

‘Trading Boots for Dancing Shoes’: Women and the Military Expression of the American Century in France, 1917–1967

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Abstract

This article examines the role of women in public diplomacy operations on and around U.S. military bases in France, especially during the Cold War. It aims to illustrate the diplomatic role of military officers’ wives in France and shows the vested interest of the military establishment in cooperating with civilian offices of public diplomacy. The more the United States demonstrated its leadership on the global scene, manifested by a wave of unprecedented military incursions into foreign territories, the more tight government control gave way to a strategy focusing on informal contacts between women of both countries at the local level. This article argues that military wives, often considered a traditional instrument of America’s effort to engage with foreign populations, contributed to the ‘parabellicist’ approach in U.S. public diplomacy, a strategy which aimed to generate ‘a nation in arms’, as has been suggested. The article contends that women’s social and cultural initiatives intended not to influence French women by pushing American values, but to support the U.S. national security effort from the bottom up, which was the most critical challenge underlying the ‘American Century’ in France.

Keywords: bases, France, intelligence, military, parabellicism, public diplomacy, tradition, United States, women

Introduction

‘That’s the way it is with women. They don’t read about the news. They often make it’, feminist writer Meridel Le Sueur exulted in 1939.¹ This statement proved particularly accurate during World War II, Meghan Winchell writes, as women made ‘their usually private work visible’ while rendering ‘unpaid yet vital services as mothers and sweethearts to the state and the military’.² Scholarly work has long discussed how equivocal the domestic propaganda message towards women in the U.S. was, oscillating between an invitation to join the workforce as part of their patriotic duty and an ambiguous promise following their contribution to the war effort, especially on the issue of employment.³ Towards the end of the war, U.S. women experienced a return to domesticity, quickly challenged by the development of an important network of military bases across the world. Overseas, women fuelled what Malia McAndrew identifies as a policy of ‘gendered interventionism’⁴ towards local populations, promoting aesthetic standards in order to contain the spread of communism. As Mire Koikari notes in the case of Japan, U.S. military outposts also used women as agents of modernization, pushing democratic ideals through a ‘politics of feminine affinity’.⁵ The traditional role of ‘diplomatic wives’ and ‘army wives’,⁶ as explored by Molly Wood and Donna Alvah, would certainly have a bright future in the Cold War.

Yet, in an age when foreign policy makers had been resorting to ‘personal/political relationships entailing intimacy, sexuality, trust, and secrecy’ to structure relations of power, as Frank Costigliola argues, women’s wartime experience had a particular bearing on the Cold War.⁷ Also, a national security state emerged after 1947, as Congress approved the creation of the Armed Forces Security Agency, the National Security Council and the Central Intelligence Agency; three years later, the top-secret NSC-68 policy paper ‘paved the way for the most comprehensive rearmament programme the United States had ever undertaken in time of peace’.⁸ Together, they marked a turning point in the Cold War, raising ‘great anxiety and much admonition on gender and sexuality matters’.⁹ Caught up in the struggle for Europe, women cooperated with intelligence and military agencies, and assumed greater responsibilities in information networks overseas: they emerged as a vehicle for Truman’s containment policy to present ‘freedom’, ‘independence’ and

‘self-enterprise’ as the hallmarks of American modernity.¹⁰ However, carefully chosen words and meticulously managed advertisement strategies ‘acted as both consumers and producers of modern culture, heralding the benefits of modernity even as they contemplated the perils of mid-twentieth-century life’.¹¹ In consequence, women living in overseas military bases became the subject of a discourse about modernity, as they were confined to the traditional roles of wives and mothers. I contend that ‘modernity’ not only fuelled the patriotic slogan of the American Century, but also partook in women’s larger mission to defend national security from abroad through the correlation of ‘the promise of peace and the American way’.¹²

This article investigates women’s role in ‘selling’ the U.S. peace hegemon in France, home to a nexus of U.S.-driven international agencies, both military and civilian, in the first half of the Cold War. As a modern, industrial country, the U.S. had been promoting the ‘American Century’, a form of pioneering slogan supported by public and private media. It was articulated in 1941 by press mogul Henry R. Luce and helped to spark the shift from traditional American protectionism to a new global orthodoxy of internationalism.¹³ Having deployed an army of soldiers and diplomats overseas during and after World War II, the US was ‘frequently *invited* to play the kind of great-power role it did’.¹⁴ Women had a pivotal influence in forging the U.S. ‘empire by invitation’, especially in France, where transatlantic economic and cultural exchanges had been sustained before the twentieth century, and had persisted despite the ideological differences brought about by communism. France stood in the forefront of the U.S. ‘pointillist empire’, composed of overseas bases that ‘act as staging grounds for ... economic, military, and cultural’ influence.¹⁵ Military bases soon became ambivalent outposts for the American Century, underlining the link between security and prosperity in the Atlantic world, and revealing the modern role of women in defending U.S. national security from abroad.¹⁶

A Domestic Double Entendre?

Women’s contribution to the defence of U.S. national security was not the result of benign development. Their role in espionage activities, dating from the Civil War, had a profound and long-term effect on the

portrayal of women in the press.¹⁷ This image evolved slowly during World War I, but remained subject to ‘gender occupational segregation’, as Mary Nolan remarks.¹⁸ The lack of gender destabilization in the U.S. led to a significant decline in wartime women’s contribution as workers, favouring the perspective of the elite class on the issue of war and gender representation. Indeed, the ‘glamorised popular image that elite women helped to define was a powerful force, shaping and influencing the context of all women’s wartime service’.¹⁹ Elite women, mostly military and diplomatic wives, became the proponents of a discourse grounded in their personal dispositions, advertising progress from the margins of their social class. Commonly confined to traditional gender roles, women embodied America’s moral values overseas, which developed through a narrative promoting U.S. internationalism and reached a wide audience in political, economic and military circles.²⁰ However, the almost entire suppression of the image of women workers in the press until World War II, when U.S. propaganda revolved around the well-known figure of Rosie the Riveter, raises broader questions when it comes to women’s platforms for expression.

Indeed, press magnates seized the opportunity to become active participants in the war effort in the 1940s and provided their female readership a forum for discussion. Voicing their opinion on war, women advocated greater involvement of the United States in Europe, ‘as a return for the cooperation which the French have shown for many years’.²¹ They were also very active in philanthropic organizations, in which they defended the war as a means to safeguard democracy. In 1942, it was up to the U.S. government and advertising companies to call women to arms. In an essay entitled *Women for Defense*,²² Margaret Culkin Banning praised the strength of American democratic principles, while novelist Keith Aylin reminded her readership of the fact that not everyone ‘ha[d] to wear a uniform’ to support the war effort.²³ But the streamlined, dynamic and modern image of the American way of life pushed by the U.S. government did not prevent the French from ‘harbour[ing] a host of false notions about their American sisters’, and by 1949, ‘they believe[d], for example, that all housework here is accomplished with push-button electricity, and that every woman [in America] owns an automobile’.²⁴ Placed in the framework of the American Century, women were the primary target of U.S. propaganda on the domestic front; they embraced the gender responsibilities of the

internationalist movement, woven into the fabric of the economic and political elite class.

Moreover, these women played a decisive part in the projection of U.S. culture overseas, through initiatives that initially consisted in celebrating major American women. One example is Eleanor Roosevelt, who 'played a major role in further spreading pacifist ideals and merging them with the promotion of social reforms and human rights'.²⁵ In World War II, a large number of women's organizations engaged in democracy promotion overseas, departing from the 'long tradition of using their supposed greater interest in peace as the basis for their claim to an increased political role'.²⁶ Conversely, 'women's participation in labour force was not motivated by self-actualization or self-reliance, but by patriotism and the desire to win the approval of men',²⁷ reinforcing gendered expectations about their contribution in the war. Meanwhile, as the Office of War Information forcefully repeated the story of women who took up jobs as factory workers as an act of patriotism, the Office of Strategic Services recruited female agents to perform operative functions in intelligence activities at home.²⁸ After World War II, the U.S. government's interest in women resided in the fact that they had been confined to a liminal space, which, with the setting up of military bases overseas, had become instrumental to formulate and support a narrative after 1947 that has been called 'the cult of national security'.²⁹

Elaine Tyler May, who underlines the connection between domesticity and 'the internal and external factors that influence foreign policy', writes about how 'gendered domestic images provid[ed] the meaning of patriotism and the reason to fight'.³⁰ As advocates of peace strongly opposed to nuclear armament, wives of U.S. diplomats gained prominence within the North Atlantic organization in Paris, because of their capacity to informally advocate the safeguarding of the U.S. national security through a structural 'homology', as Pierre Bourdieu described the contingency between social status and cultural practices.³¹ 'NATO wives', the wives of civilian or military U.S. officials of NATO, aimed at strengthening modernity as the inherent and dominant feature of Western capitalism; they had the wherewithal to build ties with wives from representatives of other countries. But in spite of the Marshall Plan and due to widespread scepticism towards information programmes, very few public diplomacy operations advertised NATO to the non-elite class.³² However, the debate intensified as the military build-up

of Western Europe brought up the fear of nuclear armament stockpiled on U.S. military bases in France, against which the Communists protested repeatedly, putting the bases' security in jeopardy. As many other informal actors of U.S. public diplomacy, NATO wives invested considerable effort in ensuring that the U.S. anti-communist position was understood within elite circles in France, as the press, radio and cinema tried to bring awareness to public opinion at home about the bases as borderlands.

However, women had yet to play a role in the public diplomacy network in Cold War France. In 1950, art historian Darthea Speyer served as cultural attaché in the Paris embassy, but was assigned the task to 'look after women's activities', which entailed organising 'lectures, being in contact with people – nothing to do with art'.³³ Head of the U.S. Information Services (USIS-France) in Paris, William R. Tyler was aware of women's importance to forge relationships with the French. They were part of a greater strategy, which, he wrote to Washington later that year, aimed to carry 'the message that the engagements which the United States and France have undertaken together – under the Marshall Plan and the Atlantic Pact with their implementing organizations such as ECA, NATO, and SHAPE – are truly in the highest common interest'.³⁴ And yet, Janet Flanner from *The New Yorker* was first to report on the all-out 'battle of the mind, in enlightened self-interest',³⁵ that followed the arrival of NATO's military command (SHAPE) in Fontainebleau. USIS-France followed up a year later, 'encourag[ing] French attitudes toward understanding and sympathy for presence of U.S. troops on French soil'.³⁶ However, the military in France 'established a rhetorical space which would be dominated by the concept of occupation'³⁷ and emphasize 'Americanization.' Women seemed to be of secondary importance to U.S. public diplomacy services, albeit to a lesser extent when placed within the framework of the media-driven American Century.

Throughout the 1950s, U.S. civilian and military officials involved with NATO flocked to Paris, where the organization had established its headquarters in 1952, with their wives and children. The U.S. State Department sponsored the NATO Information Service (NATIS) from its early days, providing funds and propaganda material.³⁸ Wives of military and civilian officers serving in NATO had a dual purpose. First, 'information posts abroad identified women as a special target

audience', and targeted those 'in positions to act as channels for political information'.³⁹ Second, women often contributed to intelligence activities, which were 'kept entirely distinct from overt foreign information activities of other U.S. government agencies'.⁴⁰ But as General Alfred Gruenther explained to the ministers of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) in December 1954, NATIS lacked purpose, which fuelled civil-military disagreement more than it promoted internationalism.⁴¹ Trying not to overstep political boundaries, he urged them to take action and validate a programme to specify, from the top down, the relations between American servicemen and the French population. The integrity of U.S. military bases made them enclosed geographical spaces, bastions of liberal internationalism, whose security had been threatened by Communist opposition in provincial France.⁴² Gruenther believed women could nonetheless be exploited for political gain.

Americans who were struggling to coordinate the information activities in NATIS had neither the leverage nor the intention to push for a programme on the issue of women. However, the gap with the local population was widening, and the situation regarding military wives in provincial France became increasingly disquieting. Women lived an insular life, pushed to the margins of both the world of the NATO civil-military elites in Paris and the local communities throughout France. Well aware the French had developed a 'psychosis of occupation', military wives were therefore encouraged to take the path of social exclusivity throughout the whole period:

Large general receptions, offered by the American ladies, allow for a first very cordial encounter; they are followed by small meetings, carefully prepared by the French ladies, where a limited number of French women invite an equal number of American women. Then, each French woman invites an American woman, takes an interest in her, 'adopts' her, in a sense. In this way, many Americans were able to experience traditional French family life.⁴³

Hoping to 'transform the sad and boring exile of American women' into 'an encounter with the virtues and latent forces of France',⁴⁴ the French Liaison Mission claimed that there could be 'no peace in this world so long as they remain indifferent to the happiness of the children of others'.⁴⁵ In this case, motherhood helped support interventionism

by containing warfare, showing how women, caught up in domesticity and steeped in tradition and morality, were considered as a conduit to safeguard U.S. national security through moral righteousness. This domestic double entendre turned social clubs on U.S. military bases into not only private spaces created to stave off boredom, but also public outposts of U.S. internationalism placed under official patronage of its military establishment.

U.S. Wives' Clubs in France and the Security-Prosperity Ethos

The debate over Western rearmament in the 1950s brought about a renewed interest in national security rhetoric, and with it a broader stimulation of women.⁴⁶ Exposing women to the political culture of the U.S. was a strategy developed throughout the Cold War to 'convert' a pre-existing inclination into a potential asset favourable to the United States. As David Snyder demonstrates, women were an essential target of public diplomacy operations that went beyond the 'Cold War kitchen' issue.⁴⁷ On the receiving end, they gave rise to a number of questions about politics, race and class in the United States. NATO wives, who sat at the nexus of public and private circles in Paris, were thus of primary importance to defuse criticism within official circles and to legitimize the polished image of the United States overseas. In the case of the Netherlands, Snyder writes, the U.S. experienced 'a failure to reach Dutch women via direct contact', although 'women's organizations were well-organized and active'.⁴⁸ But a few hundred miles away, in France, U.S. army wives succeeded in their endeavour, setting up officers' wives' clubs to maintain an active social life within as well as outside the military base. Exclusively dedicated to women's social engagement, this space was nevertheless entirely driven by gender, socio-economic and diplomatic-related concerns. In other words, under the auspices of the military establishment, these clubs were allowed to thrive.

At a time when U.S. civil-military relations were strained, governed by suspicion rather than by self-interest, the State Department became another indirect actor of women's experiences in provincial France. The European Defence Community (EDC) had entered very

lengthy debates and by 1954, there remained little hope for the creation of a European army. Thus, Leslie S. Brady, the new chief public affairs officer in Paris, set out a vision for USIS-France's general policy. On 2 February 1954 he submitted a proposal to Theodore C. Streibert, director of the recently-formed U.S. Information Agency in Washington D.C. Determined to contribute to the needs of the military establishment, Streibert immediately dispatched an economic and security specialist, Nedville E. Nordness, to Paris. On 10 March, Brady and Nordness submitted four guiding principles of U.S. public diplomacy in France, revolving around the themes of 'European integration', 'Western alliance', 'common heritage' and 'economic democracy'.⁴⁹ These principles gave implicit directions to the public information office at the Central Liaison Mission, a bilateral civil-military office designed to expose the motives of the U.S. army in France, deal with the daily issues and debunk the anti-U.S. propaganda vented by the Communists. While Brady's vision opened the door to a shift in civil-military initiatives, it also integrated army wives' activities into the U.S. public diplomacy programmes.

This does not mean that State Department officials intervened in Army wives' clubs in any way, but rather shows a convergence of interests. The first club in France was established in 1951 in the headquarters of the U.S. Army Communication Zone (Com-Z), situated in Orléans, in the central Loire valley region. By 1955, the US Air Force and US Army sponsored no fewer than twenty-three wives' clubs across the country, an expansion due to the growing number of military bases.⁵⁰ On 8 March of that year, army wives travelled to Paris to participate in the first meeting of the American Women's Association in France (AWAF), which took place in the Paris office of the international organization of the Women's World Fellowship.⁵¹ The AWAF President, a Ms. Diedeker, 'had the sum of \$100, a generous donation from the Officers' Wives Club of Orléans, to finance the organization'.⁵² Initially set up to provide humanitarian relief to war-affected populations, women worked towards people-to-people contacts with their French counterparts. According to a later report on U.S. women's activities in the NATO era, this group sought 'to establish a mutual understanding of the opportunities and problems arising from the presence in France of women's clubs and ... to advise the clubs in their activities and efforts toward constant improvement of Franco-American relations'.⁵³ Women

were vectors of identity and cultural values fitting the pattern of nineteenth-century U.S. missionary ventures.

At first sight, officers' wives' clubs had a traditional approach to interpersonal contacts. Despite the instrumental role they played to improve women's morale and their aspiration to figure as a cultural podium, they functioned within the channels of civilian and military diplomacy. But as a place of socialization, the club allowed for limited contacts with local French women. According to the head of the French public information office at the Central Liaison Mission, traditional activities, such as 'an afternoon tea with French and American ladies',⁵⁴ were the best way to protect moral values, revealing a strategy similar to the one used at NATO. Army wives recruited participants among their peers, leaving to the wife of the Prefect the duty to select French women, thus encouraging exclusivity and structural homology. U.S. army wives thereby helped mediate an outcome that both satisfied the U.S. Cold War foreign policy promoting economic prosperity and offered guarantees for domestic and international security. On the other hand, French and American women had grown accustomed to one another by the end of the 1950s, engaging in a unique experience at Com-Z in Orléans: the Franco-American Women's Club (FAWC), a locally-run, binational initiative entirely designed and almost exclusively managed by its own members, half of whom were wives of the U.S. Army officers stationed at Com-Z. It is through this social framework of the military that U.S. army wives brought a smattering of non-military French wives to experience a wind of change, albeit within traditional boundaries.

As a local initiative, the FAWC was virtually unknown until its archival records were uncovered half a century later, in 2012. Composed of an unpublished handmade scrapbook and newspaper clippings, it allows us to observe how public diplomacy methods and procedures crossed the border wall of the base into the local community, and in return, the effects it had on the modernization of the social links in a small French city and its surroundings during the Cold War. Owned by the family of the first French co-president of the FAWC, the records are not open to the public (which also explains the absence of an official repository in the references). The reason for my interest in the FAWC is its structural modernity, granting its members a sense of class hedonism while remaining outside the reach of U.S. public diplomacy control. A typical

example of entertainment and family activities, it advocated strict gender roles in a club that exposed the interrelatedness of domesticity with the challenge of projecting a positive image of the United States to support domestic security. The club offered exactly what the army needed at the time, boosting the morale of Army wives and keeping them on a war footing without seeming to do so. However, the FAWC had a very different approach to women's place in the traditional framework of army wives' clubs: not only did the Army allow its members to evolve in a culturally hybrid environment, it enabled them to experience the specific challenge of evolving inside and outside public diplomacy patronage.

Indeed, the FAWC of Orléans is a compelling example of the penetration of the U.S. social and recreational club model in a local French community of women. Founded by two long-time friends – Alice Fallen, a woman of French origin who married a colonel of the U.S. Army, and Micheline Deschamps, a thirty-five-year-old French member the local bourgeoisie – the FAWC had the support from the wives of Com-Z Commander-in-Chief, general Edward J. O'Neill and the Prefect of the Loiret region, Robert Holveck. Fallen and Deschamps agreed to sponsor 'a club whose aim would be to encourage a spirit of friendship and promote relations between the women of these two nations'.⁵⁵ In an interview with Deschamps, she eloquently declared that they built a 'social gathering club to promote mutual understanding between the two peoples'.⁵⁶ This rhetorical statement echoes the efforts of U.S. Com-Z to shape and respond to a new model of public diplomacy. Indeed, the FAWC of Orléans adopted club statutes and relied on military authorities to fund cultural and social activities. The French members, who came from privileged social positions, were an asset to its development; among them were wives of a Senator, several doctors, a Michelin factory owner, a few civil engineers, insurance agents, a rector (school director), a chief education officer, the head of the Banque de France in Orléans and several senior French army officials. The club had a substantial budget and enjoyed wide popularity among local middle and upper-class residents. There were of course no communists.

Modelled after the traditional U.S. civilian club, the FAWC offered a unique opportunity for French wives to participate in the planning of cultural and recreational activities organized at the prestigious *Château*

de La Mothe. The nature of women's activities, which included a fashion show, a contest for the best home-made hat, a pastry-making contest and an afternoon with the French-American singer Eddie Constantine, is best illustrated by a Christmas dinner dance, which revealed the club's traditional nature as well as a prescribed pattern of social exclusivity. Indeed, SFC Weatherby 'and his country gentlemen' rallied women to dance to songs from a traditionally Southern musical repertoire, as performed by SFC Ernest Butler, a country musician and his band from Harbord Barracks. With traditional dancing, Army musicians guided the women's steps away from the modern, colour-blind dance and music of the time, namely rock and roll. After almost a decade of U.S. military presence in France, wives of Com-Z officials had great success in influencing French wives through Brady's 1954 public diplomacy programme as well as USIA's mid-1950s 'People's capitalism' campaign.⁵⁷ And in the U.S., the *Washington Times-Herald* welcomed the general conclusion that the military was finally 'trading boots for dancing shoes'.⁵⁸

Its substantial administrative arsenal allowed for fast and efficient operations, attracting new members. In the spring of 1959, the club had as many as 156 members: eighty-seven American army wives and sixty-nine French women. American wives showed their habit of structuring the club to gain some independence. On the French side, the club was exclusively composed of wives of the local provincial bourgeoisie, whose spouses were in private practice or held higher positions in the administration. Financial dependence can explain why the club leaders demanded its members to uphold the highest standards of domesticity and elegance, so as not to jeopardize the official image of the U.S. military in France. Domesticity and good manners were also prerequisite conditions to receive moral and logistical support from the Com-Z officers' wives' club, whose participants were *de facto* members of the FAWC but also the target of a few advertising campaigns. In December 1958, officers' wives received a letter reminding them of the War of Independence as the founding moment in French-American history: 'Our men have done in the past and are doing at the present time, their share to retain this feeling of unity; is it not now time for us, as wives, to offer our support in this program?'⁵⁹ Later published in the Com-Z newspaper and reprinted in *U.S. Lady*, a magazine printed in the United States and circulated on all American military bases in Asia

and Europe, this letter brought women's experience of the Cold War to a new discursive space.

A Modern Discursive Space: Wives' Clubs, Parabellicism and the American Century

Cold War tensions have played an integral role in shaping the notion of 'American modernity'. This implies that peace and stability abroad proved less favourable for the United States than having to maintain peace actively, which offered the opportunity to show its material progress, military strength, political idealism and goodwill values.⁶⁰ Born out of the tensions of the two world wars, the American Century incorporates the feeling of a permanent strain in international politics. Thus, unbeknownst to U.S. Army wives and without ever leaving the realm of domesticity, the implicit 'politics of gendered interventionism' led French women to grow accustomed to military matters during the Cold War. U.S. public diplomacy aimed at keeping public opinion on a war footing. According to French writer Jacques Ayencourt, who reported on the trends in U.S. domestic and foreign policy in the literary periodical *Esprit* in 1949, U.S. public opinion was primarily 'centred around local politics' and largely exposed to the influence of the press, radio and cinema, controlled by 'the government, who told the nation what to think [to not] fall back into the rut of isolationism'.⁶¹ Pushing an internationalist agenda, the civil-military hybridity indicates a renewed method of public diplomacy, with the U.S. government deciding to 'support, at least not discourage, press campaigns that can be described as *parabellicist*'.⁶²

While the idea of a 'peacetime propaganda' programme to keep U.S. public opinion alert was not a novelty, the advent of the national security state pushed the global public diplomacy programme to further develop what Lieutenant-Colonel Walter C. Sweeney called 'a nation in arms'.⁶³ French women were of course not burdened with differentiating between the foreign and domestic political agendas of the United States. With their American peers, they produced and utilized arts and culture to their own purposes within the U.S. military base, favouring personal development over political issues. But external factors, such as the French colonial war in Algeria and

the Constitution of the Fifth Republic, reduced the risk for women to encounter political opposition outside Com-Z. Also, the newly-elected President Charles de Gaulle started the first relocation operations of the U.S. Air Force in 1958.⁶⁴ Consequently, French public opinion lost interest in the presence of U.S. military personnel stationed on their territory. Public diplomacy campaigns played an important role in keeping the integrity of military bases safe, and U.S. Army wives in France were invited to generate positive publicity for the military in their local communities, to help foster the security of army personnel and facilities. Women's outward political journey played a part in bringing to life this methodical weapon of converging national security and public diplomacy through gender-oriented representations.

The burgeoning influence of non-state actors, such as the Franco-American Women's Club, was instrumental to support U.S. interventionism abroad on grounds of pursuing national interest, as Andrew Johnstone postulates, and to promote U.S. ascendancy in the Cold War.⁶⁵ U.S. parabellicist campaigns in public diplomacy fit into the framework of the 'consensus on liberal development' in the Western world during the Cold War, and rest on the necessity for U.S. global hegemony and domestic affluence, but also on the stability of gender relations in U.S. society.⁶⁶ Activities of the FAWC were often printed in local newspapers and allowed, on a broader scale, to counteract the effects of the general anti-American propaganda of the Communists. However, the political exploitation of the image of U.S. armed forces had become a double-edged sword because the modernity espoused and promoted among others by the American members of the FAWC was exclusive, ostracizing all the women of Orléans from the local bourgeoisie.⁶⁷ In the eyes of the military, any potential resentment could become a threat to the integrity of the U.S. armed forces, and even though no trace of official and unofficial reaction from the Communists or any other opposition can be found in civilian and military archives, it was preferable to let sleeping dogs lie.

The FAWC continued to live in relative isolation. In March of 1959, fifty-five members crossed the gates of Com-Z to visit the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Powers in Europe (SHAPE), located a few kilometres outside Paris. U.S. public diplomacy officers sought to publicize the club's visit to SHAPE, since it was the first

event organized outside Com-Z premises. According to the club's first president, Micheline Deschamps, the event-planning group reached out to SHAPE's Public Information Division. Women were welcomed and briefed by U.S. Army Brigadier General James O. Curtis, who explained the ins and outs of the organization. As was customary since Gruenther's tenure as Supreme Allied Commander, the SHAPE Public Information officer (PIO) had a photograph taken with all fifty-five women after closing proceedings. Taken by the SHAPE press office, several copies of the photograph were sent to regional newspapers, to which was attached a press release. On 18 April 1959, the *République du Centre* published a piece on the FAWC's visit to SHAPE. The caption was: 'Last Tuesday, the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Powers in Europe welcomed the Orléans Franco-American Women's Club in Rocquencourt. After visiting the facilities of the Supreme Command of the Allied Armies of the Atlantic Pact, members of the Club were invited for a tea by Mrs. Houghton, wife of the U.S. Ambassador'.⁶⁸ No matter how short or elaborate, all relevant activities around the SHAPE headquarters were chosen for press campaigns, targeting the French population by exposing a form of modernity generated by this community of transnational women, and legitimized by the following visit to the U.S. embassy in Paris. The military set out to micromanage its image around the region, with women who not only read about the news, but actually made it, to paraphrase Le Sueur.

The parabellicist strategy also shifted the club's *raison d'être* to the pages of popular magazines, highlighting the link between women, public diplomacy and the American Century. Despite its status as 'a unique initiative with no formal link at any level',⁶⁹ the FAWC of Orléans was given credit, in the March 1965 issue of the widely-read *U.S. Lady* magazine, for its activism on French-American relations:

The Franco-American Women's Club meets regularly at *Chateau La Mothe*. Striving for a closer relationship between French and American women, this fine organization conducts a number of money-raising auctions and bazaars to provide funds for two scholarships awarded annually to French students. In addition, it sponsors lectures on area specialities, travel tips and cooking. Members have pooled their culinary know-how and published a cookbook of favourite recipes.⁷⁰

According to the author Major Pearl Fuchs, the FAWC had been particularly active in the area of ‘cuisine diplomacy’, a very conventional but popular activity maintaining women in their traditional role as wives and mothers.⁷¹ Moreover, the U.S. Army championed their domesticity: ‘What to do with the baby while you are engaged in all these activities? A post nursery is available at Coligny Caserne, [but] other service wives and American teenagers also do babysitting, or your wonderful husband may permit you to have a French maid’.⁷² It is also interesting to note that *U.S. Lady*, a magazine published in the United States to address issues of American women exclusively, in its pages gave priority to the FAWC of Orléans over long-established American clubs such as the Medical Services Wives, the Ordnance Wives and the Engineer Wives, or even the popular Non-Commissioned Officers’ Wives Club. It shows, in a nutshell, that the FAWC went beyond encouraging the traditional role of women: they heralded the liberal consensus, at a time when the mainstream press in the U.S. was antagonizing French and American women.⁷³

Ultimately, women’s clubs on U.S. military bases emerged as yet a new discursive space, where the expression of freedom and independence not only colluded with traditional gender roles, but also sustained the ambivalent message of U.S. national security at home and abroad, a message carried methodically to the public through the slogan of the American Century. This new discourse, introduced by the hybrid civil-military Cold War public diplomacy of the United States, was imbued with modernity, asserting the strength of the French-American military alliance to underline the importance to preserve NATO in troubled times. At the time of de Gaulle’s removal of US military bases from the French territory, the Franco-American Women’s Club played a key role in strengthening and expanding the links between transatlantic elite classes. Indeed, after six years spent as honorary president of the FAWC, Micheline Deschamps started the first Lyceum Club in France in 1967, an international association of Anglo-American influence helping women promote peace, freedom, independence and self-enterprise.⁷⁴ But just as many former members of the FAWC joined the Lyceum Club in Orléans, U.S. Army wives left France and were relocated to Germany. Without their French partners, American women could no longer uphold the image of the American Century, which

would affect the memory of the U.S. military presence in France in the following decades.

Conclusion

It can be discussed whether the prompt departure of U.S. soldiers was the moment that transformed women's experience toward modernity. Women's active role in propagating American values abroad coincided with the rise of imperialism at the turn of the twentieth century and continued well into the Cold War. Faced with the onerous challenge to build public support for troops, women contributed to the projection of a streamlined image of the American armed forces on foreign territory. Meanwhile, press moguls projected America's military might in the name of national security, to garner full consent from U.S. public opinion and condone internationalism. The U.S. government was determined to revive the 'cultural and political connection between the "cradle" and the "torch-bearer" of Western modernity', in which military families played an active role throughout the Cold War.⁷⁵ The latter promoted a 'modernisation shock' that did not sit well, because of its constructed nature, with part of the French population during the Cold War.⁷⁶

U.S. Army wives pursued a domestic agenda, in so far as they worked within the regular channels of civilian and military diplomacy to uphold traditional values on and around military bases in France. In that sense, the 'modernization' pattern advocated in U.S. public diplomacy discourse, which elevated social engineering onto an equal footing with foreign policy decisions, was absorbed by the military tradition of preserving domestic security, as underlined in Luce's formulation of the 'American Century'. While the French-American Women's Club of Orléans was certainly an innovative yet traditional operation, fostering good relations between the women of both countries, it also acted as a conveyor belt and set forth a façade of modernity that heralded the Atlantic community and secured France's position in the Western world. After France left NATO's integrated military command in 1966,⁷⁷ a new discourse emerged, not only on otherness, but also on women's clubs and military bases as examples of 'heterotopia' or 'other spaces', as Michel Foucault theorized, resulting from the success of the American Century.⁷⁸

Notes

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