

Portrait of a Woman: The Utilization of Women in Fascist Propaganda during the Years of the Nazi Occupation

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Faculty Introduction

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The photographs of the collaborationist André Zucca served fascist propaganda by depicting joyous and cheerful moments in the everyday life of Parisians during the German occupation. Stewart Lawrence deconstructs the representation of Parisian women as captured by the photographer and draws attention to a subtle form of feminine rebellion against the occupiers. He demonstrates how fashion statements and make-up can be interpreted as gendered performative acts of resistance against fascist masculinity. In doing so, he furthers the understanding of women's uncontested roles within resistance movements.

Abstract

The role of women within the various resistance movements to liberate France and the French capital of Paris has been reiterated across media since the end of the Second World War. Women acted as attachés and agents, often communicating secrets and plans to both domestic and international agencies. However, since the relatively recent inception of gender and feminist studies, few works have emerged that analyze the role of everyday women in occupied Paris and how their femininity and actions were perceived and interpreted by occupying troops. The purpose of this paper is to deconstruct the everyday presence of Parisian women as captured by the collaborationist photographer André Zucca and interpret these images through a modern gendered lens within a robust historical context, so as to provide a holistic understanding of the relationship between Parisian women and German troops during the occupation of Paris (1940-1944). The concept of the male gaze, its role in the establishment of fascist masculinity, and how Parisian women fought it will be discussed, and the continuance of these concepts in future scholarship in other areas of the occupation of France will be suggested. Upon its completion, this paper will further the dialogue of the efforts of French women during the occupation and contribute to the fields of both history and gender and feminist studies.

The female depiction has served as one of the most important expressions in French history, from royal portraiture to Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* and the first depiction of Marianne (see Fig. 1), now one of the most cherished symbols of the Republic. Women were indispensable in the breathless battle to liberate France from the Nazi occupation in *la Résistance*. However, the female image was utilized for a more nefarious purpose.



Fig. 1: Delacroix, Eugene. *Liberty Leading the People*. 1830, Oil on canvas, 260 x 325 cm. Louvre Museum, Paris.

In addition to the Nazi abuse of the female image, the French Vichy collaborationist government used the female in their propaganda with the ultimate goal of promoting their ideology of a patriarchal society and glorifying motherhood.¹ The purpose of this paper is to reexamine the role of women during World War II by analyzing the visual representation of women and providing an historical and gender studies interpretation. The gendered analysis will focus on masculinity as perceived through the male gaze and through the concept of “acting out” within an historical context, bridging the understanding of women through their actions as captured by photograph and depiction in propaganda.

¹ Barbara McCloskey, “Marking Time: Women and Nazi Propaganda Art during World War II,” *Contemporaneity: Historical Presence in Visual Culture* 2, no. 1 (2012): 2; Marianne Walle, “Vichy ou la Féminité Imposée,” [Vichy or Imposed Femininity] trans. myself, *Guerres Mondiales et Conflits Contemporains*, no. 198 (2000) : 102; Francine Muel-Dreyfus, *Vichy and the Eternal Feminine: A Contribution to the Political Sociology of Gender*, trans. by Kathleen A. Johnson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001). 3.

This paper should contribute to the body of knowledge on the role of women during the Second World War and complement the works of the female narrative in Nazi-occupied Paris, which include Tilar J. Mazzeo's *The Hotel on Place Vendôme: Life, Death, and Betrayal at the Hôtel Ritz in Paris* (2014), Anne Sebba's *Les Parisiennes: How the Women of Paris Lived, Loved, and Died under Nazi Occupation* (2016), as well as feminist discourse on the Vichy Regime, which includes Francine Muel-Dreyfus' *Vichy and the Eternal Feminine: A Contribution to the Political Sociology of Gender* (2001).² Finally, this paper should contribute to the practice of interpreting war-time photography and the discussion of the role of the Zucca controversy in modern French society, as has been framed by the articles of numerous professors including Hanna Diamond and Claire Gorrara of the University of Bath and Cardiff University, respectively, Catherine E. Clark of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Mary Louise Roberts of the University of Wisconsin at Madison.³

The first section will provide a background on André Zucca and the controversy an exhibition of his photographs caused in Paris. The second section will analyze the female image as captured by Zucca and provide an analysis of the history of fashion during the occupation. It will continue by showing how the concept of the male gaze can be applied to the photograph, as well as how the male gaze can be seen as a method for establishing fascist masculinity. The third section will analyze another of Zucca's photographs and discuss the act of applying makeup and the concept of "acting out" as a method of feminine resistance during the Nazi occupation of France.

The Zucca Controversy and New Age Nazi Propaganda

As recently as 2008, controversy erupted in Paris over the exhibition of 270 colored photographs, recently acquired and restored by the *Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris* (BHVP), taken during the Nazi occupation of Paris (1940-1944) by André Zucca. The controversy largely surrounded the narrative that the exhibition portrayed: children at play, leisurely

² Tilar J. Mazzeo, *The Hotel on Place Vendôme: Life, Death, and Betrayal at the Hôtel Ritz in Paris* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014); Anne Sebba, *Les Parisiennes: How the Women of Paris Lived, Loved, and Died under Nazi Occupation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2016); Francine Muel-Dreyfus, *Vichy and the Eternal Feminine: A Contribution to the Political Sociology of Gender*, trans. by Kathleen A. Johnson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

³ Hanna Diamond and Claire Gorrara, "Reframing War: Histories and Memories of the Second World War in the Photography of Julia Pirotte," *Modern & Contemporary France* 20, no. 4 (2012); Catherine E. Clark, "Capturing the Moment, Picturing History: Photographs of the Liberation of Paris," *American Historical Review* 121, no. 3 (2016); Mary Louise Roberts, "Wartime Flânerie: the Zucca Controversy," *French Politics, Culture & Society* 27, no. 1 (2009).

women in beautiful clothing and make-up, and Parisians peacefully coexisting alongside German soldiers playing the part of the tourist. Of the hundreds of restored photographs, only three showed Jews wearing the yellow stars that legislation required them to wear.⁴ This token inclusion drastically downplays the scale and reality of oppression experienced by the Jews in France during the occupation. According to Ronald C. Rosbottom, “of 75,700 Jews deported from France, 97 percent died in Auschwitz and other camps.”⁵ In addition to this gross underrepresentation, the exhibit failed to mention or depict any of the resistance efforts carried out in France, though members of the resistance would probably have shied away from having their picture taken by a man who worked for a Nazi propaganda magazine.

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Zucca worked for *Signal*, a glossy German propaganda publication that circulated in Nazi-occupied territory and the United States. While Zucca himself was not a Nazi, Rosbottom suggests

that Zucca probably carried far-right political convictions.⁶ These same convictions were promoted by the Vichy collaborationist government, and his work at *Signal* made Zucca a collaborationist as well. It is also important to note that while the colored photographs featured in the exhibit were not published in *Signal*, critics of the exhibition considered it propaganda. For example, one writer of the French magazine, *Le Monde*, wrote, “In this exhibition, it is never made clear...that all these photographs are a matter of propaganda.”⁷ So even though these photographs were never published, because they represented a single, idealized narrative, many French citizens considered them propaganda. Mary Louise Roberts aptly summarizes the contemporaneous sentiment toward the exhibition in suggesting “like [a real propagandist] these critics contend, Zucca whitewashed Paris of its misery, then slapped a fake smile on its face. His was the sin of airbrushing.”⁸ For the purposes of this paper, the photos of

⁴ Peter Hamilton, “Bring the Color Back to Paris’s Dark Days,” *Photo District News* 28, no. 6 (2008).

⁵ Ronald C. Rosbottom, *When Paris Went Dark: The City of Light Under German Occupation, 1940-1944* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2014), XVII.

⁶ Rosbottom, *When Paris Went Dark*, 380.

⁷ Pierre Assouline, “L’Occupation tranquille,” trans. By Ronald C. Rosbottom, *La République des livres*, April 7 2008. <http://passouline.blog.lemonde.fr/2008/04/07/loccupation-tranquille>; Ronald C. Rosbottom, *When Paris Went Dark*, 380.

⁸ Mary Louise Roberts, “Wartime Flânerie: the Zucca Controversy,” *French Politics, Culture & Society* 27, no. 1 (2009): 104.

the exhibition will be treated as Nazi propaganda, as the film used to create the photographs was either directly supplied by *Signal* or purchased using money derived from working for the same publication.

The Male Gaze and Fueling Fascist Masculinity

Zucca's photograph "Fashionable Parisian Women" (see fig. 2) is significant because he has captured the contemporaneous notion of "fashion," and, more importantly, how Parisian women perpetuated it during the occupation.



Fig. 2 Zucca, André. *Fashionable Parisian Women*. C. 1941-1944. Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris, Paris. Obtained online from <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/goings-on/springtime-for-hitler>.

The fashion industry remained alive and well throughout the duration of the occupation, and several couturiers remained open, serving both wealthy French clientele and the wives of Nazi occupiers, though some of the couturiers delighted in deliberately making the clothes poorly for the latter.⁹ So while fashion was actively manufactured, even during the occupation, those it catered to were decidedly few in number. The majority of women had a favorite dressmaker on hand who could copy the styles of the haute-couturiers using unconventional fabrics, such as those initially purposed for upholstery.¹⁰ This particular ingenuity demonstrates the dedication Parisian women expressed in maintaining a fashionable façade, but their reasoning behind such dedication carries serious implications.

Parisian women struggled to remain fashionable in order to serve both

⁹ Tilar J. Mazzeo, *The Hotel on Place Vendôme: Life, Death, and Betrayal at the Hôtel Ritz in Paris*, 178.

¹⁰ Anne Sebba, *Les Parisiennes: How the Women of Paris Lived, Loved, and Died under Nazi Occupation*, 137.

their state and the male population of France. Even before the occupation began, women were urged in fashion magazines to keep the wheels of the fashion and luxury industries grinding forward, as they represented a significant sector of the French economy and employed thousands of citizens. In this way, fashionable women could serve a patriotic purpose by continuing to purchase high-end clothing and jewelry—a seemingly win-win situation. However, these same magazines also urged women to remain beautiful to fuel the morale of troops that had yet to see combat.¹¹ Women were thus encouraged not just to service their state, but to service men by dressing in desirable clothing pleasing to the male eye. It is within this context that Zucca’s “Fashionable Parisian Women” can be interpreted

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Upon first glance, “Fashionable Parisian Women” brings three

beautiful, immaculately dressed women to the fore, though there is more to the image than just stylish Parisiennes. As Reeser noted, “to repeatedly look in an erotic way at the female body creates and affirms an opposition between the viewer and the viewed, and defines viewpoint by taking control of materiality.”¹² What is particularly important about this image is that the women are wearing sunglasses, obscuring their eyes and rendering their reciprocity of viewing inert, thus changing the relationship between the viewer and the viewed. The opposition or even competition for the control of materiality is thus surrendered to the viewer of the photograph; these women are to be viewed, and to provide no resistance to the act. With the ultimate goal of the male gaze being the establishment of masculinity within the viewer, this image aligns perfectly with the fascist desire for indomitable masculinity and for using women in order to achieve it.

Patriarchy, achieved through submission, is one of the major tenants of fascism, and photographs such as Figure 2 were one such means of obtaining it. In his sweeping psychoanalytical interpretation of fascism, Theweleit suggests that fascists, in order to achieve sexual arousal, required the domination of the female.¹³ Zucca’s photograph suggests a

¹¹ Anne Sebba, *Les Parisiennes: How the Women of Paris Lived, Loved, and Died under Nazi Occupation*, 31.

¹² Todd W. Reeser, *Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 258.

¹³ Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies Vol. 2 Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror: Theory and History of Literature*, trans. by Erica Carter and Chris Turner in collaboration with Stephen Conway (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 97.

materialization of this obsession, in that control and the negotiation of materiality were won by the fascists and the artists they employed, securing the fascist masculinity. This, however, is only one photograph, and thus, only one battle in the war of domination, and women found ways to actively resist submission.

Artifice, “Acting Out,” and Subtle Resistance

Zucca’s “Woman Putting on Red Lipstick” (Fig. 3) is significant because the act of putting on makeup is considered a feminine act and historically communicated messages about women to their male counterparts. After a great deal of normalization and the shifting currents of femininity through



Fig. 3: Zucca, André. *Woman Putting on Red Lipstick*. C. 1941-1944. Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris, Paris. Obtained online from <http://image.glamourdaze.com/2013/12/Woman-applying-lipstick-Paris-WWII-Andre-Zucca.jpg>

time, the ultimate message of wearing makeup remained constant. As described by Biddle-Perry and Miller, “women’s employment of artifice... often reflects not just a face in a mirror, but to a greater extent a moral judgement of her potential appetite for vice and a lack of virtue.”¹⁴ This remained true through the beginning of the Second World War, and women traditionally only applied makeup in the privacy of their homes. However, with the advent of war, this practice began to change.

As Paris’ luxury industry continued to construct and export new ideas in fashion, the concept of what it meant to be a “modern woman”

¹⁴ Geraldine Biddle-Perry and Janice Miller, “‘...and if Looks Could Kill:’ Making Up the Face of Evil,” *At the Interface/ Probing the Boundaries* 57 (2009): 8.

evolved with it. One important innovation was a handbag that included compartments for cigarettes and makeup compacts, and this innovation acted as the premise for being seen as a “modern woman” by bringing both smoking and putting on makeup into the public sphere, previously frowned upon in pre-war society.¹⁵ Consequently, for a woman to be considered modern, she had to actively rebel against former conventions and smoke and put on makeup in public. This act of rebellion served the majority of Parisian women well, as it provided them a method of resistance without participating in the underground organized resistance movements seeking to undermine the occupation.

In combatting the Nazi occupation of Paris, women could participate in the high stakes resistance movements by procuring information and communicating with foreign governments, or they could resist in subtler ways, such as putting on makeup in public. While many women were active within the organized resistance movements, these women chose to downplay their public appearance and wanted as little attention drawn to them as possible.¹⁶ The vast majority of women could rebel against their Nazi occupiers by “acting out.” Wallace’s theory of “acting out” manifested itself in the colonial context, where the colonized would zealously perpetuate every stereotype that they faced while walking down the street in an effort to break these stereotypes and escape them.¹⁷ This same theory can be applied to Parisian women, and the act of applying makeup or lipstick in public can be interpreted as “acting out.”

As women applied makeup in public, they were challenging both antiquated conventions as well as the establishment of masculinity through the male gaze. Parisian women were sending a distinct message to the men who viewed them, expressing power through their confidence, flaunting their femininity through the very feminine act of applying makeup, and essentially “acting out” by hyperextending their feminine capacity. It is in this way that Parisian women challenged the fascists; by rebelling against convention, they were fighting the domination that fascists required for male sexual potency, as Theweleit suggested.¹⁸ In this way, Parisian women resisted the male gaze even as they fed it. Zucca’s “Woman Putting on Red Lipstick,” is therefore a snapshot of “acting out” and everyday resistance by Parisian women. Zucca’s photographs, though grossly misrepresentative

¹⁵ Anne Sebba, *Les Parisiennes: How the Women of Paris Lived, Loved, and Died under Nazi Occupation* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2016). 93.

¹⁶ Anne Sebba, *Les Parisiennes* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2016). 69.

¹⁷ Maurice O. Wallace, *Constructing the Black Masculine: Identity and Ideality in African American Men’s Literature and Culture, 1775-1995* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002). 175.

¹⁸ Theweleit, “*Male Fantasies Vol. 2 Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror*,” 97.

of the occupation narrative, depict women in complacent submission and in revolt.

Conclusion

An interpretation of Zucca's works using various concepts developed and constructed in the field of gender studies allows for a stronger understanding of the role of women in the development of fascist masculinity. Zucca's works also illustrate the role of women as resisters, applying makeup in public and rebelling against their occupiers. These photographs, their recent exhibition, and the subsequent controversy that resulted, demonstrate the importance of a constant and updated interpretation of wartime photography and propaganda as well as an understanding of the narratives they suggest. Narratives that have fallen under fascist influence run the risk of miseducating future generations, and it is thus necessary to find them and root them out. This indicates a great deal of future scholarship, including the role of women in Vichy collaborationist propaganda, and the depiction of women in resistance propaganda, both in underground France and abroad. ■

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Student Biography

Stewart Lawrence graduated cum laude in history with a minor in French from SHSU in May of 2018. Throughout his undergraduate education, he explored numerous areas of research within the field of history, including economic, social, immigration, and gender history. His interest in modern French history was honed through various courses taught by Dr. Siham Bouamer; it was in French Culture and Civilization that he began to realize the faults in French society and sparked an interest in the questionable operations of the luxury industries of Paris during wartime. In an effort to extend the dialogue of the occupation of Paris, Stewart followed a line of inquiry about the role of Parisian women during the occupation within a modern feminist context. In addition to researching the historical and social impact of occupation in twentieth-century Europe, Lawrence will also begin an in-depth thesis on Swedish industrialization while pursuing his Masters in History at Memorial University of Newfoundland in the fall of 2018, with the ultimate goal of obtaining his PhD in modern European history with a focus on Nordic economics and industrialization.

