French Politics & Everyday Life in the Battle of France, 1940

By J. Justin Liang

Justin Liang is a senior at the University of Chicago, majoring in History. He wrote this paper for a colloquium on Nazi Germany. Curious as to how scholarship on France compared to work on the synergy between political culture and the German war effort, he found the historiography to be lacking. Wary of the sharp distinctions between "defeatist" France and "defiant" Britain, as well as between collaboration and resistance, Justin wrote this paper to show that political culture informs, and is informed, by the everyday experience of war, resulting in a highly contingent civilian response to military conflict.

The precipitous fall of France to the *Wehrmacht* and its immediate aftermath in the summer of 1940 is the subject of unending debate. This may seem surprising, since from a military perspective, it appears to have been an open-and-shut case: the Battle of France lasted a mere six weeks and completed a total rout of the French defense. Beginning with the initial offensive on 10 May, the German advance forced the British to evacuate a mere two weeks later at Dunkirk, and soon was forging ahead so quickly that it overtook French troops in their retreat. By mid-June, Paris had fallen, an armistice was signed, and half the country fell under German occupation; in early July, the Third Republic was unceremoniously liquidated, and a new, authoritarian regime under the supervision of the Third Reich was inaugurated in the spa town of Vichy.

Where the Battle of France is most contentious in the historiography and in popular memory alike, then, is the question of civilian response to the military crisis. Indeed, the assessment of French society in the summer of 1940 inevitably casts long shadows on how to judge the entire question of French involvement in the politics of the Vichy state. For those critical months of crisis and catastrophe were the moment when, in the view of many historians, the French suddenly assumed the moral responsibility of acquiescing in a regime that collaborated with Germany in its war effort and took the initiative in deporting its own Jews. They became, in Robert Paxton's words, "functional collaborators" in a pro-fascist regime, no matter their personal opinions on the politics of Vichy or of the Germans.

Paxton's polemic was the opening salvo in what is an enduring debate about the relationship of French society to the politics of the Vichy state. In more recent historiography, the debate has distanced itself from

blanket accusations of collaboration by developing in two ways. Some historians continue the attempt to situate the French politically, though with a greater eye for their ambiguities, vacillations, indecision, and divided allegiances. Detailed investigations on public opinion have shown that the French, though rarely "resisters," had little sympathy for the Vichy government and even less for the German occupiers. On the other hand, some social historians have abandoned the attempt to think of the French politically at all. Instead, they have sought to emphasize the everyday material conditions of the Vichy years, such as the shortages of food and fuel from which most of French society suffered, phenomena like the refugee movement and labor draft that pulled families apart, and other quotidian concerns that most of the French, most of the time, were preoccupied with.

What these two dominant approaches to social history have in fact done is to engage in an implicit debate about the relative weight of political perception and everyday experience as determinants of the behavior of French society in the Vichy period. This paper proposes that what may be most important in determining the way civilians react is *how they themselves perceive the political content of their everyday experience*. Looking closely at the critical months during and immediately after the war in 1940, I suggest that much of French society underwent a process of rapid depoliticization that at least in the inaugural moment of the Vichy regime, when some would argue the French first entered into complicity with the Third Reich, the French themselves thought of their own experiences and actions in largely non-political terms. This depoliticization above all determined the general acquiescence of the French public for most of the remainder of the war.

This paper comprises three parts. In the first, I briefly sketch the broad trends in the historiography on Vichy France until now, paying particular attention to different interpretations of French involvement in the politics of the period, and showing that society's own perceptions of that relationship have thus far been neglected. In the second part, I draw on a selection of diaries and journals, written by a diverse group of people in the summer of 1940, to demonstrate the process of depoliticization that operated in French society at the time. My survey of contemporary testimonies is by no means exhaustive, nor does it give a complete cross-section of French society. But the evidence suggests something highly significant: in the third part of the paper, I propose that privileging processes of politicization and depoliticization as themselves historically contingent features points to a promising area of research that may help us better understand why people acted the way they did in the summer of 1940—or for that matter, in other periods of armed conflict.

I. Social history in two keys: political perception & everyday life

Postwar French society stayed away from the politics of the Vichy period as much and for as long as possible. After the Liberation of France in 1944, memory of the preceding four years was promptly bundled away. In its place, two competing and equally self-serving impulses took hold: one was to forget the "Dark Years" altogether, treating them as an ellipsis in the historical record. The other was to glorify the period as a heroic chapter in French history, during which "forty million resisters" had struggled valiantly against the German menace, while only a coterie of conniving politicians at Vichy was responsible for plotting the policy of collaboration.[1] In either case, the aim was to generate a *cordon sanitaire* between French society and the French state, so that the ignominy of that regime might never stain the people who suffered its rule.

The layers of silence and mystification that accumulated around the Vichy years have since then progressively fallen away. The beginning of this process was in no small part due to the pioneering work of Robert Paxton, whose 1972 book *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order* caused a firestorm of controversy when it appeared in translation in France. Paxton repudiated the widespread idea that if de Gaulle had wielded the sword for France, Pétain had held the shield, protecting France as best he could and giving in to German demands only when he could do no other. Instead, drawing extensively on German archives in default of access to French ones, Paxton argued that not only did Vichy leaders actively seek collaboration with Hitler, they were motivated by a homegrown right-wing, anti-Semitic agenda to initiate their own program of domestic policies, whose ultimate aim was a fundamental reform of society which they called the National Revolution. But while Paxton wrote the first systematic analysis of the nature of the Vichy regime, the nature of French society during that time was left largely unexamined. Limited to political and military archives of the German occupiers, Paxton made the simple assessment that the majority of the French, having created a "broad public climate of acceptance" in the aftermath of the defeat, were without a doubt "'collaborators' in a functional sense."[2]

Subsequent historians, as part of the "social turn" in the mid-80s and 90s, shifted their focus of research away from the Vichy regime to

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[1] Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2.

[2] Robert Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944* (New York: Norton Library, 1972), 5, 235.

those living under it. As a result, fine-grained analyses based on newly-available regional archives in France sought to situate French public opinion more precisely. John Sweets, studying the town of Clermont-Ferrand, and Pierre Laborie, in the southwestern *département* of the Lot, each concluded that while most people were not resisters, calling them "functional collaborators" would be equally inaccurate. A spate of similar local and regional studies seemed to find "almost universal hostility to the Germans from early on, and a fairly rapid disenchantment with Vichy."[3] But if most of the French were neither collaborators nor resisters, what were they?

These new close-up, local perspectives on French society had the salutary effect of challenging the very usefulness of dichotomies between collaboration and resistance: these categories were too morally and politically charged, and clearly the majority of the French fit into neither typology. Philippe Burrin and others introduced such new concepts such as accommodation, adaptation, and *attentisme*—the wait-and-see attitude.[4] Pierre Laborie in particular stressed the complexity and confusedness of a society marked by ambivalence. For example, a majority of the French bemoaned the defeat but were in favor of the armistice; they accepted Pétain while rejecting the Vichy state. In fact, many French believed that Pétain, contrary to his own pro-collaboration pronouncements in public, was still playing a "double game," just as they themselves were often engaging in a daily exercise of double think. [5] Rather than depict a nation divided between rival factions, Laborie portrayed the French as divided within themselves.

While the social historians working on public opinion were still trying to locate French society politically, others were moving beyond politics altogether. If the former operated at the level of the imaginary, the latter turned to look at French society in its basic materiality. These historians contended that for most people, the daily rhythms of private life were far more significant than the political sphere. Sweets suggested that the one word to which the war years in Clermont-Ferrand could be reduced is "shortage,"[6] while Richard Vinen found other themes that recur in contemporary documents: refugees, deportations, food supplies, and provi-

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[3] Jackson, *France: The Dark Years*, 13.

[4] Philippe Burrin, *France Under the Germans* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 2-3.

[5] Pierre Laborie. "1940-1944: Double-Think in France" in *France at War: Vichy and the Historians*, eds. Sarah Fishman et al. (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 186.

[6] John Sweets, *Choices in Vichy France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 8.

sioning thereof, which often involved the vagaries of the black market.[7] Some historians have expressed discomfort with giving too much attention to such mundane concerns, even if these were what were on most people's minds; historians saw the focus on social and material history as downplaying the political choices people made, and even seemed sometimes like an apologia for their moral failure to act responsibly. But these reasonable concerns beg the question: what, indeed, *was* the political content of everyday life in Vichy France?

At one extreme, anyone who stayed in France after the invasion and armistice could be considered politically implicated. Such was Paxton's description of all French as "functional collaborators," even if they did nothing. But even inaction can have many meanings: as John Sweets provocatively suggested, if a bystander who deliberately did nothing while seeing a Jew being arrested by the police was a functional collaborator, was a bystander who did nothing while watching someone stuff anti-Vichy tracts into letterboxes therefore a functional resister? Sweets also highlights that the Vichy regime premised itself on a fundamental reform of French society.[8] If the social body resisted reform, was that resistance? By intruding on and attempting to regulate various aspects of private life, the Vichy regime increased the total surface of possible opposition. Even a once private activity, like listening to the BBC, could be seen as having been politicized by the regime's attempt to prohibit it.

All this goes to show that quibbling over where to draw the line between political and non-political may inevitably be somewhat of a semantic exercise. On the other hand, what might be more useful is to examine where people themselves drew that line—their *perceptions* of how political their actions were—for these perceptions were what influenced how people ultimately behaved. The way you chose to answer a local gendarme's seemingly innocuous question—"have you seen Pierre X this week?"—hinged on whether you saw any political stakes involved, and then on whether one considered yourself at that moment to be a political actor. Similarly, how you interacted with German soldiers depended on whether you saw them primarily as *the German enemy* or as homesick young men who happened to be German. These perceptions of where the boundary of politics lay should not be seen as stable or unambiguous, but

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[7] Richard Vinen, *The Unfree French* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), 5.

[8] Sweets, *Choices,* 169.

they were nonetheless critical in determining how the French interacted with the occupying forces and with the Vichy state.

II. Contemporary attitudes in diaries and journals: everyday life beyond politics

The fall of France in the summer of 1940 created a climate of indescribable confusion in which events moved with astonishing rapidity. The swiftness of the rout put six million people on the road as refugees, and pushed many more into close contact with the invading German army. The sudden fall of a seemingly stable state, the equally sudden invasion by another one, and the unexpected appearance of a third—all in the span of six weeks—fundamentally destabilized settled relationships between state and society. The summer of 1940, then, was the moment that the French had to abandon their roles as citizens of the Third Republic and begin formulating initial terms of engagement with both the Vichy regime and the German occupiers. This is a process best captured by the diaries and journals that the French kept at the time. These documents demonstrate how rarely people saw their own actions and experiences in political terms. In fact, what people overwhelmingly wrote and thought about at this time suggests a more generalized process of depoliticization that occurred in much of French society during and in the immediate aftermath of the German invasion. This did not mean that people did not have political opinions, but these were perceived as quite distinct from their everyday lives. Neither did it mean that people were not conscious of the need to make difficult choices in their approach to the Vichy state and to the German occupiers, but these were made largely on the basis of personal non-political criteria.

Accordingly, the French were depoliticized at precisely the moment that earlier historians have seen them as entering political and ideological complicity. Some scholars have actually viewed the summer of 1940 as the moment of strongest public support for Pétain and his policies: in Philippe Burrin's words, "the career of what was soon to be known as the Vichy government began at its peak."[9] But any attempt to accurately situate the French politically in this period is open to question. In fact, Richard Vinen argued that "many recall the few weeks or months after the German entry into France as a period that was somehow separate from the rest of their lives." Simone de Beauvoir, for example, talked about the period as a "no man's land" in time, as political passions and national concerns were put on hold while individuals learned to deal with the new situ-

[9] Burrin, *France Under the Germans*, 18.

ations that invasion and defeat posed.[10] Many diaries' authors hoped fervently for an armistice—but no one thought of it as the basis for national regeneration and a new political order, only as a way to end the fighting, stem the refugee crisis, or reunite torn families. And almost immediately, they were forced to adjust to food shortages, civil restrictions, and the presence of German garrisons in the occupied territories. Depending on specific circumstances that varied considerably, the diaries show people perceiving their lives as removed from the political sphere in different ways and for a range of reasons.

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For the French lying in the invading army's path, it was the prevention of death and devastation, above and beyond any political concerns, that underpinned the widespread desire for a ceasefire. As the German army advanced through northern France with apparent invincibility, many municipal and provincial authorities rushed to declare their cities and towns open ahead of the troops' arrival, so as to spare them destruction. But in Nantes, an article in the local newspaper incorrectly declaring that the city was no longer open and that it would be defended until the very end set off mass panic and confusion. Edmond Duméril, a high school teacher better informed than his fellow citizens, found himself reassuring an anxious crowd that no fighting would be done. Someone Duméril considered a "zealot" did accuse him of defeatism—but he was the rare exception. Most people wished to avoid the last-ditch, desperate resistance that they considered likely to result in meaningless ruin.

Local officials' declarations of open towns were sometimes contradicted by the French army's rearguard actions, such as the detonation of bridges, which drew widespread condemnation because it raised the possibility of German reprisals. Berthe Auroy, passing through the town of Moulins in central France, recorded its inhabitants' reaction to a detonation on the river Allier: "'Why,' asked the [townspeople], 'did our troops blow up the bridge? Badly given instructions? Or had a countermand not arrived in time?'" Auroy reported that both the prefect and the mayor had tried parleying with the German commander and "implored him to spare the town."[11] Back in Nantes, Duméril also reported rumors that the French

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[10] Simone de Beauvoir, *La Force de l'âge* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 457, quoted in Vinen, *The Unfree French*, 15.

[11] Berthe Auroy, *Jours de guerre: ma vie sous l'Occupation* (Montrouge: Bayard, 2008), 69. "Pourquoi, se demandaient les Moulinois, nos troupes ont-elles fait sauter le pont ? Un ordre mal donné ? Un contrordre n'est pas arrivé à temps ? Le pré-

army was considering blowing up bridges on the Loire; but this, Duméril thought, was "to what end? One must wish that the armistice conditions be accepted soon so as to avoid more destruction."[12]

Of course, the desire for an armistice hardly stemmed from sympathy with Germany, or from any investment in the vague promise of national revival. In fact, when Pétain first announced on the radio the government's request for an armistice, Bobkowski, then still in Montluçon in central France, noticed the somber mood that fell over the town. "We saw a crowd in front of a bistro from which escaped the sound of a radio. The *Marseillaise*. We approached. The women were in tears and the men had a gloomy air." He reported feeling "the desire to cry." But the next moment he added, "*we snapped out of it.*" Contained here is a key idea: that the national tragedy of defeat and armistice was hard to take, but life went on; as refugees, Bobkowski noted that "we pulled ourselves together. We had to think about what we were going to do."[13] In a way, all across the country people were "snapping out of it:" they were relegating political passions to a space separate from the daily decisions they faced.

Many of those whom Bobkowski observed lamenting the defeat but welcoming the armistice were refugees like him: they may have bemoaned the subjugation of France, but they rejoiced at their own liberation from weeks of senseless wandering. The exodus numbered up to six million people, a staggering one-sixth of the entire country.[14] In Nantes, Duméril watched as an unending stream of "panic-stricken automobiles, covered with mattresses and parcels continued to tumble night and day down the road from Rennes."[15] Given such a context, Berthe Auroy did not even think to mention the armistice in her diary, or perhaps did not hear of it until later. After all, she was spending days on end riding a se-

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fet et le maire s'étaient rendus auprès du chef allemand pour le supplier d'épargner la ville."

[12] Edmond Duméril, *Journal d'un honnête homme pendant l'Occupation*, ed. Jean Bourgeon (Thonon-les-Bains (Haute-Savoie): L'Albaron, 1990), 25~27. "A quoi bon ? Il est à souhaiter que les conditions d'armistice soient bientôt acceptées pour éviter de nouvelles destructions."

[13] Ibid., 25. "On a aperçu un attroupement devant un bistrot d'où s'échappait le son d'une radio. *La Marseillaise*. On s'est approchés. Les femmes étaient en larmes et les hommes avaient l'air sombre... J'avais envie de pleurer... Nous nous sommes secoués. Il fallait songer à ce que nous allions faire."

[14] Hanna Diamond, *Fleeing Hitler: France 1940* (Oxford: Oxford, 2008), 3.

[15] Bourgeon, *Journal d'un honnête homme,* 26. "Les autos affolées, couvertes de matelas et de paquets continuent à dévaler nuit et jour la route de Rennes."

ries of overcrowded trains that carried her in a haphazard, crisscrossing itinerary to more than a dozen different places across northern and central France. The suspension of all regular rail services led Auroy and Bobkowski onto trains that stopped in unfamiliar towns and ejected its passengers, who were forced to find shelter as they waited for the next, equally unpredictable train. Bobkowski was fortunate enough to soon escape the chaos and the crowds by getting his hands on a bicycle, but such independence was rare. More often, the problems of travel in the summer of 1940 led people to situations in which they had to engage with German or local officials. On 30 June, Auroy, laden with heavy packages, tried to traverse a dangerous gorge across which the bridge had been destroyed: "but then a German who was there had a chivalrous gesture. He took the packages and brought them up on the other side."[16] The Germans may have sought to politicize such relationships with propaganda posters proclaiming "National Socialist protection to the French refugees!" which Auroy noticed outside a *lycée*.[17] But in Auroy's own mind, it was an older form of chivalrous interaction that took precedence in her mind over the political nature of the relationship.

This is not to deny that some pressure to see the world of 1940 through the prism of politics existed. Myths like that of a "fifth column" of Germans infiltrating the country ahead of the troops were widespread; but these were liable to disappear when held against the light of local interactions.[18] Auroy, for instance, came upon a German-speaking family and immediately suspected them of being fifth columnists, especially since a German soldier was exchanging chocolate and cigarettes with them. But while the mother and father could not speak French, "the little girl started relating in good French that... they had the bad luck, while crossing Paris, of losing in the crowd... the eldest child, a girl of 19, who knows not a word of French and had no money on her." Auroy noted that now "I felt sorry for them, and God knows when they will be able to go find their

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[16] Auroy, *Jours de guerre*, 77. "Un Allemand qui se trouvait là a un geste chevaleresque... a pris les paquets et les a remontés de l'autre côté."

[17] Auroy, *Jours de guerre*, 77. "Protection National-Socialiste aux Réfugiés français!"

[18] Christian Delporte, "The Image and Myth of the 'Fifth Column' During the Two World Wars," in *France at War in the Twentieth Century: Propaganda, Myth, and Metaphor*, ed. Valerie Holman and Debra Kelly (London: Berghahn Books, 2000), 49.

child!"[19] Here as elsewhere, Auroy's personal experiences were defying simple political expectations.

In fact, political categories themselves were often fluid or almost completely flattened by the material concerns that everyone both those who fled and those who stayed put, seemed to share. The shortage of not only food, but daily necessities and domestic articles, was exacerbated by the looting that almost all sides were seen to have perpetrated. Now back in northern France, Auroy took down what she heard again and again from people: "Certainly, the Germans had emptied out the groceries, the cellars, the shops of all kinds. But the French soldiers, and especially, especially the refugees themselves had plundered without scruple." Auroy saw this as evidence that "war unleashes the basest of instincts" in everyone, without regard to political allegiance.[20]

Not quite seeing the Germans as *Germans,* or political adversaries, was a prevailing perspective reflected in the diaries under discussion. As the *Wehrmacht* streamed into Nantes and inundated the town, Edmond Duméril remarked that "civilians surrounded the soldiers and tried to interview them, without showing any animosity, while the Germans took pictures of them." Some of the "onlookers," he noted half-sardonically, "can even go tomorrow and watch the changing of the guard, with music!"[21] Liliane Schroeder, a twenty-year old Parisian who sought sanctuary with her mother in the southwestern town of Marennes, recorded how "bizarre" she found the reaction of the population: "much more of curiosity than of repulsion." A surprising proportion of the townspeople made their way to the fairground in front of the *gendarmerie* to get a glimpse of the Germans and their parked armored cars. "Not to forget that evidently we are in a small town, population 3,000... distractions are rare... and the Germans are

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[19] Auroy, *Jours de guerre*, 81. "Et puis la fillette se met à raconter en bon français... Ils ont eu le malheur, en traversant Paris, de perdre dans la foule d'une gare l'aînée de leurs enfants, une jeune fille de 19 ans, qui ne sait pas un mot de français et qui n'avait sur elle aucun argent. Maintenant, ils me font pitié, et Dieu sait quand ils pourront partir et rechercher leur enfant !"

[20] Ibid., 93. "Certainement, les Boches ont vidé les épiceries, les caves, les boutiques de toutes sortes. Mais les soldats français et surtout, surtout les réfugiés ont pillé sans scruple... tant il est vrai que la guerre déchaîne les instincts les plus bas."

[21] Duméril, *Journal d'un honnête homme*, 28. "Des civils entourent les soldats et essaient de les interviewer, sans montrer aucune animosité, pendant que les Allemands les photographient... Certains d'entre ces deniers sont capables d'aller demain assister à la relève de la garde en musique !"

serving as a circus or some other phenomena."[22] Somehow this scene seemed separate from the distressing news that had "gone on and on" the night before on the radio, and which gave her the feeling "in my breast of real physical grief"—a grief that the sight of real Germans somehow did not elicit.[23]

Schroeder soon came into even closer contact with the garrisoned invaders. On 2 July, she and her mother came home to eight German soldiers who had been billeted to a room in their home, and were already performing their ablutions in the courtyard. This she found to be "all comedy." Late that night, when they found the Germans drunk and rambunctious, her mother communicated in pidgin French and simple gesticulations her disapproval of their behavior, after which the Germans sobered up and "acted very wisely, to not make noise and to go to bed before eleven o'clock." Schroeder found them "touching," "very proper," and "full of good will."[24] Though it was at first in bad taste to interact with them any more than was needed, she and her mother gradually developed "almost friendly" relations with them. Such relations seemed to depend on their perception of these eight young men as individuals, rather than members of a political category. While remarking wryly that "they have only one flaw—they're not French or English!" Schroeder also asked: but "how can we be cold and disagreeable to them thus taken individually (*ainsi séparément*)?" At times, she did question her easygoing attitude to this unusual and politically compromising situation. But "where did this attitude come from?" She concluded that "it's not cohabitation with miserable soldiers that troubles me when there are so many more important things

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[22] Liliane Schroeder, *Journal d'Occupation, Paris 1940-1944* (Paris: François-Xavier de Guibert, 2000), 19. "La réaction de la population a été bizarre : beaucoup plus de curiosité que de répulsion. Il ne faut pas oublier évidemment que nous sommes dans une petite ville qui compte en général 3 000 âmes... Les distractions sont rares... et les Allemands ont fait office de cirque et de phénomènes."

[23] Ibid., 19. "Ces discours dont on nous a rebattu les oreilles depuis hier. Lorsque, pour la première fois, il en a été question à la T.S.F., j'ai ressenti dans ma poitrine une véritable douleur physique..."

[24] Ibid., 24~25. "Tout est comédie... ils se sont engagés à être très sages, à ne pas faire de bruit et à aller se coucher avant 11 heures... Les locataires sont touchants, propres, et pleins de bonne volonté. Comment pourrait-on être froid et désagréable avec eux ainsi séparément ? ... Ils n'ont qu'un défaut, c'est de ne pas être français ou anglais !"

that are happening, will happen."[25] In comparison to the national drama of defeat, armistice, and political turmoil, her friendly encounters with eight soldiers seemed to belong to a world apart.

Needless to say, relations with the Germans were not always entirely innocent or purely amicable. The country house in Chartres to which Berthe Auroy had finally succeeded in arriving was approached by a German officer in search of a parking space. Over the course of her conversation with him, Auroy was friendly but not very truthful. She lied and said she was married, claimed her husband was an officer in the army now taken prisoner, and presented herself as a university professor. As she imagined, such a self-portrait served to ingratiate herself with the German officer and made her a "person of distinction" in his eyes. When she "dared" to recommend he be cautious around her bed of roses in the garden, she noticed he "does make a few precautions," but she still could not keep out a "bunch of grunts" who later "invaded the garden." Auroy was not lacking in political consciousness; in fact, she relished making a not-so-subtle jab at the German by telling him that "they were not going to have the English as they had the French," and they would have a "properly difficult task" ahead of them.[26] But it is telling that she considered her own interaction with him to be removed from that political sphere.

Perhaps the most complex relationship between the diarists and the Germans was that of the German speaker Edmond Duméril in Nantes, who shortly after the invasion offered his linguistic services to the prefect of the Loire-Inférieur and served as a key intermediary between the *département* and the occupying forces. Given his profile and his responsibilities, Duméril appeared as the classic collaborator. But in fact he refused to join the collaboration movement, citing the "absolute neutrality" that he saw his role as requiring.[27] Duméril's diary entries in the summer of 1940 demonstrate the largely non-political perspective he held on his own conduct. Even if his political opinions were staunchly anti-German—

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[25] Ibid., 28~29. "Presque amicales... D'où me vient cet état d'esprit ? Ce n'est pas la cohabitation avec de misérables soldats qui me troublera quand il y a tant de choses tellement plus importantes qui se produisent, et se produiront."

[26] Auroy, *Jours de guerre,* 102~103. "Je tremble pour notre beau rosier et ose lui recommander de faire attention. Et je dois dire qu'il prend quelques précautions... J'ai l'aplomb de lui dire qu'ils ont là une tâche bien difficile et qu'ils n'auront pas les Anglais comme ils ont eu les Français... Je suis un personnage de marque... Une bande fantassins a envahi le jardin."

[27] Duméril, *Journal d'un honnête homme,* 129. "Neutralité absolue de ma part".

upon first seeing Wehrmacht troops in his beloved city, he saw them as the "first visions, how painful, of war and defeat!"[28]—he ultimately gave greater weight to his responsibility towards the local community. Moreover, as Schroeder observed, it was hard to sustain a grudge against all Germans, especially once relations became personal and no longer political. Meeting the German commander for the first time, Duméril expected, based on his own political preconceptions, someone "big, brutal, and haughty," and was "surprised" when he found instead "an aged man, almost elderly, lean and short... who rushed to meet us with a kindness, I would even say a cordiality, that did not seem feigned." He was particularly struck by the commander's parting words: "'we both find ourselves,' he said with tears in his eyes, 'in a situation we did not wish for.'" Ultimately, Duméril hoped this "conversation will be useful to all my fellow citizens by permitting me to intervene tirelessly in their favor."[29] In subsequent meetings with the Germans, Duméril lobbied hard for the return of prisoners-of-war and negotiated over the status of "refugees, ration cards, petrol."[30]

One reason Duméril and others may have focused on personal or local concerns was because their own nation seemed far away and increasingly elusive. Radio and print media—the usual means by which French people participated in the national political sphere—soon became unreliable, and for a time fell silent altogether. On 24 June, Duméril complained that "we are without news regarding the rest of France." One month later, on 23 July, Schroeder remarked, "no newspapers, no radio," while even in the free zone, Jean Guéhenno noted "such silence. No more newspapers. All the stations for French radio have stopped. We enter into servitude

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[28] Duméril, *Journal d'un honnête homme*, 27. "Premières visions, combien douloureuses, de la guerre et de la défaite!"

[29] Ibid., 30~31. "Un grand reître brutal et rogue. Quelle surprise ! C'est un homme âgé, presque un vieillard, sec et de petite taille... qui se précipite vivement à notre rencontre avec une amabilité, je dirais même une cordialité, qui ne paraît pas feinte... 'Nous nous trouvons tous les deux, dit-il les larmes aux yeux, dans une situation que nous n'avons pas voulue...' J'espère que cette conversation sera utile à tous mes concitoyens en me permettant d'intervenir sans répit en leur faveur."

[30] Ibid., 43. "Les mêmes questions reviennet sur le tapis : réfugiés, cartes de ravitaillement, essence..."

without knowing precisely what it will be."[31] Henri Drouot in Dijon similarly noted that in relation to the nation's affairs, "the French people... informed about nothing, cannot know, nor approve, nor reprove."[32] But Schroeder also observed that "this is just as well, since everything we can learn from all this [newspapers, radio] must be greeted with skepticism."[33] The quality of the wartime press was widely recognized as questionable, so much so that Andrzej Bobkowski recorded having "to read between the lines" with newspapers to even find out that the Germans had reached Paris.[34] Near the end of June, Auroy was at first delighted with the reappearance of the local newspaper, but upon reading discovered only barely disguised pro-German propaganda. She wryly imagined herself reading it for lack of any other news source: "there will perhaps be sensational news... a rail service message, a postal announcement... Deception! Deception!"[35] Reluctantly, she could still see herself reading the news for personal pleasure or community announcements. But when sources of reliable information on the real fate of the rest of the country ceased to exist, for Auroy as for many others, their horizons were momentarily shrunk to a world of private concerns and local matters where Germans were no longer just Germans and national politics receded into the far distance.

Conclusion

By examining diary entries written in the summer of 1940, penned at various locations in the country and within a diverse set of circumstances, the outlines emerge of what might be a wider process of depoliticization occurring in French society at the time. These diary entries are particularly useful in demonstrating the interweaving of action and

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[31] Jean Guéhenno, *Journal des années noires, 1940-1944* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), 18. "Quel silence. Plus de journaux. Tous les postes de radio français se sont tus. Nous entrons dans la servitude sans savoir précisément ce qu'elle sera."

[32] Henri Drouot, *Notes d'un Dijonnais pendant l'occupation allemande, 1940-1944* (Dijon: Éditions universitaires de Dijon, 1998), 10. "Le peuple français... informé de rien, ne peut ni ne saurait ni approuver ni réprouver."

[33] Schroeder, *Journal d'Occupation*, 34. "Ni journaux, ni T.S.F .... C'est d'ailleurs tout aussi bien car tout ce que cela pourrait nous apprendre devrait être accepté avec réserve et scepticisme."

[34] Bobkowski, *En guerre et en paix*, 23. "Les Allemands sont à Paris. Cela n'est pas dit clairement, mais on peut le lire entre les lignes."

[35] Auroy, *Jours de guerre*, 76~77. "Il y aura peut-être des nouvelles sensationelles... l'annonce d'un train, d'un courrier. ...Déception ! Déception !

perception, reality and interpretation: they exemplify the way people reflected on their own behavior based on how they perceived its political content. Contemporary testimonies propose a view of history that considers processes of politicization or depoliticization as themselves historically contingent facts. Such facts merit their own research, and that is the direction in which this paper hopes to point. But the historical contingency of those facts may constitute an equally important area of study. The question that needs to be asked more often is: *why* do processes of politicization or depoliticization occur? Philippe Burrin has recently proposed breaking out of the limitations of national frameworks and making comparative studies of military occupations.[36] On the other hand, Peter Fritzsche, in the historiography of Nazi Germany, has convincingly suggested looking to political *culture* to determine whether, and to what extent, people interpret their personal lives through the prism of politics.[37] His astute use of diaries and correspondence written by Germans at the time of the Nazi rise to power uncovers an astounding degree of politicization in society. He shows, first, how political language had seeped into everyday discourse. In addition, he suggests how such normally private activities as vacationing became politicized through mass movements like the *Kraft durch Freude* program: when Germans travelled on holiday, they were "consuming images of the nation;" when they enjoyed a rise in real incomes, they experienced their own prosperity through the prism of national regeneration.

Although a handful of scholars have studied the evolution of political culture in the Third Republic, much more remains for historians to uncover.[38] Likewise, the study of Vichy political culture in the current historiography remains subject to a narrow focus on the right-wing fringe, and as such tends to extrapolate from aspects of the Vichy regime's conservative politics to French society as a whole. This paper suggests of course exactly why the precise role of politics in society can never be presumed. The role of political culture in predicting the processes of politicization or depoliticization—processes so important to deciding how society behaves over the course of military conflicts—is a question to which we have only begun to formulate an answer.

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[36] Philippe Burrin. "Writing the History of Military Occupations" in *France at War: Vichy and the Historians*, eds. Sarah Fishman et al. (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 78. [37] Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2008).

[38] See for example, James R. Lehning, *To Be a Citizen: The Political Culture of the Early Third Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).