nature over the course of the last year of the war. At first Maertens listed mainly clothes and food but as the armed combat increased there are long lists of medical supplies collected as well. Maertens noted that one *marraine* had bought some old clothes and shoes and fixed them up in order for the men to use them. She had very good contact with her charges and they were “satisfied with their *marraine*.”<sup>45</sup> In December 1943 Maertens wrote that a group of female teachers had collected toys which, according to her other notes, were given to children in need for Christmas.<sup>43</sup> The amounts collected are listed by Maertens for each region and then totaled. The parcels they put together for the *réfractaires* contained coffee, tobacco, chocolate, sugar, jam, cakes, pasta, beans, potatoes, cheese, and sometimes eggs, butter and ration cards. In June 1944, at the peak of resistance activities Maertens noted collecting ration cards that allowed them 130 kilograms of potatoes, 230 kilograms of beans, and 10 kilograms of sugar.<sup>44</sup> Women were engaged to perform these tasks because they could travel to

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<sup>39</sup> Jacques Semelin, *Unarmed Against Hitler: Civilian Resistance in Europe, 1939-1943*, trans. Susan Husserl-Kapit (London, 1993), 121.

<sup>40</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 6.

<sup>41</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 6.

<sup>42</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 57.

<sup>45</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 9.

<sup>43</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 15.

<sup>44</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 49.

the country to collect food without being searched as thoroughly as the men and because they were inconspicuous joining grocery lines along with dozens of other women shopping for their families. Women could move around more freely than men during the Occupation. They were able to attend meetings in public and visit multiple stores without suspicion falling on them as would have been the case for men visiting grocers and laundry women. H el ene Mabile is quoted in Coudert as saying: "women were less easily suspected than men: it was normal that they would have a hand bag, whereas men, at that time, went around with hands in their pockets and were immediately noticeable if they were carrying a parcel."<sup>45</sup> Women were able to blend in with other customers and volunteers in a way that men were not. In June 1944 the Liberation was underway and localized fighting broke out between active resistance units and German soldiers. From this point on Maertens began to list more and more collected medical supplies. In June 1944 she listed a stock of medical supplies they gathered containing many products including bandages, ether, compresses, soap, aspirin bottles, alcohol, matches, a tourniquet, thirty-four morphine vials and a syringe with two needles.<sup>46</sup> It would have been impossible for the women to collect all these materials without the contribution of their contacts.

The network of people established by women was invaluable for the collection and distribution of such a large amount of material. It was their responsibility to organize contacts in different occupations that were able to support resistance activities. The laundry women Maertens found to do the men's washing, as mentioned earlier, is one example, and the teachers who collected the toys, mentioned above, are another. Maertens also notes a *marraine* who found some menders, a cobbler and a wash house.<sup>47</sup> Maertens referred to questionnaires that were distributed to teachers, headmasters, priests, bakers, grocers and printers. In October 1943 she recorded preparing seven questionnaire texts for doctors, midwives, nurses and teachers as preparation for a document that was to be sent by mail.<sup>48</sup> These questionnaires were to be sent to people considered to be potential resisters. She did not include an example of a questionnaire but from her other notes it can be assumed to be a screening process to narrow down those deemed like-minded and reliable. Many people were needed to support a resistance network if it wished to survive for any length of time. Above ground resisters, such as women in support roles, were needed to sustain and cooperate with underground resisters. Women accepted the responsibility of finding contacts to ensure the safety and survival of the *maquis* units. Protecting their members by exploiting traditional gender roles was a tactic used by many resistance networks. Delegating activities between men and women made resistance networks more efficient. Women's contribution to organizing and distributing supplies and money was essential.

Women were encouraged to join communist resistance networks. Women needed to be involved in order to achieve the communists' goal of Popular Resistance. It was a policy of the party during the pre-war period to engage women in political activities despite them not having suffrage in France. Groups were run by and for women and their female members were responsible for encouraging others to join their networks. The women's and men's groups of the pre-war era were structured to complement each other. This tactic continued throughout the war. The complementary nature of the

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<sup>45</sup> Coudert, *Elles, la r esistance*, 94-95.

<sup>46</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 50.

<sup>47</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 9.

<sup>48</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 2.

different groups was even more essential during the Occupation. Men's groups and women's groups could focus on different activities to further strengthen the network as a whole. The interaction between men's units and women's units is the fourth and final aspect of significance for this discussion of Maertens's journal. The opinions of the men and their different units differed depending on their own engagement. Maertens often concluded her description of the month's activities with a reflection on how their work could be improved. In October 1943 she wrote that the Party was treating "the work of women with a deplorable lack of seriousness" which was limiting their membership numbers and, as a result, preventing their activities from becoming more effective.<sup>49</sup> In November 1943, however, she gave a summary of a conversation that she had with a male resister in charge of a unit who wanted to form some aid committees for *réfractaires*. He approached the UFF because he wanted a woman to coordinate the different people involved. He envisaged a process where his men would recruit members and provide aid where possible. If they were unable to help he would direct them to the UFF contact that would have access to funds, identity cards and addresses of employers and organizations that were likely to help.<sup>50</sup> Maertens was worried about the security of opening access to their women militants but was to continue discussions in order to find a solution. In January 1944 Maertens described a discussion that she had with a male liaison from another unit. They shared the desire to have women at all levels of FTP activities including recruitment of male and female combatants, liaison agents, the collection of sensitive information and the provision of food and health services, propaganda and fundraising. This way, she pointed out, the units could dedicate themselves to the armed struggle and have all the auxiliary services looked after by women.<sup>51</sup> The male liaison also made the point that women volunteers for the FTP did not have to be communist: all like-minded women were welcome to be a part of their resistance units.

These male units were obviously treating the work of women seriously. The difference appears to be that men on the ground working with resisters appreciated the need for women's involvement whereas the party leadership did not understand exactly how important women's contributions were to the active units. The Party usually delegated activities concerning gender. Women were viewed as necessary members of the PCF and the communist resistance but women in leadership roles were in charge of organizing women's groups and their members. The Union des Jeunes Filles de France (UJFF) was the pre-war precursor to the UFF and was treated in the same way. The responsibility of organizing and managing the UJFF members was given to Danielle Casanova (who raised the idea of starting a women's group), Jeannette Vermeersch, Claudine Chomat and Yvette Semard.<sup>52</sup> UJFF activities were connected to the overwhelmingly male Jeunesses Communistes' activities, but it was run by and for women with minimal contact from the party leadership. Once the PCF was banned and communist activities moved underground Casanova began to set up the UFF. As mentioned before, motivating and including women was an important and unique aspect of communist resistance activities. Maertens's notes suggest that men in charge of the well-being and organization of active units not only needed women's support but

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<sup>49</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 4.

<sup>50</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 6.

<sup>51</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 22.

<sup>52</sup> Susan B. Whitney, *Mobilising Youth: Communists and Catholics in Interwar France* (Durham and London, 2009), 196.

actively encouraged women's involvement in their activities. In order for women's groups to continue to grow, women resisters had not only to be accepted but their potential contribution had to be understood. If men and women did not understand each other's work there could not have been truly useful cooperation. The interaction between and mutual dependence of men's and women's units is further illustrated by Maertens when she wrote in January 1944 that the term *marraine* to describe these women had become too restrictive.<sup>53</sup> Their activities had expanded to be more than providing moral support and guidance such as a godmother would do. Maertens suggested that *responsable à la lutte armée* would be more accurate to describe those women involved with FTP activities. The joint activity of all resisters is what formed the French Resistance. Women were essential in sustaining and enabling active units to grow. Colonel Rol-Tanguy was quoted in August 1944 in *L'Humanité* saying that "without women on the ground half of their activities would have been impossible."<sup>54</sup> Maertens's journal effectively illustrates the range of jobs women performed, the differing responsibilities and the importance of their combined efforts.

Maertens was an important member of the communist resistance. She was a rare example of a woman in a leadership position and was accepted as such by those around her. Despite the danger of keeping records of her activities, she continued to write a journal that provides a rare and detailed look into the life of a resister. She was recognized for her contribution to the French Resistance and through her words those female resisters working around her can also be recognized. Maertens's journal contributes to the research of women in communist resistance networks. In order to better understand the situation of women during the Occupation it is necessary to continue to research women's opportunities within resistance networks. This article has shown that a consideration of the large numbers of women involved, the extent of the responsibilities adopted by these women and their initiative in forming contacts and providing support can expand the knowledge of women as active members of resistance networks further than the existing historiography. Women were actively encouraged by communist networks to contribute to resistance activities. No other network pursued women as a separate demographic of potential resisters. Detailed research of women's involvement allows a deeper understanding of the functioning and realities of resistance in France during the Second World War.

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<sup>53</sup> Cahier de Lucienne Maertens, 22.

<sup>54</sup> Jacqueline Marchand, "Les Femmes?," *L'Humanité* 41, no. 11 (August 1944): 1-2.