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New Caledonian Women in the Free French

Challenging Gender and Racial Absences in Archival Records and Personal Narratives

Nina Wardleworth

Abstract: Charles de Gaulle's Free French forces were dominated by men recruited from across the French Empire. However, women from every imperial territory also played an important role. This article focuses on women from New Caledonia, in the French Pacific, who joined the Free French women's auxiliary forces in Autumn 1940. It draws upon military archives, contemporary newspaper coverage, and Raymonde Jore's autobiography to investigate how these women skillfully navigated their identities and the stories of their service, depending on the sociopolitical environment. It also demonstrates how the intersections of gender and race influenced official attitudes toward these female combatants, as male metropolitan French officers and their administration were forced to grapple with changing visions of womanhood and empire in periods of war and decolonization.

Keywords: Charles de Gaulle, gender, New Caledonia, race, Free French, women, World War II

In the Autumn of 1940, two young women, both called Raymonde, left their homes in the French imperial island territory of New Caledonia to join Charles de Gaulle's embryonic Free French (*Forces françaises libres* [FFL]) movement in London.[1] This territory was one of the first parts of the French Empire to rally to the Free French cause on 21 September 1940. However, it is often overlooked in historical summaries of this movement's beginnings in favor of Chad, led by de Gaulle's ally, the Guyanese-born Félix Eboué.[2] New Caledonia, under the leadership of its new governor, Henri Sautot, quickly constituted civil defense units to protect the islands and

recruited men to be sent off to fight for the fledgling Free French army (in what would later become *les Bataillons du Pacifique*). Placing the territory on a war footing so quickly was strategically significant because of New Caledonia's geographical location in the Pacific, of interest to the British, Australians and the Japanese, but also because of the importance of its natural mineral resources, especially nickel.[3]

The women of New Caledonia played an active role from the start, both in their home territory and in the heartlands of the Free French in London, French West Africa, and Algiers. Yet both their gender and ethnicity meant that they were also marginalized and sidelined, both during the conflict and in postwar commemoration and historiography. Kim Munholland and Robert Aldrich do not make any reference to female soldiers or Resistance fighters in their books, which provide the most comprehensive histories of the war in New Caledonia and the wider French Pacific.[4] The leading French-language general history of the Free French, Jean-François Muracciole's *Les Français libres: l'autre résistance*, devotes much space to categorizing who could be considered as a true member of the Free French. His conclusions place the spotlight on white men with previous military experience and downplay the role of colonial soldiers, to whom only five pages are devoted, despite the fact that they constituted the majority of the troops.[5] There is no mention of the role played by women in the Free French, and this demonstrates that narrow definitions of belonging and identity continue to exist in the historiography of the Free French, though Muracciole states that "of all the colonial territories, it was in New Caledonia and Polynesia that the number of indigenous people enlisting in the Free French Forces was the highest, as a proportion of the total population."[6] In more recent imperial readings of the Free French, it is the story of the African colonies that dominate, such as Eric Jennings's *Free French Africa in World War Two*, which provides an important recentering of

Equatorial Africa as an equal partner to London in the foundation of the Free French story.[7] In the limited historiography of women of the Free French, whose numbers rose to 14,000 by the end of the conflict,[8] such as the extremely detailed study *Elles ont suivi de Gaulle* by Sébastien Albertelli,[9] it is the stories of its female founders, women who were well-known before the war such as the tennis star Simone Matthieu, that take precedence. Although the story of the two Raymondes does appear several times, it is often as a way of documenting the refusal of the women of the Free French (especially those based in London) to always respect military discipline.[10]

Such postwar silences contrast with women's vital propaganda role during the war years. The female combatants were feted as the Free French pinups, some of its most powerful propaganda tools, used to recruit other fighters and to fundraise for the cause, especially in the first months of the war when the Free French were seeking to promote their cause and bolster their finances.[11] These propaganda images ranged from wartime depictions of the Rochambelles (mainly upper-class white French and American women ambulance drivers attached to the Free French) being pictured styling their hair in their ambulance wing-mirrors on the battlefield[12] and newsreel footage of the singer Josephine Baker in the Free French air force uniform, to the immediate postwar lecture tours of former female members of the French internal Resistance across the United Kingdom in 1944–1945.[13] The numbers of women serving in the Free French forces and the subsequent army of liberation from the French Empire (the French Caribbean, Reunion, Madagascar, as well as New Caledonia) dwarfed those from metropolitan France until the Autumn of 1944,[14] yet they are still largely absent from the historical narrative.

However, in order to more fully understand how a then proudly imperial France conceived its changing status throughout the Occupation and then the fight for liberation, it is

imperative to examine the motivations and experiences of a full variety of actors committed to their own vision of what France was and could be. The stories of women from the French Empire, such as those from New Caledonia, highlight the imperial bonds that had been developed thousands of miles from the motherland, through education and cultural propaganda programs. These case studies shine a spotlight on the still underexplored theme of gender discrimination and its intersections of questions of race, class, and national identity within the Free French.

This biographical approach, which, as Guillaume Piketty has demonstrated, is such an established trope of Free French historiography,[15] is an especially important tool in the study of female combatants from European empires, as their trajectories differed greatly from French male norms in terms of education, class, and race.[16] The cases of three New Caledonian women will be examined here, those of Raymonde Jore (1917–1995) and Raymonde Rolly (1917–1988), who left the island to join the Free French in 1940 and returned with their new husbands in 1946, and that of Marguerite Hardel (1912–1984), who remained in New Caledonia to serve in the administration of the Free French navy for the entire period of the war. These women were chosen for this study, because of the relative abundance of a range of material in the French archives (in both their own voice and those of their military and colonial hierarchies), and because of the traces (and absences) in postwar histographies of their stories.

The individual journeys and experiences of these three women provide an important insight into how racial profiling and whiteriarchy were the norm in the operations and attitudes of the Free French. They also highlight the contradictions inherent in these women's attitudes toward their status within the French colonial project, which often altered depending on the geographical context. This study brings together official military and Resistance archives, letters,

newspaper articles, photographs, and an autobiography with the aim of raising these women's voices and therefore challenging the established white, male-centric narrative that has dominated the Free French story. The conclusions drawn from the reading of their stories here make a wider contribution to rethinking women's agency in wartime as they began to serve for the first time in large numbers in what were still predominantly masculine theaters of war. They also provide an insight into the extent to which attitudes of both the colonizer and colonized toward empire were changing in the years leading up to the decolonization of France's empire.

Archival Traces

It is highly probable that there were numerous other women like Jore, Rolly, and Hardel from New Caledonia who served in various capacities in the Free French, but the official documentation—and therefore studies about them—remains relatively scant. Women from colonial territories, other than French North Africa and West Africa, have remained understudied throughout colonial historiography to an even greater extent than their male counterparts.[17]

Relatively few women (1,781)[18] were given Free French accreditation (*homologation*) after the war, a status that then provides an official archival trace through the individual files of the Resistance office (GR16P) of the French Ministry of Defense (SHD). The French military archive's database, *Mémoire des hommes*, which catalogues such accreditations, lists only seven for New Caledonia.[19] The women's distinct army status as female auxiliaries did not class them as soldiers, though this is how Jore and Rolly described themselves in all the documents consulted, providing an insight into the disconnect between army rhetoric and female lived and imagined experience. As a result of this classification, the women do not have any distinct army service records held at the military archives in Pau, like so many of their male counterparts. Such

military archives are often more detailed than those of the Resistance files, allowing a more complete male story to be told in historiography and commemorations.

The first mention of possible New Caledonian female recruits is in the outgoing correspondence of Governor Sautot in the 44W series of the Services des archives de la Nouvelle-Calédonie. This demonstrates that he was keen to promote the wishes of these women to serve, even going so far as to send the original letters of petition from Jore and Rolly to De Gaulle. It can be assumed that De Gaulle read these letters, as he unusually met both women on his return from the Middle East in October 1941, having been out of the country when they first arrived in Britain.[20] Rolly's letter to the governor of 30 September 1940 made a compelling case that she was "capable of replacing a man when it comes to driving a car, ambulance or truck."[21] Jore demonstrated in her letter of 1 October 1940 how she had undertaken a nursing qualification in order to serve France and made an impassioned plea that "they [Caledonian women] would be numerous and sublime, proud and valiant, ready to take the first order, accepting all the hardships, all the moral and physical suffering of war, all the sacrifices, even that of their lives."[22] Both letters highlighted the links between the women and the colonial administration; Jore stated that she had tried to make her petition in person as she worked as a secretary in the same building as the governor, and Rolly emphasized that her father worked for the island's postal service. These two women obviously therefore knew how to operate in New Caledonian colonial society in order to present themselves as morally and practically suitable candidates for such an important wartime role.

What about those women who were turned down from serving overseas?[23] It can be assumed that many would have chosen, like Hardel, to undertake war work on the island. So why are there not more Free French accreditations for New Caledonian women? This may have been

because of a reticence from the women themselves to demand such recognition in the immediate postwar period. This phenomenon has been documented for metropolitan female members of the French internal and external Resistance. Élodie Jauneau explains how the immediate postwar view of these servicewomen was predominantly of them being less *des femmes-soldats* ("female soldiers") and more *des femmes au service des soldats* (women in traditionally gendered and sexualized military roles such as cooking, washing, and prostitution).[24] By the mid-1950s, when societal norms privileged the ultra-feminine women who played traditional gender roles, French military rhetoric described women who wished to have combatant roles as "hybrid" and "asexual"[25] and instead preferred to highlight the profiles of the country's "Angels," the nursing corps in the Indochinese War (1946–1954).[26]

There was also a lack of awareness of pension and legal rights that such recognition of their wartime role would offer them. Hardel's case is typical of numerous individual Resistance files that have been consulted of women from the now former French Empire. Hardel only applied for Free French accreditation in 1972, following her sixtieth birthday as she found herself as a single woman at the age of retirement with an elderly mother to care for.[27] This process took her four years with numerous letters flying back and forth over the 10,400 miles between New Caledonia and metropolitan France. It involved considerable effort on her part to track down her former commanding officers, now living in France, to gain the necessary testimonials. At first, her period of service was calculated at only fifteen months (1 July 1944 to 31 October 1945), following the scant official paperwork that existed. Yet her commanding officer gave her date of enlistment as 12 October 1940 but said that he had not made her sign any military paperwork, as in December 1940 he had yet to receive instructions from London about what to do with female personnel.[28] Finally, the December 1940 date was recognized, granting

Hardel forty-four more months of service and the increased corresponding pension rights. In contrast, the military archival file GR12H5,[29] concerning the rallying of the Pacific territories to the Free French, contained lists of hundreds of men who had signed up to join the civil defense units or the *Bataillon du Pacifique* from the Autumn of 1940. These lists contained the men's full biographical and employment details, as well as typed army contracts. This made it much easier for them to claim their own Free French accreditation, and therefore pension rights, in the years following the war. The naming of one of these men, Jean Tranape, as a *Compagnon de la Libération* (following the awarding of the *Croix de la Libération* by De Gaulle in June 1944) and then as a Commander of the *Légion d'Honneur* would also have served to raise the profile of his entire battalion and of their role in numerous theaters of war.[30]

There is a full administrative paper trail for both Jore and Rolly, as they signed their own contracts on arrival in London on 7 June 1941, although other documents in their individual Resistance files give a probably erroneous initial service date of 21 September 1940, the date on which they are said to have joined the Free French and left New Caledonia for London.[31] However, this military paperwork was not rewritten or adapted for women. In her examination of the French colonial archives, Marie-Paule Ha documents that the "taxonomic system [was] entirely structured by a male-centered vision."[32] The same was true of these military archives, where the physical description section included a place to record the type of facial hair of the soldier. On Jore's record, the term "none" was inscribed and then an attempt to erase it was made, the soldier in charge obviously being unsure of what to do in such a novel situation.[33]

The gender difference is therefore stark. Women were not only hampered during the war years by the failure of the Free French administration to define and regulate their service in a timely manner, but they were also disadvantaged both immediately and many years after the war

for the very same reason when making pension and recognition claims. Women who were stationed thousands of miles away from the Free French headquarters in London were further penalized, as instructions took so long to get through to these very edges of empire. This was often because lines of communication had been damaged during the war or restricted by pro-Vichy officials in French Indochina.[34] Women from New Caledonia were still further hampered, as theirs was the first colony from which women signed up to the Free French. Two years later, by the time that the women of the French Caribbean territories had joined the Free French, first as part of La Dissidence movement having escaped to the British islands of Dominica and Saint-Lucia in 1942 and then in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana in 1943, there were complete protocols and paperwork trails in place, making it easier for them to gain postwar recognition.[35]

If we take a wider look beyond the individual Resistance accreditation files or even the French army files (SHD) that document the rallying of the Pacific to the Free French (GR12H5) or those that document the women's unit of the Free French (GR12P251), it becomes apparent that the women of New Caledonia (and virtually all other women of the French Empire) are also absent. Their archival erasure or minimalization therefore runs across multiple forms of official wartime and postwar documentation. Whether this was a deliberate omission or mistaken oversight, it tells us a great deal about how these women were viewed both during the conflict and in the postwar period.

The Omnipresence of Jore

If there is relative paucity in the amount of material in the French Resistance archives and the collections from the New Caledonian archives about these three women, why is it that Raymonde Jore has been featured in virtually every historical study, ranging from detailed

overviews to more general pictorial representations about women Resistance fighters in France during World War II?[36] Most have devoted a section to the women of the empire who were part of the Free French and contain many photographs of these female soldiers, discussions of the territories from where they were drawn, and details of the roles they played. However, very few of these women are mentioned by name. Jore is therefore featured alongside women who received far greater levels of public and state recognition because of their postwar careers, such as the first women to enter the French Senate after the granting of the right to vote to French women in 1946, the French Guinian Eugène Eboué and Jane Vialle from Congo-Brazzaville.

Jore's omnipresence is undoubtedly due to a detailed, and therefore precious, source: her autobiography, *Le corps féminin* (*The Women's Corps*, the first title given to the women's units of the Free French), published in 1975. As the title of her book suggests, her testimony was a means of bearing witness not only to her own years of service, but also to those of her counterparts in the women's units of the French army. This is common to other testimonies about the period published by women that highlight the collective nature of their experiences, trials, and tribulations.[37]

Jore dedicated the book to these female comrades, stressing that "I note that virtually nothing has been said about the participation of the daughters of France (filles de France) in the Second World War."[38] The term filles de France highlights her patriotism and sense of belonging to the colonial motherland. It was, however, perhaps surprising that she chose this title for her autobiography, given that she describes in this memoir how *Le corps féminin* was a "an ambiguous term that provoked general derision."[39]

This autobiography is the only means of directly accessing these New Caledonian women's voices (along with their initial letters of petition) in a way that was not mediated by the

(male) military hierarchy, as was the case in their individual Resistance files. Jore's narrative was, however, undoubtedly still influenced by external forces, including a strong sense of patriotism and duty. In the introduction, Jore said that the account had been written in the immediate postwar period—"It's been thirty years since I put down on paper 'our war' . . . what I'd kept to myself until now"[40]—but that she was motivated to seek to have it published because of the relative lack of other firsthand French female veterans' testimonies.[41] The text was published by the publisher France-Empire, which had an editorial line that sought to publish works by veterans that provide a positive view of imperial history from World War II onward.[42] It is difficult to gauge how her narrative might have changed in this thirty-year period (1945–1975) between writing the text and final publication. These years were marked by the gaining of independence for most of the French colonies and the transformation of New Caledonia's legal status from a colony to a French overseas territory in 1946. These changes undoubtedly influenced Jore's sense of national identity, though this is not directly referenced in the text.[43]

Jore's decision to try once more to publish her autobiography also appears to have motivated her to apply for the *Carte de combattant volontaire de la résistance* (official state recognition of wartime Resistance activities) three years after the publication of *Le corps féminin* in February 1978, just after her sixtieth birthday. It is clear she was therefore seeking official recognition from the French state in addition to this recognition of publication. However, such a link would be impossible to gauge from the official paperwork because of the absence of Jore's voice from the entire file.

Racial and Gender Profiling

Discussions of race and the Free French to date have focused on the roles played by male soldiers from across France's empire in the Free French forces that then became the regular

French army during the Liberation of France in 1944 and 1945. They emphasize the continuity of attitudes that governed the treatment of Black and Arab soldiers between the prewar colonial Third Republic and the period of the Free French forces.[44] Other work has concentrated on the whitening of the French army, with the withdrawal of up to 15,000 Black African soldiers from the front lines to be replaced by White French fighters from metropolitan Resistance groups in the autumn of 1944.[45] Most of these studies have examined non-White soldiers en masse and have rarely included the views of these soldiers because of the rarity of such sources. One of the major issues that forms the central part of both Jore's and Rolly's story is the negation of questions of gender and race and their intersections, though such discussions are often couched in oblique references. Jore's autobiography is important, as it is a rare firsthand examination of the prevalence of racial stereotyping and racism within the Free French and their British and Commonwealth allies and especially of their intersection with questions of gender.

When Jore and Rolly traveled to London from New Caledonia in the Autumn 1940, via Australia, they were often interviewed in the local press and spoke at events in numerous cities, organized by the newly formed Free French committees and other pro-French groups. The wide newspaper coverage that their visits received revealed the propaganda coup that these women presented for the nascent Free French organization in Australia, seeking to legitimatize and fundraise for De Gaulle's movement. The two women were the very embodiment of the success of the French imperial project, as they were born on the other side of the world from the metropole, had never traveled outside their island, and yet because of their imperial education felt profoundly French. Their particularly feminine characteristics were highlighted throughout the newspaper articles (they were shown sitting together companionly, mending clothing, and reading a women's magazine in one newspaper photograph), and the novelty of young women in

uniform was evident: “Both girls wear on their wrists metal identity discs similar to those issued to soldiers.”[46] The particular placement of these identity discs highlighted gender differences and therefore the different military roles that it was imagined that these women would be called upon to play. The discs were not worn around the neck, under the uniform, where they would not impede the soldiers’ ability to fight, but was instead worn like a piece of jewelry, a pretty bracelet. M. André Brenac, the leader of the Free French in Australia, was meant to have offered both women their first uniforms, and therefore it was suggested that it was the Australian French community that made them into soldiers, thus providing a gratifying link to the motherland for these expatriate populations who were seeking to play their part in the war effort. *The Sydney Sun* managed to feminize the uniform question by quizzing Raymonde Rolly about her favorite color (which she claimed was green) and so suggested that the green color of the Free French driver’s uniform may have been one of Rolly’s major motivations for volunteering for the ambulance corps, rather than any particular desire to serve in that role or her valuable previous experience driving lorries for her father’s postal business. So, women were shown to be influenced not by army requirements or personal aptitude, but instead by feminine whims. *The Brisbane Courier-Mail* described their 21 March 1941 deployment as the women having “been busy with their plans since September . . . for going overseas” as if they were planning a foreign holiday or honeymoon, not a possibly dangerous military posting. This great interest in French female soldiers in the Australian press may also have reflected the fact that Australian women had yet to be drafted into war work, with organizations like the Australian Women’s Army Service (AWAS) and the Women’s Australian Auxiliary Air Force (WAAAF) only being formed six months later in September 1941.[47]

All the articles from Australian newspapers included numerous physical descriptions of Jore and Rolly. Their descriptions in newspaper reports were meant to immediately depict them as white: "Mlle Rolly a striking blond and her companion, an equally handsome brunette."[48] Hair color is commonly used as a signifier of whiteness[49] and beyond that of dominant society and beauty norms. Therefore, by emphasizing the blonde and the brunette the journalist was stressing to their readers the normative and therefore acceptable nature of these women and therefore their suitability to represent France (and even the Western Allies more generally), even though they come from the furthest reaches of the empire. The photograph which accompanied the article also presented the two women as white. Richard Dyer states that "the photographic media privilege and construct whiteness" and that "in the history of photography and film, getting the right image meant getting the one which conformed to prevalent ideas of humanity."[50] This includes ideas of whiteness. It is difficult to gauge whether such deliberate visual and textual whitening originated with the Free French authorities and their representatives in Australia or with the Australian journalists. Was a desire to demonstrate the power and prestige of De Gaulle's Free French tied to a supposedly normative skin color, or was it symbolic of Australian racial prejudice? Questions and judgments surrounding skin color would have been particularly important in this British settler colony, which was constructed along racial lines, and which had introduced a color bar in its own armed forces in 1940.[51]

The specific racial compositions of the population of New Caledonia and the corresponding differing legal status and attitudes were often poorly understood outside of the territory. There was the indigenous population of the islands, known as the Kanaks; the European settler population, sometimes called the *Caldoche*;[52] other colonial populations brought to the penal colony (including Algerian nationalists); and migrants from neighboring Pacific islands,

Japan, Java, and French Indochina.[53] Isabelle Merle has documented that it was "the cultural link, closely associated with the place of residence which, in New Caledonia, forms the basis of the fundamental distinction between Whites and Kanaks, much more so than skin colour."[54] Rolly came from one of the "places of residence" (Voh) where the cultural codes that were followed would have been more important than racial origin. Equally Jore, with her job in the colonial administration, would also have been able to transcend racial barriers in this New Caledonian context.

Metropolitan French historians have been keen to assign a racial descriptor to Jore. The *Dictionnaire historique de la Résistance* and *the Dictionnaire de la France Libre* both describe Jore as "Kanak."[55] Christine Levisse-Touze describes Jore's "skin tone"[56] repeatedly. White skin "tone" is still referenced as the norm; therefore, Levisse-Touze is highlighting Jore's position as a woman of color. Marguerite Wietz is more frank, labeling Jore as "one of the rare women of color of the *Corps Féminin*."[57] Jore's own descriptions of her racial identity and her reporting of the words of others in her autobiography were often contradictory. She described herself as "a white woman" when she was garrisoned with North and West African indigenous *tirailleurs* and *zouaves* troops in Algeria[58] but accepted with pride the description of herself as "the Kanak corporal" by the President of the Provisional Government of Algiers in 1944, as he praised her courage for standing up to her military hierarchy.[59] Jore highlighted the lack of understanding or knowledge of France's Pacific territories among Free French officers and their inability to view these territories' populations as entirely French: "New Caledonia, almost unknown, apart from its former penal colony . . . [Jore is] a true island girl, with an aggressive spirit, absolutely different from other French girls."[60] Such racial stereotypes continued into modern historical texts. Weitz in her history of female Resistance fighters claims that Jore struggled in London

because, “not being a city-dweller and faced with an unusual climate, she [Jore] had great difficulty adapting.”[61] Levisse-Touze also refers to the London weather, stating that Jore eventually went to North Africa for “a happier climate for her.”[62] This focus on colonial troops’ supposed inability to withstand northern European weather conditions is reminiscent of the policy of *hivernage*[63] that was put into place for West African soldiers during World War I. Jore stated instead in her autobiography that it was the quantity of racial slurs that she suffered throughout her period of service from fellow members, both male and female, in the Free French that motivated her request to be transferred from London to the theaters of war in the Middle East or back home to New Caledonia. Instead, she was sent to France’s Central African territories (AEF).

Love and Marriage

Although numerous postwar marriages between couples that met in the Free French attest to the frequency of wartime relationships, they are rarely evoked in the testimonies of the period for reasons both of modesty and of concern not to overshadow or damage the political and moral ideals for which they were fighting.[64] Sébastien Albertelli documents the tight control of the sexuality of women in the Free French while they were stationed in barracks in London; they had to conform to “a more rigorous moral discipline” than their male counterparts.[65] But such controls were more difficult to enforce out of the Free French centers of first London and then Algiers.

Following their requests to leave London, the two Raymondes were both transferred to Equatorial Africa in late 1942. Rolly met her future husband, a Norwegian doctor named Herman Beer, on the boat from Freetown to Lagos, and they were married in the Nigerian city on their arrival. Beer spent the rest of the war working in South Africa without his wife, who was unable

to gain a transfer from Brazzaville. Rolly's individual Resistance file reveals very little about her time in Africa after her marriage, first in Brazzaville and then in Douala, and she did not leave a published account of her wartime activities, though she made a few appearances in Jore's autobiography.[66]

After her initial disappointment over her transfer destination, Jore arrived in Brazzaville anticipating it as a happy event as she "set foot on French soil . . . the capital of Free France,"[67] but she complained about the welcome that she received: "Strangely enough, it was the 'foreigners' from Brazzaville who received us most cordially"; the French women demonstrated "their snobbery, their pride, their false prejudices, their jealousy."[68] As in London, both her race and her gender had made her an unwanted arrival, upturning accepted social norms and conventions in a highly stratified colonial society in which French women or *la coloniale* were meant, according to Marie-Paule Ha, "to incarnate a feminine version of the civilising mission with the mandate to bring about the domestication of the empire, domesticity being upheld in the early decades of the century as the sine qua non for true colonization-cum-civilization."[69] Jore left Brazzaville by July 1943, having been transferred, once again, and sent on a series of short, often unspecified, missions before she finally joined the secretarial staff of the new provisional government in Algiers. A telegram of 11 November 1943, in her individual Resistance accreditation file, hinted at scandal. It was from General Marchand to General Koenig and requested that Koenig (then Deputy Chief of Staff in Algiers) refuse the transfer of Marcel Teyssier (later to become Jore's husband) to Algiers apparently for health reasons, a transfer that Marchand believed that Jore herself had been attempting to advance. "He [Teyssier] is infatuated [s'est entiché] with Corporal JORRE Raymonde, who I had to expel from the AEF and Cameroon because of *her scandalous conduct* [underlined in the telegram]. Corporal JORRE is

the cause of the divorce of this non-commissioned officer, who leaves his wife and three children behind."[70] Marchand instead intended to send the accountant from the colonial service, with little military experience or training, to serve in a fighting regiment, which can only be read as a form of punishment. The telegram appears in Jore's individual Resistance file, yet her own voice is totally absent. A major event in her life is narrated instead through the voices and prejudges of two high-ranking white male officers.[71] As Ann Laura Stoler states, this is an example of how, "disquiet and anxieties disrupt rote reports" in colonial archives.[72]

This event seems to have confirmed all the French army's official and private concerns about the disastrous consequences of allowing women into its ranks. There is also a clear racial dimension to this comment. The verb *s'enticher* suggests that Teyssier was unable to resist Jore's charms, that she had bewitched him, a common stereotype about relationships between white French men and women from the empire.[73] It equally suggests that Jore had behaved in a manner that no respectable (white metropolitan) French woman would, by splitting up an established marriage and family unit. Mme Teyssier was painted as an example of the idealized French bourgeois wife and mother. While the Free French did not overtly espouse the French collaborationist Vichy government's rebranding of the country's motto to place family (and therefore a retrograde place for women in the home) at its center, it clearly viewed traditional family (and racial) structures as central to both its wartime victory and the subsequent moral rebuilding of France after the war.

The telegram also briefly mentioned that Teyssier had served in the French colony of Gabon in 1940 and fought with the pro-Vichy forces against the Free French in October and November 1940, but this is not given as the reason to refuse Teyssier's transfer. Therefore, Jore's crossing of societal boundaries was depicted as more dangerous than previous pro-Vichy service.

It is incredibly striking that two such high-ranking French generals should take time to comment on a romantic relationship between two relatively junior staff at a moment when the preparations for the liberation of Italy were underway. This was symbolic of a changing imperial world where a woman of color had become part of the French army and could travel around the empire under orders.[74] It can also be viewed as highly hypocritical, as Koenig had a longstanding and well-known extramarital relationship with his own (English) chauffeur, Susan Travers, an affair that Travers claimed was widely known about.[75] Koenig replied five days later that he had received "poor information" when he originally sanctioned the transfer and would stop it immediately. It is hard not to read bruised pride in Koenig's words, shame that he had been taken in by the words of Teyssier and worse still those of Jore.

Jore related the event in detail in her autobiography in a chapter entitled "I Was in Love," concentrating especially on the attitudes of local commanding officers: "The general in command of the troops in the AEF has seen fit to poke his nose into the love affair between a reservist sergeant and a volunteer corporal."[76] She documented this in the third person ("the sergeant" referring to her future husband and "the corporal" describing herself), as if to highlight that she was providing a supposedly unemotional reading of the situation. There was no mention of her future husband's marriage or any children. Although she did hint that it had been a widely known scandal in the colonial town, which was evidence, she claimed, of the conservative nature of colonial officials and their wives.[77] But such recourse to gossip and scandal about women's sexuality was a common tool of colonial administrators to uphold French administrative control,[78] and in a time of war where the empire was the Free French's only stronghold,[79] French high-ranking military officials behaved no differently.

Teyssier arrived in Algiers with the *Bataillon de marche no. 13*, demonstrating that Marchand did indeed manage to transfer him to a fighting regiment, though he had not managed to have him sent to a different location. The couple were married at Algiers town hall on 15 April 1944, two days after his arrival in the city.

Colonial Travelogue

This forced exile from Brazzaville following the "scandalous affair" meant that Jore undertook a protracted journey around French and British Central African colonial territories, moving from one posting to another with no clear orders or objectives. The narrative passages about Central Africa in her autobiography provide rare female transnational reflections on this colonial landscape. The French colonial travelogues published in the 1920s and 1930s were written by metropolitan French women with already established journalistic credentials such as Denise Savineau and Lucie Cousturier, while they were on missions financed by French museums and the colonial government.[80] They, unlike Jore, had a reason to be there, in both the eyes of the colonial officials and the indigenous populations. The nearest equivalent to Jore was the French-Dutch-German photographer Germaine Krull, who was working for the Free French in Central Africa at the same time as Jore was on mission, with the task of documenting the production of goods to support the war effort.[81]

Jore's descriptions reflected her self-confessed colonial education ("born colonial").[82] However, she seemed to distance herself from, and even ignore, her own heritage, which she had previously described in her autobiography. She adopted all the trappings of colonial life, engaging a series of "boys" in each of her stopping points in Africa as housekeepers. She subscribed completely to colonial theories of racial hierarchies, which placed Black Africans squarely at the bottom of the racial order with her in-depth descriptions of the supposedly

primitive nature of African villagers she encountered on her travels, especially during the trip up the Congo River from Brazzaville to Bangui. Jore's descriptions of tropical landscapes, including their flora and fauna, echo earlier colonial adventure novels so popular in the interwar period. She ascribed her later periods of ill health to her "journeys around Black Africa,"[83] reflecting the then popular pseudoscientific theories around race that set out the dangerous nature of the African landscape and climate for the health of the colonizer.[84]

She spoke admiringly of the French *mission civilisatrice* in the AEF, especially of the colonial road infrastructure: "Along the 1,200-kilometer route, the *Compagnie de transports* had set up perfectly equipped and well-stocked stopover gites. It was a treat, after a day of fatigue and exhausting heat, to be able to take a long shower while the local populations (*indigènes*) prepared dinner."[85]

Jore's distinct Free French affiliation, where she was not part of a large and distinct female unit, coupled with an often-ambiguous racial status and thus her supposed ability to survive alone in Africa, afforded her more liberty of movement than most French women of the period. She traveled across French Equatorial and West Africa unaccompanied by father or husband and not explicitly under the command or protection of any male colonial administrators or officers. Her orders changed constantly, she believed, to keep her separated from Marcel Teyssier. Her Free French file does not contain any documentation that explains what her missions were in these territories or the events that might have led her to being moved from one mission to another. Undoubtedly, she had become what Jennifer Anne Boittin has termed an "undesirable" in the eyes of French colonial and military authorities, who then simply wanted to move her to another jurisdiction.[86] Other Free French women remained in the larger colonial towns and cities of Brazzaville, Dakar, and Algiers in preordained colonial society structures,

mixing largely with their male military superiors in the office or local colonizers in the hotels and sports clubs and undertaking traditionally feminized roles (i.e., secretary, nurse, or social worker).[87]

The return to what the two Raymondes referred to as the "motherland" (France not New Caledonia) occupied surprisingly little space in both memoires and archives, despite the desire expressed in their initial petition letters of 1940 to come to its aid. This was not a fleeting visit, as the two spent several months in Paris and were only formally demobilized in 1946. Like so many other women across the world, they slipped back into traditional gender roles once wartime was over. Individual state recognition would only follow twenty years (De Gaulle's visit to New Caledonia in 1966) to thirty years (Jore's administrative quest for recognition of wartime service) later.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the individual stories of Jore, Rolly, and Hardel provide important insights at the macro-level into the incorporation of women into the French military forces, especially the Free French, in the aftermath of the defeat of 1940. They demonstrate the extent to which, despite the Free French's recognition of the importance of empire to their cause, they (and their British allies) were ill-prepared for integrating women from France's empire into their ranks. French military officials were often blinded by racial and gender stereotypes, which both influenced their military decision-making during the war about the roles and missions to be assigned and restricted full recognition for these female imperial veterans in its aftermath.

The review of existing research has demonstrated the extent to which questions of gender and race, and especially the intersections of the two, remain understudied in the histories of the Free French, which continue to privilege the stories of its white, male senior officers. Yet an

examination of a greater variety of combatant case studies provides important insights into questions of emancipation through wartime service for women from the French Empire as well as its limitations. Such questions of independence for colonial populations were to become central to France's postwar political, social, and military debates in the years leading up to decolonialization, which immediately followed World War II. French women were given the vote in 1944, partly in recognition of their wartime work and sacrifices. However, the partial nature with which female suffrage was granted across the rebranded French Union demonstrates that this imperial war work remained unrecognized and overshadowed by theories about different populations' racial suitability for such a right.[88] The fact that New Caledonia has yet to become independent, despite numerous referenda and periods of unrest over the last eighty years, only makes questions of the inclusion (or exclusion) of the stories of its veterans in a French national narrative more pertinent.

Jore's autobiography is a fascinating document that allows the voices of these women soldiers from the French Empire to be heard in a way that is not mediated by their army hierarchy. It also provides a rare female reading of (sometimes different) social conventions in a variety of colonial societies during the war, from the colonial metropoles of London and Paris to French West, Central, and North Africa, as well as of the transnational encounters between colonized populations. Jore's negotiations of her identity in her travels demonstrate the particularity of societal hierarchies in New Caledonia that privileged culture and education over race, and which meant that she, and others, found her identity difficult to read and perform outside of the island. Hardel's letters of petition to the military authorities, written in order to gain her pension as she approached retirement, demonstrate how women had yet again to negotiate a variety of different, often unwritten codes in the postwar period, those of a male-

centered military system and those of continuing postcolonial territory on the geographical periphery of the French Republic.

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Notes

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1. I would like to thank Elizabeth Fink and the two reviewers for their detailed comments on the first draft of this article and to reviewer one for sharing three letters written by Jore, Rolly, and another New Caledonian woman, Ginette Meunier to Governor Sautot in the Summer of 1940 that are now in the New Caledonian archives, making them difficult for me to consult.

2. Félix Eboué was the first non-white governor of a French colony. He was named as Governor of Chad in July 1938 after having spent more than twenty-five years in the colonial administration of numerous French West and Central African colonial territories. https://www.ordredelaliberation.fr/fr/compagnons/felix-eboue (accessed 22 March 2023).

3. Kim Munholland, *Rock of Contention: Free French and Americans at War in New Caledonia 1940–1945* (New York: Berghahn, 2005); and Alexander Lee, "Nickel and the 1940 New Caledonia Coup," *Australian Journal of French Studies* 60, 3 (2023): 290–303, https://doi.org/10.3828/ajfs.2023.25.

4. Robert Aldrich, *France and the South Pacific since 1940* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1993); Munholland, *Rock of Contention*.

5. Jean-François Muracciole, *Les Français libres: l'autre résistance* (Paris: Tallandier, 2009), 60–64.

6. Ibid., 64. This and all subsequent translations from French into English are my own.

7. Eric T. Jennings, *Free French Africa in World War Two: The African Resistance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

8. Paul Gaujac, "Des Corps Féminins aux AFAT: Afrique du Nord 1943–1944," *Guerres Mondiales et Conflits Contemporains* 198 (2000): 109–122, here 109, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25732680.

9. Sébastien Albertelli, *Elles ont suivi de Gaulle: Histoire du corps des volontaires françaises* (Paris: Perrin, 2020).

10. Ibid., 131.

11. Charlotte Faucher and Laure Humbert, "Introduction: Beyond de Gaulle and Beyond London: The French External Resistance and Its International Networks," *European Review of History / Revue européenne d'histoire* 25, 2 (2018): 195–221, https://doi.org/10.1080/13507486.2017.1411336.

12. "7 août 1944: 'Les Rochambelles' de la division LECLERC, Chroniques d'une libération," *L'INA éclaire l'actu*, 7 August 2004. Video. https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclaire-actu/video/rcc09000652/7-aout-1944-les-rochambelles-de-la-division-leclerc.

13. Charlotte Faucher, "Restoring the Image of France in Britain, 1944–1947," *The Historical Journal* 64, 5 (2021): 1428–1448, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X21000017.

14. Claire Miot, “Combattantes dans combattre? Le cas des ambulancières dans la Première armée française (1944–1945),” *Revue historique des armées* 272 (2013): 25–35, https://journals.openedition.org/rha/7779; my own research into individual Resistance file (GR16P) accreditations.

15. Guillaume Piketty, *Français en Résistance: Carnets de guerre, correspondance, journaux personnels* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2009).

16. Muracciole, *Les Français libres*, 65–134.

17. Marie-Paule Ha, “Engendering French Colonial History: The Case of Indochina,” *Historical Reflections* 25, 1 (1999): 95–125, here 100, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41299134.

18. Number given when the search terms of “woman” and “FFL” are entered into the database. In comparison, 61,715 men received such recognition. “Titres, homologations et services pour faits de résistance” on the *Memoire des Hommes* website, https://mdh2021.arkotheque.fr/fr/ (accessed 22 March 2023).

19. Renée CELIERES, Huguette GALLAIS, Marguerite HARDEL, Raymonde JORE, Adèle MORNAGHINI, Raymonde ROLLY, Lili TONOLOF. This question of Free French accreditation will be returned to and examined specifically through the case of Hardel.

20. Albertelli states that only a few of the female *volontaires* ever met De Gaulle during their time in London. Albertelli, *Elles ont suivi*, 127.

21. Letter from Raymonde Rolly to Governor Sautot, 30 September 1940. Services des Archives de la Nouvelle-Calédonie, 44W.

22. Letter from Raymonde Jore to Governor Sautot, 1 October 1940. Services des Archives de la Nouvelle-Calédonie, 44W.

23. An online exhibition in 2015 (*Femmes au cœur du conflit: Nouvelle-Calédonie, 1939–1945*, Musée de la 2nde Guerre mondiale en Nouvelle-Calédonie, Nouméa, New Caledonia, 6 March – 8 August 2015) claimed that there were 150 women that attempted to sign up to join the Free French from New Caledonia, but that only Jore and Rolly were able to leave the island for London. This is an even larger number than that put forward by Jore and Rolly in their own testimonies. https://issuu.com/mairiedenoumea/docs/catalogue-femmes-au-coeur-du-conflit-compiled (accessed 22 March 2023).

24. Élodie Jauneau, "Images et représentations des premières soldates françaises (1938-1962)". *Clio. Histoire, femmes et sociétés*, 30, 2 (2009) : p.231-252., www.shs.cairn.info/revue-clio-2009-2-page-231?lang=fr.

25. Ibid., 128; Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949).

26. The term "Angel of Diên Biên Phu" was given to the French nurse Geneviève de Galard. Initially, she worked as part of the air evacuation from this military fortress. She would then choose to stay in this camp under siege to care for the wounded and was subsequently taken prisoner by the Vietminh. The important role played by the twenty women who worked in the military brothel in care for the wounded was not told by the media at the time. Anon, "Dien Bien Phu's Heroic French Nurse Receives Warm Welcome in Hanoi," *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, 1954, 1.

27. Letter from Marguerite Hardel, Service Historique de la Défense (SHD): GR16P285689.

28. Attestation de Jean Jouin, Nouméa, 16 March 1973, SHD: GR16P285689.

29. (Dossier 1) Organisation de la milice civique de la France libre en Nouvelle-Calédonie, inscriptions, armement (1941–1945); (d.2) copies de documents concernant le ralliement de Tahiti à la France libre (1940–1943) SHD: GR12H5.

30. Profile of Jean Tranape on ordredelalibération.fr (accessed 22 March 23).

31. This date seems erroneous as the letters petitioning Governor Sautot which were sent by the two women are dated 30 September 1940 and 1 October 1940. It maybe that either or both the women and/or the Free French authorities wished to promote a narrative of an early and enthusiastic rallying of New Caledonia to the Free French movement.

32. Marie-Paule Ha, *French Women and the Empire: The Case of Indochina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6.

33. Acte d'engagement de Raymonde Jore. SHD: GR16P311304.

34. Communications to New Caledonia had to go through the pro-Vichy colony of Indochina. SHD: GR12H5.

35. Nina Wardleworth, "The Documentary as a Site of Commemoration: Filming the Free French Dissidents from the French Antilles," *European Review of History* 25, 2 (2018): 374–391, https://doi.org/10.1080/13507486.2017.1415302.

36. Frédéric Pineau, *Femmes en guerre 1940–1946* (Paris: ETAI, 2013).

37. Élodie Jauneau, "Genre et récit de guerre: La parole des femmes de la Grande Muette (1939–1962)," *Nouvelles études francophones* 25,1 (2010): 127–147, here 144, http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/nef.2010.0007.

38. Raymonde Teyssier-Jore, *Le corps féminin* (Paris: France-Empire, 1975), 8.

39. Ibid., 9.

40. Ibid., 8.

41. By 1975, only Ève Curie, Tereska Torres, Andrée Griffin, and Rachel Windsor had published their memoires. These women had all either had greater responsibilities than Jore or had preexisting links to the military through their husbands, allowing them to access publication opportunities with greater ease.

42. https://www.imec-archives.com/archives/fonds/211FRE (accessed 8 April 2019).

43. It has proved impossible to consult the publisher's archives to determine how the text changed through the editorial process.

44. Jennings, *Free French Africa*; Julien Fargettas, *Les Tirailleurs sénégalais: les soldats noirs entre légendes et réalités, 1939–1945* (Paris: Tallandier, 2012); Ruth Ginio, "African Soldiers, French Women and Colonial Fears during and after World War II," in *Africa and World War Two*, ed. Judith A. Byfield, Carolyn A. Brown, Timothy Parsons, and Ahmad Alawad Sikainga (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 324–338.

45. Claire Miot. "Le retrait des tirailleurs sénégalais de la Première Armée française en 1944: Hérésie stratégique, bricolage politique ou conservatisme colonial?" *Vingtième siècle* 125 (2014): 77–89, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24674900.

46. "Noumea Girls to Join Corps Feminin," *The Brisbane Courier Mail*, 21 March 1941, https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/44901759.

47. Australian Government, Department of Veterans' Affairs, *Australian Women in War*, http://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/resources/australian-women-war (accessed 10 March 2019).

48. "From Noumea to Join the Free French in England," *The Daily Telegraph Sydney*, 8 March 1941.

49. Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997), 124.

50. Ibid., 89.

51. https://www.dva.gov.au/i-am/aboriginal-andor-torres-strait-islander/indigenous-australians-war (accessed7 March 2019).

52. Christine Pauleau, "Calédonien et Caldoche," *Mot* 53: 48–65, https://www.persee.fr/doc/mots_0243-6450_1997_num_53_1_2446.

53. Kim Munholland, "The Trials of the Free French in New Caledonia, 1940–1942," *French Historical Studies* 14, 4 (1986): 547–579, here 548, https://doi.org/10.2307/286538.

54. Isabelle Merle, "Genèse d'une identité coloniale: Histoire d'une émigration 'organisée' vers la Nouvelle-Calédonie de la fin du XIXe siècle. La fondation des centres de Koné et Voh, 1880–1892," *Genèse* 13 (1993): 76–97, here 94, https://www.persee.fr/doc/genes_1155-3219_1993_num_13_1_1199.

55. François Marcot, ed., *Dictionnaire historique de la Résistance* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2006); Georges Caïtucoli, François Broche, and Jean-François Muracciole, eds., *Dictionnaire de la France Libre* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2010).

56. Christine Levisse-Touze, "Les Femmes de l'outre-mer dans la guerre" (Paper delivered at the conference at the Musée du Général Leclerc de Hauteclocque et de la Libération de Paris, 10 March 2012).

57. Margaret Collins Weitz, *Les combattantes de l'ombre: histoire des femmes dans la Résistance* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997), 37.

58. Teyssier-Jore, *Le corps féminin*, 287.

59. Ibid., 299.

60. Ibid., 49–50.

61. Collins Weitz, *Les combattantes de l'ombre*, 37.

62. Levisse-Touze, "Les Femmes de l'outre-mer."

63. *Hivernage* ("overwintering") was the military policy, developed during World War I, of withdrawing troops from the Western Front to winter barracks in the warmer climate of southern France. Richard S. Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914–1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 88.

64. Jean-Marie Guillon and François Marcot, "Amours et sexualité," in *Dictionnaire Historique de la Résistance*, ed. François Marcot (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2005), 917–918.

65. André Le Troquer, note, Alger, 15 January 1944, SHD 7P73 quoted in Albertelli, *Elles ont suivi*, 224.

66. The archives, especially the personal notes held by the archives in New Caledonia, are also relatively silent about her war years. There are no details of her time working in London and during the war years spent in numerous countries in Central and West Africa. A touching photo exists in the New Caledonian archives of a handshake between De Gaulle and Rolly (in uniform and wearing her medals) during the then president's visit to New Caledonia in 1966; it appears to be the only indication of the ways she continued to engage with her wartime service.

67. Teyssier-Jore, *Le corps féminin*, 207, 213.

68. Ibid., 216–217.

69. Ha, *French Women and the Empire*, 50.

70. Telegram from General Marchand to General Koenig, 11 November 1943, SHD: GR16P311304.

71. Jore's husband does not have an individual Resistance file (GR16P file) but instead has a full military record of service held in Pau. As this document is covered by a different time delay for release than Resistance files, it has proven impossible to ascertain whether the telegrams also appear in his file.

72. Ann Laura Stoler, "'In Cold Blood': Hierarchies of Credibility and the Politics of Colonial Narratives," in *Engaging Colonial Knowledge: Reading European Archives in World History*, ed. Ricardo Roque and Kim A. Wagner (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 35–66.

73. Owen White, *Children of the French Empire: Miscegenation and Colonial Society in French West Africa 1895–1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 43.

74. Stoler, "In Cold Blood," 17.

75. Susan Travers, *Tomorrow to Be Brave: A Memoir of the Only Woman Ever to Serve in the French Foreign Legion* (New York: Free Press, 2001).

76. Teyssier-Jore, *Le corps féminin*, 221.

77. Ibid., 230.

78. Jennifer Anne Boittin*, Undesirable: Passionate Mobility and Women's Defiance of French Colonial Policing 1919–1952* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022), 153.

79. Jennings, *Free French Africa*.

80. Georgy Khabarovskiy, "The Pervasiveness of Colonial Identity in Lucie Cousturier's Travels to West Africa." *Studies in Travel Writing* 22, 2 (2018): 162–179, http://doi.org/10.1080/13645145.2018.1504733.

81. William Fysh, “Infrastructures of Light: Tropicapitalism and Germaine Krull’s Camera,” *Photography & Culture* 13, 2 (2020): 175–196, here 180, https://doi.org/10.1080/17514517.2020.1754657.

82. Teyssier-Jore, *Le corps féminin*, 297.

83. Ibid., 293.

84. Eric T. Jennings, *Curing the Colonizers: Hydrotherapy, Climatology, and French Colonial Spas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

85. Teyssier-Jore, *Le corps féminin*, 235.

86. Boittin*, Undesirable*, 74.

87. Danielle Porter Sanchez, “Bar-Dancing, Palm Wine, and Letters,” *Journal of African Military History* 3, 2 (2019): 123–154, https://doi.org/10.1163/24680966-00302002; Phyllis Martin, *Leisure and Society in Colonial Brazzaville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

88. Emily Lord Fransee. “I May Vote Like All Women’: Protest, Gender, and Suffrage in French Senegal, 1944–1945,” *French Colonial History* 20 (2021): 119–144, https://doi.org/10.14321/frencolohist.20.2021.0119; Elizabeth Perego, “Veil as Barrier to Muslim Women’s Suffrage in French Algeria, 1944–1954,” *Hawwa* 11, 2–3 (2014): 160–186, https://doi.org/10.1163/15692086-12341246.