



Shorn Women: Gender and Punishment in Liberation France

By Fabrice Virgili



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At the end of World War II, over 20,000 French people accused of collaboration with Germany endured a particularly humiliating act of revenge: their heads were shaved in public. Nearly all those punished were women. This episode in French history continues to provoke shame and unease and as a result has never been the subject of a thorough examination.

This groundbreaking book by Fabrice Virgili throws new light on these acts of retribution and reveals that, contrary to popular belief, a vast number of those women accused were innocent of any sexual involvement with Germans. Further, this form of punishment was in evidence well before the Liberation and in fact occurred in most European countries both in the twentieth century and earlier.

Why were these punishments largely directed at women? Was a relationship with a German emblematic of female collaboration and betrayal, or were contemporary feelings of violence towards the enemy subsequently re-directed? Answering these questions and many more, Virgili suggests that the punishment was not only meted out for 'horizontal collaboration' but also for many other forms of involvement, and that the act of shaving the head was itself a form of sexual punishment. For Virgili, the public nature of the punishment was a defence strategy, a response to the German Occupation and a reaction to the suffering and violence that had preceded the Liberation.

This pioneering investigation of one of France's darkest moments will be fascinating reading for anyone interested in World War II, French history or women's studies.



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Editorial Review

Review

“At last, the story of this common act of retribution . . . a remarkable achievement.” *?Le Monde*

“Painstaking crosschecking of grains of information gleaned from diverse sources . . . achieved to perfection . . . This book is a masterpiece of historical method and should be recommended reading for all serious scholars of history whatever their subject matter. One of the best pieces of scholarship about the Second World War, the sooner it becomes available in English the better.” *?Modern and Contemporary France*

“We have had to wait over half a century for a systematic historical study to appear concerning the public shaving of women . . . allegedly punished for 'horizontal collaboration'. . . [the author] brings the evidence of his research to light with convincing and indisputable precision.” *?Le Monde Diplomatique*

“Fabrice Virgili introduces new factors into the historical debate over the division between legal and illegal acts of reparation.” *?Le Monde des Debats*

“A remarkable work . . . Fabrice Virgili . . . succeeds in bringing our knowledge and understanding of this phenomenon up to date.” *?L'Histoire*

“A gripping work, Fabrice Virgili decodes this specifically male-directed violence.” *?Elle*

“Festival, revenge, punishment, the ambivalence of the Liberation in the squares and town halls of France is brilliantly researched in this outstanding study of the gendered rites of sexual humiliation. Essential reading.” *?Professor H. R. Kedward, University of Sussex*

“The study makes for compelling reading . . . This [is a] profoundly intelligent, if occasionally harrowing, account of a dark moment in French history.” *?The Times Higher Education Supplement*

“This is an important, scrupulous and extremely well-researched book.” *?History*

Language Notes

Text: English (translation)

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About the Author

Fabrice Virgili contributed to Goth from Berg Publishers.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Karl Harms:

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