

## **Geneviève Tabouis, this *Cassandra* of the Interwar Policy**

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***Résumé:** Nous présentons dans notre article un journaliste exceptionnel et un écrivain à la fois dont les livres ont connu un grand succès auprès du public. La nièce des hommes politiques de grande renommée en France, de la famille Cambon, Geneviève Tabouis a attentivement analysé la politique de l'entre-deux-guerres et a anticipé les grandes catastrophes qui allaient effriter la société des années '30-'40. Par ailleurs, elle a été surnommée *Cassandra*, comme la fille de Priam, le roi de Troie, qui fut maudite par les dieux de toujours dire la vérité que personne ne croira. Sa lucidité politique a fait exclamer avec véhémence même l'un des politiciens français célèbre à l'époque, Aristide Briand : « Comme vous êtes affreuse, Tabouis ! Vous ne savez pas qu'en politique, on ne dise jamais la vérité ? »*

***Mots-clés :** Geneviève Tabouis, féminité, journalisme, militantisme*

She was named Casandra, after the Troy princess, daughter of Priam, who God Apollo gifted with prophecy. The god than got furious and doomed her to always tell the truth and that no one shall ever believe her. The mythical Casandra had predicted the fall of Troy. Geneviève Tabouis, the modern Casandra, had anticipated the great events which were to shake dramatically the history of the Old Continent and of the entire world: the rise of fascism, the popularity of Hitler, the braking of the Treaties of Versailles, the aggression over small states, the appeasement of the democratic powers, the blindness of political leaders of these countries and, finally, the World War.

She was first called maliciously Casandra. To tell the truth, often, offending stories, to point out bad situations, when everything seems perfect, becomes vexatious. Geneviève Tabouis represented for most people a jinx. Though, when her predictions, not Nostradamus like, but clear headed and based on cautious analysis proved to be accurate, the world looked at her with admiration. But she never forgot how she got her name. Tabouis wrote, decades later, a fierce and bitter book: „They called me Casandra”. Her work was a sign of indignation, delayed maybe, but Geneviève Tabouis always wanted to tell the truth, in a grey age, when under the peaceful facade, the war was being prepared.

Geneviève Tabouis is, no doubt, the most popular female journalist in the world. She had either the fortune, or the misfortune, depending on the way someone appreciates the situation, to witness historic events. And she closely knew all the great political leaders who hallmarked the history of the 20th century.

She was born in Paris, in 1892, in a bourgeois family, named Lequesne. The father, Fernand, abandoned his family when Geneviève was only six years old. She grew up under the careful observation of her mother, Bertha, born La Fosse, the daughter of a rich industrialist, of her brother Raymond and her aunt Eugenie La Fosse, the wife of the Ambassador Jules Cambon. Genevieve was strictly educated at Assumption Convent, on Lubeck Street, in Paris. She then studied in a prestigious institution, taking a degree in Egyptology and Semitic Archaeology. Later, she graduated Political Science Institute.

Emanating from a well-known bourgeois family, Geneviève Eugénie Marie-Laure Tabouis was introduced in diplomatic milieus at a young age, due to her uncles, the ambassadors Paul and Jules Cambon, whom she loved and appreciated. They initiated her in international politics. Often, Genevieve accompanied her uncle in Madrid or Berlin, until the start of the First World War.

In 1919, Jules Cambon hired Geneviève as his assistant, so that she could participate to all negotiations concerning the system of Treaties of Versailles. The attraction for journalism appeared and the passion for Egypt took second place. The new posture it allowed Geneviève to meet all great public figure in France and Europe. She was always present in the *Assemblée nationale* lodge, often accompanied by another French statesman, family friend,

Edouard Herriot. She was quickly appreciated for her hard work, sharp feather and appearances in high society.

Tabouis started flirting with journalism in 1922, when she wrote in „La Petite Gironde”. Shortly after her debut, Tabouis is sent to the League of Nations in Genève, as press correspondent. There, she writes for „Petite Marseillaise”, too. Fond into international affairs, Tabouis becomes a member of the International Association of Journalists accredited to the League of Nations, where she rapidly climbs the hierarchy, through vice-president. Meanwhile, starts writing in l’Œuvre, and she will continue the collaboration for ten years. Here, on December 17th 1935, she brings into the open the plan of dividing Ethiopia, belonging to Pierre Laval and Samuel Hoare, fact that will increase her prestige. In 1936, she anticipates Hitler’s action of demilitarization of Rhineland, two days before this took place. In January 1937, publishes an article about a possible intervention of the German army in the civil war in Spain, to support Franco. That moment on, the nickname becomes her repute.

People described her as a powerful woman, with an iron will, a complex spirit. Her way of reading politics formed under the influence of the French radical socialist movement. But the analytic spirit was often replaced by patriotic assertion, said either with magniloquence, either with persuasion. Her sincere patriotism was motivated by anything that could bring France applauses, sympathy and adhesions. Although, she was one of the richest in information and promptest specialized journalists.<sup>1</sup>

Geneviève Tabouis started to write at L’Oeuvre, increasing both the prestige and the number of papers sold, when fascism was in full ascension. With great intuition, Casandra anticipated Hitler’s future, while he was just „ a young man, who calls himself a national socialist, Adolf Hitler.”<sup>2</sup> While the German leader became more powerful, so did Casandra’s adversity over the man and the system that she inferred it would generate a disaster. She knew as many real facts as great statesmen and she had an advantage: she could write and speak without limits. She was attacked by French statesmen, who were bothered that a woman would blemish their arrangements. The old socialist leader Aristide Briand actually said shamelessly: „You are awful, Tabouis! Don’t you know that in politics you should never tell the truth?”

Casandra was the opponent of fascism of any kind, fact that brought her Hitler and Mussolini’s hostility, who attacked her in their speeches. Media in totalitarian states was not favourable to her either. More often than not they hated her for her effort of screaming about „the end of Europe”. „She screams, screams, screams, sustains with certified information, with nation’s arguments, in numerous paper columns what other compatriots don’t even realize: that giving up to Hitler’s blackmail means throwing France in war.”<sup>3</sup> For this purpose she abandons the elegance of her first chronicle. Reports become more concentrate, reasoning is very harsh, details have no more picturesque, the style is pervasive.<sup>4</sup>

On September 1, 1939, the ineluctable happens. Germany invades Poland and, after few days, France declares war to the aggressor. The hostilities with the old contender begin in 1940 and the French army is vanished by Wehrmacht. Genevieve Tabouis does not witness the German occupation and leaves for Bordeaux, where she is arrested by the authorities of the Vichy government. She escapes, by miracle, and goes to London. There, she quickly gets into a conflict with General de Gaulle, to whom she reproaches the lack of official support and then decides to depart to United States of America, where she militates for USA to become belligerent, on behalf of values of democracy. Genevieve lived in America for five years and travelled in all states in order to convince people to sustain her aim. Here, she makes her debut in radio journalism at *The Voice of America*, but her greatest success is editing „Pour la victoire”, between 1942-1945, in New York, where there wrote famous journalists like Philippe Barres and Henry de Kerillis or other popular names like Eve Curie, Claude Levy-Strauss, Andre Breton and Antoine de Saint-Exupery. The gazette was a fan of General Giraud, which will attract the aversion of supporters of de Gaulle. Only in 1944,

Cassandra realizes the necessity of supporting Charles de Gaulle and Free France. Her work was supported by her friend and confidante, Eleanor Roosevelt, First Lady of the USA.

At the end of the war, Geneviève Tabouis returns to France and rebuilds from scratch an impressive journalistic career. She starts to publish again, as a columnist, at *L'Aurore* and *France libre* (1945-1949), *L'Information* (1949-1956), where she is in charge of the Foreign Affairs Department and *Paris-Jour* (1959-1972). Since 1956, Tabouis collaborates with *La Depeche du Midi*. She writes much, warm blooded, but not that many readers like her editorials like before. The old generation of statesmen was gone. The war had been a terrifying experience. What else, worse, could happen and be predicted? Geneviève senses the change and turns to radio journalism. Though the new activity she achieves an unexpected fame, that writing never gave. She worked with RDF (Radiodiffusion française), RTF, l'ORTE. But her biggest success was Radio Luxemburg, than RTL, where her chronicles „Dernières nouvelles de demain” (1949-1967), „Nouvelles exclusives” (1964-1966) and „l'Inédit du dimanche” (1967-1981) were very popular. Geneviève was famous for her stereotypes: „Watch out what you are going to find out!” and „I am still learning”. She had regular radio appearances until 88 years old.

Due to her critical, often cynical, spirit concerning the flaws of the western post-war democracy, she was believed to be a soviet agent. Interesting fact, her biographer, Denis Marechal, published documents found in Russian archives, which proved that during the '30, Geneviève Tabouis received 5000 francs monthly from the Soviet Embassy.

Since 1916 she was married to Robert Tabouis and had two children, Francois and Rosine. Along her tumultuous existence, through the thousands of articles and radio chronicles, she had time to write books, too: *Tutankhamen, the life and time* (1928), *Nabucodonosor and the triumph of Babylon* (1931), *Solomon, the king of Israel* (1934), *Loyal and perfid Albion* (1938), *The blackmail of war* (1938), *Jules Cambon seen by his own* (1938), *They called me Casandra* (1942), *Twenty years of diplomatic tension* (1958), etc.

Geneviève Tabouis died in 1985. She was 93 years old and she had been working at a radio article. The last one...

## Notes

[1] Geneviève Tabouis, *Douăzeci de ani de tensiune diplomatică*, Editura Politică, București, 1965, p. 6.

[2] *Ibidem*, p. 7

[3] *Ibidem*

[4] *Ibidem*, p. 8