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Chapter 1
Introduction: the long liberation

I remember the day I saw the first Germans . . . there was a rumour, we went down to the street and I saw the motorized troops arrive. It was a sort of grey-green block. It was sparkling, it was backfiring, it was bellowing. They turned the corner of the road . . . and in my mind . . . it was death which advanced.[1]

To begin with, was the invasion. Six weeks later came the defeat, followed by four years of occupation. Riven into pieces (map 2), France was at war with the occupiers and with itself. The government, democratically elected in 1936, 'committed suicide' when those parliamentarians still left in the chamber of deputies – the communists had already been banned and other opponents to the occupation had fled – voted full powers to the veteran First World War marshal, Philippe Pétain.[2] He and his collaborationist government would rule with a brand of Catholic, racist, technocratic and anti-feminist authoritarianism framed by what was posited as a return to authentic French values, in order to wrest the nation from the grip of decadence to which it had succumbed. For the first two years, a large proportion of the population supported Pétain and his National Revolution. Indeed, many people – and not only those on the right – had been disturbed for some time about France's weakness that Pétain seemed set to restore, believing the country to be debilitated by, among other elements, degenerate foreigners and a feeble birth-rate so that it could no longer hold its own on the international stage.

To begin with, then, were the fantasmatic ponderings of writers like Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, even Jean Giraudoux.[3] They found France enfeebled after the First World War and the loss of more than a million young men which the leaders of the Third Republic – whom they regarded as decrepit – did little to assuage. Instead of confronting the crisis of the early 1930s with firm controls, the government permitted the admission of ever greater numbers of foreigners, especially Jews, whose arrival did nothing to aid restabilization. Amid mounting political polarization and growing membership lists of communist and far right parties, the installation of the Popular Front

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Map 1: French *départements* in 1944 (courtesy Oxford University Press)

government in 1936 was, for those on the right, a final betrayal of their nationalist values. For the ordinary, working immigrants who were increasingly the target of the right's venom, it was a different story.

To begin with, then, was a France embattled against the fascism of its neighbours but whose own 150-year-old values maintained it as a nation of individual freedom and asylum. France welcomed more newcomers than any other country apart from the USA, and in the inter-war years they came from all over southern and eastern Europe, France's colonies and, after 1933, from central Europe too. Those who wanted to be politically active, and they were numerous, could enrol in the Main-d'Œuvre Immigrée (MOI) – communist party sections that operated in their own language – or join native French activists in trade unions, or

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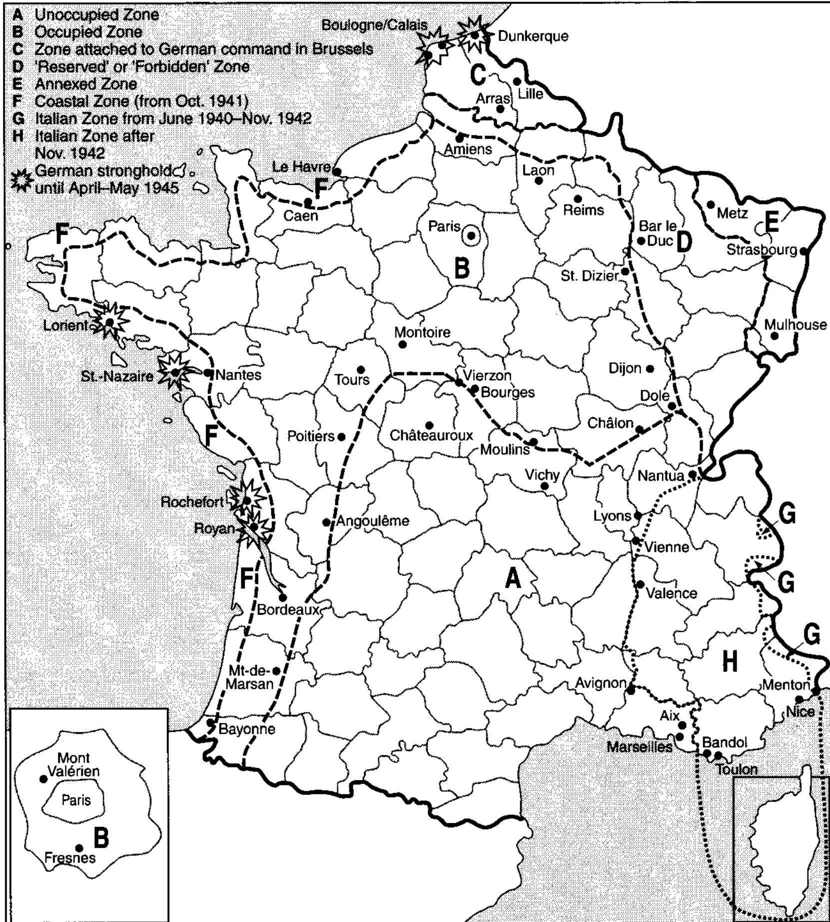

Map 2: France divided 1940–44 (courtesy Oxford University Press)

subscribe to one of the dozens of social and cultural associations that immigrants themselves established. These organizations offered exciting opportunities. Imagine the significance to poor, working women, for example, who, at a time of strong social divisions when women were still denied contraception and abortion – and providing even information on them was illegal – were given the chance to meet a doctor not only addressed by her first name, but who explained contraceptive methods in detail.[4] To counter their financial hardships, employees benefited for the first time from paid holidays and more limited working hours (though these were inapplicable to that large proportion of Jewish immigrants who bore the insecure conditions in the garment trades). If the mid-1930s offered hope to these individuals, the increasing severity of

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German Nazism, and the installation of Edouard Daladier's more authoritarian regime in France, followed soon after by war and invasion, were traumatic.

But the majority of the population was neither immigrant nor politically active. After the initial shock of the invasion, and in particular the *exode*, which affected even more than the 8 – perhaps 10 – million individuals trekking across France ahead of the invading armies, most people settled into getting on with their lives as best they could. To begin with, then, was a complex and subtle web of compromise, accommodation, making do and getting by . . .[5]

If there is no single beginning to the story of the German occupation of France, there is even less a single end. In one sense, the Liberation of France was both beginning and end, being the start of a new political and historical era, and the end of the occupation. But only in one sense. It is to challenge the comfortingly neat periodization of 1940–44, and thereby to suggest new interpretations of the history of France at this time, that this book has been written. Even at its most basic level – the liberation of territory in 1944 – the liberation did not start and end with the Normandy landings in June, or the Provence landings in August, or the liberation of Paris the same month, or any other of the multiple events that encompassed the military liberation. It did not even end in 1944. Only in 1945 would the German coastal strongholds and the bases in eastern France annexed to the Reich come once more under French control. Only in 1945 would the approximately 1.5 million people taken from France to Germany as prisoners of war, forced labourers and resisters start to return home.[6] And the settling of scores took many more years yet.

The liberation of French territory was prolonged and violent. More people lost their lives and more property was destroyed during the liberation than at any time since the war began. Two million people became homeless, many as a result of Allied bombing.[7] Communications were chaotic and supplies unreliable, especially to the cities. In the unusually harsh winter of 1944–45, urban inhabitants really started to starve. That winter was particularly arduous in the annexed zone as, in addition to all the terrors of Nazi rule and the knowledge that most of France was now free of it, to say nothing of the dreadful cold, Allied aircraft returning from raids on Germany routinely discharged their unused bombs over the area.[8] Nazi reprisals were devastating, as they had been during the occupation.[9] So the significance of despatching the Nazis from France must not be minimized. But the liberation involved more than ejecting two sets of rulers (Vichy and Nazi) and installing a viable third. Just what kind of rule and, moreover, what kind of France it would govern was the burning question at liberation, and had been constantly discussed during the occupation years.

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Liberation started the day the armistice was signed. While many people initially believed in Pétain's promise to protect 'the French' and help them survive the occupation as best they could, his growing number of opponents were anticipating and working to achieve liberation. What would become the highest honour for those who fought to free France, the Compagnon de la Libération, was instituted by General de Gaulle and his supporters as early as November 1940. Throughout the occupation, ideas for a liberated France were defined and refined in a process of 'aspirational liberation'. Plans for the post-occupation future were debated in the resister clandestine press, among the Free French in London and Algiers, and certainly by ordinary people. This protracted process of imagining, hoping for and planning liberation, merged and intersected with discourses emanating from Vichy, and it continued until well after the installation in Paris of the provisional government in August 1944. We could point to a variety of cut-off dates for this liberationism: the inauguration of the Fourth Republic in 1947; the end of the war in Indochina and the start of the one in Algeria in 1954; or the end of the Algerian war in 1962; or possibly the events of May 1968; or even 1995 when, for the first time, a French head of state admitted French responsibility for the deportation of the Jews.[10] My discussion of source material ends in the early 1950s, not with a major historical event, but with commentators' own historicization of the Vichy past. For all its curtailment from the potential longer views that may be explored in the future, though, this book is about the 'long liberation'.

The long liberation and the issues it raises are viewed here through the prism of Jewishness and gender – concerns at the heart of Vichy's idealized France. While Vichy excluded all sorts of groups from its France – freemasons, Roma and communists, for example – its own antisemitism combined with that of the Nazi occupiers led to a catastrophic policy of deportation and murder. For the racists and xenophobes whose moment seemed to have arrived under Vichy, moreover, Jews had come to represent the very worst dangers that immigration and infiltration by outsiders were supposed to portend. With respect to gender, ever-stricter differentiation between men and women, and their public and private roles, formed one of the most significant foundations on which Vichy's National Revolution was based.[11] These two aspects were adopted and manipulated by resisters too. But studying them reveals more than the sum of their parts: taken together, the combination opens a door to the very conceptualization of the world that resisters wanted to make against that conceived by Vichy. Resisters – whether small groups of communist women producing clandestine newspapers, members of the Free French provisional government in Algiers, or high-status men who worked with Vichy and its agencies but who claimed resister status afterwards – were the people who formed or influenced policy and ideas

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at the end of the occupation, though they did not do so with equal authority or power. It is their transformations of these notions of race, gender and exclusion within liberationist imaginings that concern us here. Before shifting to an examination of how liberationism cohered with the belief in technocratic planning that became such a force in post-war French politics, this study explores aspirational liberationism as it was expressed in the clandestine press. Subsequently, it investigates the effects and interpretations of these discussions on some of the people most implicated in Vichy's exclusionary policies. To begin with, though, we focus on that classic moment of liberation – Paris in August 1944.

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Chapter 2
Narrating liberation

Cramped on tiny wooden school-room chairs in one of the two remaining rooms belonging to the Union des Juifs pour la Résistance et l'Entr'aide (UJRE), we came, in the summer of 1996, to honour the memory of a former resister. In its post-war heyday, the clinic, newspaper printing and distribution, meeting rooms and orphans' administration centre took over the entirety of what, fifty years later, had become a crumbling three-storey building not far from the Gare de l'Est in Paris. Early in 1943, this communist affiliated, Jewish resistance organization based in Paris, brought together a number of Jewish clandestine groupings under a single umbrella, the better to draw all Jews, immigrant and French-born, into the resistance, and to represent Jews in France once the occupation was over.[1] After liberation, its Commission Centrale de l'Enfance, like the Œuvre de Secours aux Enfants, ran a number of orphanages for some of the thousands of children its members, largely women, had helped to hide during the occupation and whose parents had been deported.[2] It continued to publish *Droit et liberté*, the clandestine newspaper that had appeared during the occupation, as well as *La Presse nouvelle* and its Yiddish version, *Di Naïe Presse*, and provide medical assistance. Former resisters still found a home there, and a hundred or so gathered to pay their last respects to the Polish-born resister and lifelong activist Perela Traler. Stories, poems, songs and jokes were succeeded by orations on her resistance character and political adroitness informed, we were told, by an innate maternalism. They were delivered in a mixture of Yiddish and French, a division apparently dependent on the age of the speaker. Finally, the Kaddish, the Jewish prayer of mourning, signalled the sad ending of the gathering and its palpable sense of losing a generation as well as a comrade. But what to do? Everyone present, it might be assumed, was Jewish, nearly all over the age of sixty-five. But these were also communists or ex-communists who had consciously rescinded any pre-existent Judaic piety in favour of a politicized antipathy to rabbinical doctrine. A few people's sense of propriety forced them to rise, a move most others in the room gradually

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followed. Led by those at the front, chairs and walking sticks scraped the stained wooden floor as the congregation shuffled to its feet, in noisy competition with the elderly singer's faltering tones. At the same time, he was waving his hands in a furious gesture telling us to sit down, and so, once again from the front of the room to the back, everyone retook their seat. The entire Kaddish, a call for peace within and beyond the unity of the Jewish people, had been disrupted by this creaky indecision. In its small, tragi-comic way, the spectacle symbolized the ambiguities at the heart of this group – an expression, perhaps, of its uncertain relations to religion, to the political party, to the republic. It is these uncertain relations, and their reformulation within the changing nationalized and gendered contexts of occupation and liberation, that will be explored in this book.

Liberation was the moment that France emerged from the politics of exclusion that characterized Vichy and the Nazi occupation of France.[3] The Vichy regime sought to control not only what the inhabitants of France did, in the manner of all legislatures, but to mould the population according to ideals that befitted its National Revolution, embodied in the redrafted state slogan, *Travail, famille, patrie*. It rapidly enacted exclusionist policies. Exactly one month after the armistice of 22 June 1940, Vichy legislation stripped French nationality from those individuals who had been naturalized after 1927. This act was applied rather unevenly, directly affecting some 15,000 of the potential 900,000, and particularly targeted Jews.[4] Within a few months, the regime had barred foreigners (including these newly foreign) and married women (11 October) from public office and the liberal professions, repealed the law against antisemitic publications (27 August), and reduced Jews to inferior civil status, excluding them from many areas of public life and influence (3 October), before diminishing their rights still further the following year and stealing their property under the policy of what it called 'Aryanization'.[5] All Jews, including those born in France, effectively became foreigners in the early stages of the regime, which aided their later transformation into the special threat that would be 'solved' by deportation.[6] Jewish and non-Jewish refugees were forced into internment camps. About 3,000 Roma and Sinti were also rounded up into camps, where they remained until 1946, two years after liberation, and seventy were deported as forced labour to Germany.[7] All sorts of groups were regarded as not appropriately French, including freemasons, Protestants and resisters, 30,000 of whom were executed in France. Approximately 60,000 individuals identified as non-Jewish political resisters were taken to concentration camps in Germany. More than 75,000 Jews, two-thirds of them never having held French nationality, were transported first to transit camps in France and thence to the killing centres in Poland; all but about 5,000 ended their

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days in Auschwitz-Birkenau. In common with other parts of occupied Europe, more than half the Jewish deportees from France were taken in 1942, and more than a third of the total in just two months, July and August, of that year. They were rounded up across the occupied and non-occupied zones. Less than 3 per cent of the Jewish deportees, and about 60 per cent of the politicals would return.[8]

The politics of exclusion embodied in the National Revolution was not confined to those subject to deportation and internment, and cut still deeper into the social fabric. Vichy's insistence on the priority of the heterosexual Catholic family, which was seen most powerfully in its apparent elevation of motherhood which confined women to the home via its *femme au foyer* policy, the woman at home;[9] its reformulations of gender via youth programmes and labour constraints;[10] its veneration of the figure of Pétain, insisted on in the multifarious uniformed leagues that adults and young people were constrained to join; its introduction of specific legislation against male homosexuality – all these fed a radical new vision for a population deemed appropriate for France. For all its devastating impact on some elements of the population, many people managed to adapt without much difficulty. The regime was inconsistent, and regional differences in people's responses to it were stark. It is important nonetheless to remember the subtle depths at which Vichy ideology acted, as well as to seek the extent to which its legislative efforts achieved their stated ends, which had four years to take effect.

Vichy had new ideals to fulfil and was a radically different regime from its republican predecessors; it was also indebted to them.[11] The authoritarian republican government of Edouard Daladier installed in 1938, signed the Munich Agreement in September that year, and established some of the anti-immigrationist legislative framework and internment camps which were to prosper under Vichy and facilitate its projects. After a new wave of anti-communism had been unleashed by the Red Army's entry into Poland in September 1939, Daladier's government banned the French Communist Party (PCF). Even before the invasion in May 1940, Daladier was interning 'political undesirables'. Populationist concerns too had beset Third Republic governments and commentators since the First World War. Troubled by what they perceived as a falling birth-rate, particularly in comparison with its erstwhile enemy, Germany, pro-natalists had seen their support augment.[12] This was given state support in various ways, not least laws in 1920 and 1923 against abortion and contraception, and legislation that was supposed to support large families. In July 1939 when another war was all but certain, new measures designed to bolster the family and to repress abortion and contraception still further were enacted in the Code de la Famille.

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Immigration from the colonies and Europe also increased during the inter-war years. Most of those arriving filled jobs in the industrial and agricultural sectors, whose needs were not met by labour available in France, though some came in search of educational opportunities denied them at home. In a European context of heightened political tension during the 1930s, and in which greater reliance was being placed on biological notions of race, the influx of these immigrants was in many quarters interpreted in terms of the threat and damage they might cause the republic. The arrival of thousands of refugees from the growing German Reich and Spain only exacerbated older tensions, so that by the time war was declared, many commentators and those in government were willing to accept that the non-French really did pose significant threats to national well-being.[13]

The concept that came to define and confine these disparate elements of the population was assimilationism. This was the mechanism whereby people learnt to become French. From its earliest days, the republic demanded that individuals regarded as welcome would need to conform to certain requirements in order to fulfil their duty to the republic and to benefit from the rights it conferred upon them. In defining itself as singular and indivisible, the Jacobin republic also instituted a set of exclusionary principles to identify those individuals permitted citizenship or the potential to become citizens. This dynamic contractual arrangement between the republic and its citizens, as well as those regarded as not, or not yet, appropriate for citizenship, is called here the assimilatory project. Its capacity at once to contain notions of assimilation that inevitably dilute difference, and notions of individualism in which difference resists redefinition, made the assimilatory project open to continual refinement. At the top, the state demanded conformity and excluded those it deemed nonconformist and maverick; at the bottom, the individual internalized assimilationism so as to make it their own. The project's dynamism privileged the individual's feeling that they had fashioned themselves within the universal, itself an inherent part of the project, and fashioned the universal within themselves.

Difference was inherent to assimilationism, not in opposition to it, and it always contained a 'double bind' whereby the community which the outsider was required to join could always reject it on grounds of difference.[14] In a work that provides a very clear analysis of assimilationism in France, Max Silverman argued that the national community was to supersede all other forms of identification in the modern nation-state that the republic inaugurated.[15] This was certainly true for men, who were the only people offered the possibility of citizenship. Women, though, had other primary allegiances. The modern French nation, while excluding women from access to public power and also from the democratic process of choosing which men should have access

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