



The Enduring Influence of Female *Special Operations Executive* Agent Biopics on Cultural Memory and Representations in France and Great Britain

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Abstract

Seventy-five years have elapsed since the end of World War Two. Yet, the memory of the conflict still occupies a central place in British and French collective consciousness. Fiction and film representations of the war act as powerful ‘vectors of memory’, to borrow an expression from French historian Henry Rousso, and as such, they have deeply contributed to shaping popular and cultural memories of the war.

This article investigates a specific aspect of World War Two representations, namely the cinematic representations of the female agents from the SOE F section, focusing on the ‘generic’ or archetypal figure of the female SOE agent as generated by the post-war cultural industry. After a brief contextualisation focusing on Churchill’s clandestine organisation, the article will analyse the contribution of *Odette* (Herbert Wilcox, 1950) and *Carve Her Name with Pride* (Lewis Gilbert, 1958) to the construction of a World War Two ‘mythology’. It will then address more recent films, concentrating on *Charlotte Gray* (Gillian Armstrong, 2001) and *Female Agents* (Jean-Paul Salomé, 2008).

How did the fictional construction of the female spy come to influence the social and cultural perception of the SOE agent? Are the tropes developed in such post-war films as *Odette* or *Carve Her Name with Pride* still current or have they evolved with time? The analysis of these fictional representations will reveal the permanence or evolution of certain representational patterns and also allow us to approach different

perspectives on the cultural representation of World War Two on both sides of the Channel.

Keywords: World War Two, SOE F section female agents, cinematographic representations, gender, cultural memory

Résumé

75 années se sont écoulées depuis la fin des hostilités et pourtant, la mémoire de la Seconde Guerre mondiale continue d'occuper une place centrale de la conscience collective, en France comme en France. Comme démontré par Henry Rousso, les œuvres de fiction et les représentations cinématographiques de la guerre constituent autant de « vecteurs mémoriels » qui ont grandement contribué à façonner la mémoire culturelle de la Seconde Guerre mondiale.

Cet article entend analyser un aspect bien spécifique de ces représentations, à savoir les représentations cinématographiques des agents féminins de la section F du SOE. L'étude ne portera pas sur le portrait d'un agent en particulier mais plutôt sur l'image « générique » de ces femmes telle que véhiculée par les œuvres culturelles d'après-guerre. Après quelques éléments de contextualisation sur le SOE et ses missions, l'article se consacrera à la façon dont *Odette* (Herbert Wilcox, 1950) et *Carve Her Name with Pride* (Lewis Gilbert, 1958) ont contribué à la construction d'une « mythologie » propre à la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Il se concentrera ensuite sur l'analyse de films plus récents, *Charlotte Gray* (Gillian Armstrong, 2001) et *Les Femmes de l'ombre* (*Female Agents*) (Jean-Paul Salomé, 2008).

Il s'agira notamment d'examiner l'influence des œuvres de fiction sur la perception culturelle et sociale de ces agents féminins, puis d'analyser l'héritage des films d'après-guerre. Il conviendra ainsi d'identifier les éléments de continuité et les évolutions éventuelles. Cette étude sera également l'occasion de mettre en lumière différents angles concernant les représentations culturelles de la Seconde Guerre mondiale en France et outre-Manche.

Mots Clés: Seconde Guerre mondiale, agents féminins de la section F du SOE, représentations cinématographiques, genre, mémoire culturelle

The Second World War holds a special place in both British and French cultural memories. In the United Kingdom, the recurring reference to the 'Blitz spirit' whenever Britain is confronted with hard times bears testimony to this prevalence in collective memory. One of the most recent occurrences was Queen Elizabeth II's address to the nation on 5 April 2020 during the coronavirus crisis. In her speech, Elizabeth invoked the values of fortitude and resilience, solidarity and unity ingrained in the 'national spirit' and ended her address with an implicit allusion to Vera Lynn's wartime emblematic song *We'll Meet Again*.¹ On the other side of the Channel, the past two decades have seen a resurgence of interest in the Second World War. While post-war film productions were mostly devoted to the construction of an official and selective memory, since the 1970s, subsequent generations have endeavoured to address the *Occupation* in all its complexity, thus trying to come to terms with the nation's intricate past. The success of the television series *Un village français*² with its focus on the moral dilemmas of ordinary French people and its complex blend of cowardice and heroism illustrates the level of interest in a more candid, multifaceted vision of the war.

Alongside the sustained interest in the Second World War, women's contributions to the war effort have become increasingly visible, not only in historical research³ but also in all fields of popular culture.⁴ Standing at the pinnacle of this collective acclaim, the female Special Operations Executive (SOE) agent is one of the figures that has exerted the strongest grip on popular imagination and culture. This has resulted in many works of fiction which each function as 'vectors of memory'⁵ and have contributed to shaping cultural images. This inevitably raises questions as to the distance between women's actual experiences and the way they are perceived. However, although these fictional representations may lack historical accuracy, from a sociological standpoint, they mirror shifting discourses on gender and chart the dramatic changes in women's social roles.⁶ This paper will not focus on a single portrayal but rather on the 'generic' or the archetypal figure of the female SOE agent as generated by the post-war cultural industry and such films as *Carve Her Name with Pride* or *Odette*. It will then address more recent films, concentrating on *Charlotte Gray* and *Female Agents*.

How did the fictional construction of the female spy come to influence the social and cultural perception of the SOE agent? Are the tropes developed in *Odette* or *Carve Her Name with Pride* still current or have they evolved with time? The analysis of these fictional representations will reveal the permanence or evolution of dominant patterns of representation and allow us to identify different perspectives on the cultural representation of the war on both sides of the Channel.

1. Historical background: the SOE's missions and the recruitment of female agents

The *Special Operations Executive* was a clandestine organisation set up in July 1940 by Winston Churchill to literally 'set Europe ablaze'. Placed under the aegis of the Minister of Economic Warfare, Hugh Dalton, the SOE was distinct from the Intelligence Services. In Dalton's own words, its mission was to 'coordinate, inspire, control and assist the nationals of the oppressed countries',⁷ with the explicit purpose of stirring up and fostering a spirit of resistance. Subversion and sabotage marked a departure from conventional warfare, but this strategy reflected the urgent need to counter the Nazi war machine. The purpose of psychological warfare is clearly evident in this excerpt from Dalton's memoirs, *The Fateful Years* (1957):

As to its scope, "sabotage" was a simple idea. It meant smashing things up. "Subversion" was a more complex conception. It meant the weakening, by whatever "covert" means, of the enemy's will and power to make war, and the strengthening of the will and power of his opponents, including in particular, guerrilla and resistance movements.⁸

At the core of this destabilising machinery, the F section operating for France was by far the most important one in the organisation – both in the number of agents deployed and in the strategic role it played – as the liberation of France was the prerequisite for the Allied reconquest of Europe. Led by Maurice Buckmaster, this section established close to 90 networks across France between 1940 and 1944. Fifty-six of these circuits were still active at the time of the Allied landing.⁹

Beyond logistical aspects, irregular warfare inevitably entailed irregular warriors. British SOE agents, particularly women from the F section have long resonated within British popular and cultural memory. One of the main reasons for the public's sustained interest in SOE is the fact that the F section deliberately initiated and pursued a recruitment policy involving women. Thirty-nine out of their 480 enlisted agents were women.¹⁰

Considering the social context of the period, recruiting female agents was a ground-breaking step.¹¹ This practice ran counter to military statutes. Furthermore, social expectations and people's experiences of the war were profoundly gendered. If men were morally expected to engage in active service, women were supposed to ensure survival and continuity on the Home Front. While the governments involved in the conflict instrumentalised women as preservers of the family unit, it seemed

inconceivable to dispatch female agents behind enemy lines, especially given the social and cultural representations of the time.¹² Nevertheless, gender stereotypes helped keep women above suspicion and paradoxically weighed in favour of their recruitment. The prevalence of traditional gender roles meant that women could move around more freely without raising undue interest in their activities. Conversely, men were natural objects of suspicion, especially from February 1943 onwards with the enforcement of the '*Service du travail obligatoire*', a policy which forced French men to go and work in Germany.¹³

Female recruits came from all walks of life. They were all affiliated to a women's military unit, mainly The First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY) and the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF), established in 1907 and in 1939 respectively. The contribution of the FANY to the work accomplished by the SOE is substantial: in 1944, the Corps' strength was 6,000, of which 2,000 were in SOE.¹⁴ Most of them were posted to Grendon Underwood listening station, ensuring a vital link between the UK headquarters and the agents on the ground. In addition, 39 of the 50 women agents sent to France belonged to the FANY.¹⁵ A *sine qua non* requirement was a good knowledge of French culture and perfect fluency in French so they could remain unnoticed.

Through their affiliation to female military units, women were supposed to benefit from the protection of the Geneva Convention. In fact, the agents did not wear uniforms and, like men, placed themselves at risk of abuse by the enemy and deportation. Under the '*Nacht und Nebel*' decree, any individual guilty or suspected of committing offences against the occupying power vanished without a trace. No information would be given as to the person's whereabouts or their fate.¹⁶

Female agents were trained in sabotage, small arms, radio and telegraph communication, unarmed combat and silent killing.¹⁷ If women received the same paramilitary training as men, they were essentially recruited as couriers and wireless operators. Though highly strategic, these roles merely occupied an 'auxiliary' function within a chain of command primarily led by men. The resistance networks supported by the F section were indeed dominated by men reluctant to delegate their leadership to women. A notable exception was Pearl Witherington (1914-2008), who took over the direction of the *maquis* following the arrest of her circuit leader.¹⁸

Beyond delivering messages, which was perilous in itself, couriers worked in close cooperation with radio operators. They were constantly on the move, looking for safe houses for wireless operators or carrying their sets from place to place. They were also actively involved in the reception of air-dropped arms and occasionally took part in sabotage work. Thus, both couriers and radio operators undertook dangerous tasks¹⁹

and many paid the ultimate price for their commitment: thirteen out of the 39 F section female recruits died during deportation and only three of those who had been deported survived the death camps.²⁰

Yet, as stated by Clare Mulley, ‘all too often, female special agents and women who served in the resistance are still honoured more for their intentions or their beauty than their achievements’.²¹ Beyond this, one of the most striking features of the popular perception of SOE female agents is the discrepancy in the degree of public recognition they have been granted individually.

2. Post-war publicity and the influence of *Odette*

Though female agents all undertook similar missions and encountered the same danger, some agents like Violette Szabo (1921-1945) and Odette Sansom (also known under the names Odette Churchill and Odette Hallows, 1912-1995) have almost achieved mythical status while others are virtually unknown. Odette has become an integral part of British national identity and was worshiped by the post-war press and the public, her fame leading Penny Starns to dub Odette ‘World War Two’s Darling spy’.²² As for Violette Szabo, in late 2009, an SOE memorial was unveiled at London’s Albert Embankment and, tellingly, it was Violette who was chosen to embody the action of SOE agents, both male and female.

One might wonder why some agents have become war heroines ingrained in collective memory while the vast majority have fallen into oblivion.²³ For those who wanted to return to normal life or who found it difficult to re-adjust, keeping their experiences to themselves was a matter of choice, but this does not explain *per se* such a difference in recognition. The reasons are many and varied, but the most likely explanation lies in the media coverage granted to their wartime achievements. The public perception of history can be heavily shaped by fiction, even though film or literary representations may differ greatly from reality.²⁴ Exposure to the media and, above all, the way in which the film industry addressed their experiences led to imbalanced post-war representations, both at individual and collective levels. Though there may have been common features, each situation was unique. Agents also had different beliefs and motives for joining, and considering them as a whole inevitably runs the risk of stereotyping.

For those who did achieve a high degree of cultural visibility, their overexposure in the media lies in the fact that ‘when women are actively involved in ways that challenge societal codes about femininity, a voyeuristic fascination ensues’.²⁵ Interviewed several decades after the war in the early 1990s, Pearl Witherington-

Cornioley outlined the inherently transgressive nature of her wartime experience and expressed her discomfort at circumstances which, in her view, ran against nature. When asked about her paramilitary training and unarmed combat lessons, she declared 'I took in everything they said without questioning it; not once did I think it was daft or pointless. But I never would have been able to use a weapon in cold blood. I think that's a feminine issue. I think women are meant to give life not to take it'.²⁶ Undeniably, female agents challenged cultural constructions of femininity. Since their existence was revealed to the general public, female SOE agents have become a prominent topic of Second World War cultural memory and the gap between conventional gender norms and the stark reality of their wartime missions has impressed the public.

Their existence was first disclosed on 11 March 1945. In a *Sunday Express* article entitled 'WAAF Girls Parachuted into France', Squadron leader William Simpson, DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross) asserted: 'The interesting thing about these girls is that they are not hearty and horsey young women with masculine chins. They are pretty young girls who would look demure and sweet in crinoline'. Though the article clumsily addressed the topic in a gendered way, it concluded that 'all these unknown young girls [...] have proved one thing for ever. The toughest tests of courage and endurance faced by men can be passed with honour by women'.²⁷

The craving for more information about them was further nurtured by the veil of secrecy maintained by authorities, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the concomitant publication of various articles which primarily sought sensationalism.²⁸ Fiction writers, too, responded to the expectations of this new readership, re-imagining female spies' experiences. As the eminent SOE historian Michael Foot asserted: 'History and journalism, like nature, abhor a vacuum, and into the vacuum of official silence, ghastly imputations about what happened to these girls have been freely inserted by sensation mongers'.²⁹

As far as the British film industry is concerned, the post-war era was a period of mass scale production of 'heroic-triumphalist' British war films³⁰ whose primary purpose was to pay tribute to the memory of the war's heroes while lifting the nation's morale and self-assurance in a time of austerity. According to Patrick Finney, 'narratives of heroism were fundamental to national recovery'.³¹ Initially intended for male viewers, war films progressively aimed at a wider audience. Two major productions, namely *Odette* and *Carve Her Name with Pride*, charted the experiences of real-life women agents. The first one, directed by Herbert Wilcox in 1950, draws on Odette Sansom's biography by Jerrard Tickell while the second one, directed by Lewis Gilbert and released in 1958 is based on Violette Szabo's life. Both agents had been

apprehended while on active service in France and eventually sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp after several weeks of interrogation and torture at the prison of Fresnes and at Gestapo Headquarters. Violette was executed but Odette survived. She was awarded an MBE in 1945 and became the first woman ever to receive the George Cross for gallantry in 1946 and the only woman who has been awarded it while still alive. In 1950, she was made a *chevalier de la Légion d'honneur* by French President Vincent Auriol for the services she rendered during the war.³² As an iconic figure, she was given free rein to tell her story and was heavily involved in the construction of her own post-war image.

The over-exposure of female agents in the media contrasted deeply with the ethos of the SOE, which operated in secrecy. Yet Odette claimed she was publicising her story for her fallen comrades. As she asserted in an epilogue at the end of the film:

It is with a sense of deep humility that I allow my personal story to be told. I am a very ordinary woman to whom a chance was given to see human beings at their best and at their worst. I knew kindness as well as cruelty, understanding as well as brutality. My comrades, who did far more than I and suffered far more profoundly, are not here to speak. It is to their memory that this film has been made and I would like it to be a window through which may be seen those very gallant women with whom I had the honour to serve.

Odette was filmed on the actual location of the events 'in a sober semi-documentary style'.³³ Anna Neagle, who had also played the part of Edith Cavell in *Nurse Edith Cavell* (1939), starred as Odette. Before the actual filming took place, she followed the Churchills (Odette and her husband Peter Churchill), on a tour of the very places where the events had occurred. According to Odette, Anna Neagle was deeply affected by the role and was eventually more upset by doing that film than Odette was, reliving the experience: the actress was 'visibly moved by her research for the role, so much so that it took her well over a year to recover and feel normal again once filming had finished'.³⁴ To reinforce the impression of a documentary film, Colonel Buckmaster, who had been in charge of the French section, also made a cameo appearance to play his own part. Reflecting the aesthetic shift of the post-war period, the film offered a more realistic representation of a female spy than those produced in the first half of the twentieth century.³⁵ In overcoming the binary opposition of the image of the evil spy embodied by Mata Hari, with the martyr and virginal figure of Edith Cavell, it offered a more complex representation and allowed for multiple readings. Anna Neagle's performance was less glamorous and more veracious than in *Nurse Edith*

Cavell. However, one key element remained: the reinforcement of national identity through the idolisation of war heroines.³⁶

As technical advisor on the film *Carve Her Name with Pride*, Odette also contributed to the post-war image and construction of Violette Szabo. The latter had worked for the *Salesman* circuit led by Philippe Liewer, aka Major Charles Staunton. After a first successful assignment, her second mission was to intensify Resistance activity in the Limousin region and to support the Allies in their D-Day operations. However, on 10 June 1944, she was captured by a detachment of the notorious *Das Reich* division of the SS and sent to Ravensbrück.³⁷ Violette Szabo was posthumously awarded the George Cross on 17 December 1946, the *Croix de Guerre* in 1947 and the *Médaille de la Résistance* in 1973.³⁸ Violette's role was brilliantly played by Virginia McKenna, then British cinema's 'English rose'.³⁹ The motion picture directed by Lewis Gilbert was based on R. J. Minney's biography of the same name. It focused on the 'ordinariness' of the character, an aspect which was not present in *Odette*.⁴⁰ Right from the outset and even before the war scenes, the film is particularly effective in depicting the disruption of conventional gender roles in wartime. Thus, Violette repeatedly asserts her wish for an active role though the film eludes the fact that the historical Violette had already engaged in war work as a member of the Women's Land Army or the Auxiliary Territorial Service. According to Alan Burton, this omission creates 'a more vivid shift from shop girl to female agent'.⁴¹ Before her recruitment, Violette proclaims, 'If I'd been a man, I'd like to have been a professional soldier.' For Rosie White, this film thus 'offers a version of the female spy as a trained professional' and not a mere amateur hindered by her femininity.⁴² Virginia McKenna's athletic appearance is also an indicator of 'changing sensibilities', matching Violette's father's description of his daughter as 'the toughest one in the family'.⁴³

There is a definite feminist stance in this film. Throughout the picture, Violette is mostly surrounded by female characters, an aspect which contrasts with *Odette*, where the heroine evolves in a male-dominated microcosm. Violette's friendship with her fellow female spies Lilian Rolfe (1914-1945) and Denise Bloch (1916-1945) prior to their execution by a firing squad is central to the plot. In a similar vein to *Odette*, where a romantic inflexion had been given to the plot through the romance between Odette and Peter (Trevor Howard) and their final embrace in the closing scene, the screenwriters invented a romantic story line involving Violette and her commanding officer (played by Paul Scofield). For Juliette Pattinson, this recourse to romance may be a sign that a late 1950s audience 'would not accept a film without a romantic subplot'.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, romance remains side-lined by sisterhood, thus offering a precursory feminist viewpoint. For Rosie White, 'this version of the female spy may

be understood as a forerunner of later representations, in its matter-of-fact account of a woman at work'.⁴⁵

For both films, there were however some concessions to conventions and normative gender roles. Both Odette Sansom and Violette Szabo had made the harrowing choice of leaving their children behind to join the fight against Nazism. As maternal figures, they inevitably captured the public's imagination, contradicting the usual representation of the female spy. The directors predictably focused on these aspects to give depth to the characters and offset the unconventionality of their mission by more traditional feminine attributes.⁴⁶ The emphasis on motherhood also reflects post-war articles which reassured the public that 'female agents had returned to conventional womanly roles after their wartime adventures'.⁴⁷

A highly popular film, *Carve Her Name with Pride* has been called 'a paradigm of British pluck and reserve'. At the same time, it was 'surprisingly forward-looking in its portrayal of women and their ability to excel in a male-dominated environment'.⁴⁸ Both *Carve Her Name with Pride* and *Odette* contributed deeply to the shaping of post-war 'SOE mythology' and, to a certain extent have served as archetypes for subsequent films. According to Elizabeth Vigurs, they acted as 'a celluloid memorial and as a place of memory'.⁴⁹ It is thus interesting to examine the cinematic heritage of these films and chart forms of continuity or evolution, focusing on the more recent films *Charlotte Gray* and *Female Agents*. As these latter films do not explicitly concentrate on the life of one particular individual, they cannot be classified as biopics. Yet they share many similarities with *Odette* and *Carve Her Name with Pride* and can be viewed as part of their legacy.

3. Historical films and the legacy of *Odette* and *Carve Her Name with Pride*

An adaption from the 1999 novel by Sebastian Faulks, *Charlotte Gray* was filmed by Australian director Gillian Armstrong and was released in 2001. It tells the story of a young Scottish woman working with the French Resistance in the hope of rescuing her lover, a missing RAF pilot shot down while on mission over France. *Charlotte Gray* is a composite character, drawing on the experience of several real-life SOE heroines, including Nancy Wake (1912-2011), Pearl Witherington-Cornioley, Odette Samson and Violette Szabo.⁵⁰ Shot in South-Western France, the film had the perfect formula for commercial success: stunning locations and a talented cast starring Cate Blanchett, who gave a remarkable performance. However, neither critics nor the public were

convinced by the film, which was described as a dull and ‘lumbering’⁵¹ adaptation lacking stamina and realism.

Charlotte’s intentions and actions in the field lack credibility and coherence. While actual SOE officials were careful not to recruit women primarily driven by emotional motives, the romantic and melodramatic storyline prevails. Ralph Donald and Karen MacDonald thus mention:

It’s a shame that the many heroic exploits of the four real female spies were not placed in the forefront of the film, rather than loop a few of their combined accomplishments around a disjointed and uninspiring love story. The story of women as intelligence agents in wartime would have been better and more accurately served [...] if it were shown that these women’s minds were on their mission, not their boyfriends.⁵²

Other critics mention ‘needless glamorization’ and describe it as ‘another movie where World War II is the backdrop for a love triangle’ or ‘an adaptation that is often confused as to whether it’s a love story set in wartime, or a war story with a love angle’.⁵³

One of the main incongruities is language. As much is made of Charlotte’s fluency in French in the novel and in the first part of the picture, one might expect a switch to French once Charlotte is parachuted into France. This would have cohered with the need for agents to fit seamlessly into French society. Nevertheless, the film carries on in English. The director obviously chose to side-step the language issue, intending the film to be accessible to a wide English-speaking audience and deciding not to insert subtitles.⁵⁴ Though the German characters speak German, the French characters do not speak French, which seems inconsistent.

Another unlikely plot element is the fact that Charlotte finds herself involved in the hiding of two Jewish boys in her own safe house, whereas undercover agents were supposed to keep a low profile and would not expose themselves or other circuit members to additional sources of danger. For Elizabeth Vigurs, this subplot clearly illustrates how ‘the film allows dramatic licence to override historical fact, resulting in an unrepresentative image of life as an SOE agent’.⁵⁵ However, it also contributes to giving Charlotte a maternal dimension and ensures empathy. This implicitly echoes the theme of motherhood which was already present in *Odette* and *Carve Her Name with Pride*.

As faulty and insubstantial as it may have been, the film had the merit of rekindling interest in SOE agents among younger generations. The film merged the experiences

of real agents with fictional ones and, just like *Odette* in its time, the name Charlotte Gray soon became synonymous with SOE. The blurring of boundaries between reality and fiction is even more obvious in the press obituaries of actual female SOE agents. Both Eileen Nearne (1921-2010) and Nancy Wake (1912-2011) were thus dubbed as ‘The real Charlotte Gray’.⁵⁶

Seven years later, in 2008, a film entitled *Les Femmes de l’ombre*, literally ‘women of the shadows’, was released. The French title is strongly reminiscent of *L’Armée des ombres* (Army of Shadows) directed by Jean-Pierre Melville in 1969.⁵⁷ In its English version, the title was regrettably translated as the very bland *Female Agents*. The film, directed by Jean-Paul Salomé and starring Sophie Marceau, was co-produced by the BBC. Louise Desfontaines, the main character performed by Marceau, is loosely inspired by real life agent Lise de Baissac (1905-2004). In the run-up to D-Day, Louise is sent on a mission to exfiltrate a British agent who has fallen into the hands of the enemy while preparing the invasion of Normandy. If German intelligence discover this, the whole D-Day scheme could be jeopardised. Along with her brother Pierre (Julien Boisselier), Louise is tasked with gathering a team of female agents for the mission. This recruitment is, however, carried out using a combination of corruption and intimidation, with appeals to patriotic duty playing only a minor role. The first is Suzy Deprez (Marie Gillain), a former cabaret dancer whose main gift is seduction. The second is Gaëlle Lemenech (Déborah François), a chemist and explosive expert. The last recruit is Jeanne Faussier (Julie Depardieu), a prostitute awaiting execution for the murder of her procurer. She is offered the remission of her death sentence in exchange for her services.

Whereas *Charlotte Gray* was described as lethargic, critics of *Female Agents* almost unanimously acclaimed the film as thrilling and packed with action, but they were not easily misled as to its historical accuracy. *The Observer* mentions:

a fanciful babes-at-war action pic in which Winston Churchill rounds up a crack team of fabulously good-looking young women to rescue D-Day from disaster while paying special attention to their hair and make-up. Director Jean-Paul Salomé declared that the hardest part was “making it as realistic as possible while providing plenty of glamour”, an endeavour in which he is only 50 per cent successful, despite some fingernail-pulling torture and creepily photogenic naked death.⁵⁸

The choice of French popular star Sophie Marceau as lead character and the *femme fatale* figure of Suzy are indicators of the will to instil glamour in the film. The opening

sequence uses wartime photographs of servicewomen, thus giving the impression that the story is based on facts. However, the constant references to Maurice Buckmaster, the official in charge of the French section, are wholly unrealistic and the agents receive minimal training. Another inconsistency is that historical SOE female agents were never assigned to a collective mission, though fiction had already conceived the commando scenario. Indeed, *Female Agents* seems to draw its inspiration from Ken Follett's best seller *Jackdaws* (2001), although the novel is not mentioned in the credits.⁵⁹ The list of incongruities includes the fact that the SOE never sent brothers and sisters or husbands and wives together on the same mission. The fact that they might be made to talk while being tortured in front of each other (a psychological ploy used in the film) posed too great a risk.

Above all, the characters' motives are implausible as their recruitment is based on coercion, while in fact voluntariness and genuine commitment were the rule. This aspect led historian Mark Seaman to describe the commando as 'the dirty dozen in petticoats',⁶⁰ and it also infuriated some resistance veterans who viewed it as a dishonour. In an article entitled 'Sophie Marceau's New Film Sparks Resistance', *The Telegraph* quotes Denise Vernay, a former resistance member:

This film is worse than if they had done nothing [...] I am very sorry that it was made at all, especially at a time when those generations watching it who did not know the war can no longer differentiate between the reality of our commitment and these ridiculous women portrayed in the film. Women joined the Resistance out of patriotism, a conviction which appears nowhere in this film. [...] It is an injury to them and a betrayal of their memory to say they were recruited by blackmail, lies and pardons.⁶¹

The opening scene shows Louise as a cold-blooded sniper assailing German soldiers and her final mission consists in shooting down Colonel Heindrich (Moritz Bleibtreu), the ruthless head of German counterintelligence who knows about D-Day. In the final scene, she achieves her goal in a somewhat theatrical scene. Like the shadow she is supposed to be, she is seen emerging from the smoke of a railway platform, aiming at the officer's head. Just a few seconds later, she vanishes in the smoke. In these sequences, we can clearly detect the influence of *Carve Her Name with Pride* where, in several scenes, Violette is shown with heavy weapons or takes part in hand-to-hand combat. In one of the most famous scenes, she is seen wielding a gun and mowing down Germans, an image which 'has permeated the public's perceived wisdom of the SOE and has given rise to the myth that all agents were involved in armed struggle'.⁶²

Nevertheless, one realistic element lies in the recurring vicious torture sequences which confer a resolutely dark side to *Female Agents*. These graphic scenes stand in sharp contrast to *Odette* and *Carve Her Name with Pride*. Whereas *Odette* addresses the question of torture implicitly, resorting to *film noir* techniques and expressionism (like close-ups or dark and oppressive lightning), the *Female Agents* scenes are quite gruesome and graphic, focusing on instruments of torture and showing the limits of heroism. As Penny Starns mentions in her review of 1950s SOE films, bleak or ghastly details

[were] not given media attention, and at a time when women were still viewed as a somewhat protected species in British society, it was not considered appropriate to dwell on their experiences of torture. Cinematic representations of SOE women were therefore, obviously flawed; although they did at least ensure that their sacrifices were acknowledged.⁶³

Though *Female Agents* clearly shows that women were not given preferential treatment on account of their sex, it also brings to the fore the way prisoners could be humiliated in gender-specific ways.⁶⁴ For instance, Gaëlle, the explosives expert, is stripped down before having a fingernail removed. Unlike *Odette* and *Carve Her Name with Pride*, the scenes involving physical torture are shown. Gaëlle does not try to hide her pain and she almost immediately gives in under duress. Her agonised shrieks stand in stark contrast to Odette's resolute 'I have nothing to say'. Moreover, Gaëlle's terror is made quite explicit and is especially visible when she wets herself out of fear.

However, the classic themes of glamour and heroic myth-making still prevail. This latter trait, common to both British and French cultures, operates differently in France, a country which has yet to come to terms with a shameful past.⁶⁵ *Female Agents* bears witness to the difficulty of addressing collaboration. Yet the film does not try to conceal this aspect, as the examples that follow will illustrate. As *The Guardian* review of the film mentions, for a long time, 'the complex French experience of the Occupation, the myths, realities and misrepresentations of collaboration and resistance, was a touchy subject'.⁶⁶ Film representations thus shed interesting light on the pervasiveness of what Henry Rousso, a specialist of the Vichy regime, called the 'Vichy syndrome' or 'résistancialisme', i.e. the heroic myth of an entire French nation united against the occupier.⁶⁷ This dominant version of French Second World War history was instrumentalised by both the Gaullists and communists who deliberately relegated collaborators to a tiny minority. Another function of this sanitisation of memory was to ensure national unity and impose a reassuring and soothing vision of the dark years

after the trauma of Nazi rule.⁶⁸ Collaboration is not an easy concept to define. It involves a broad range of interpretations which all have to take into account the particular circumstances of the Occupation. According to Rousso, it 'meant different things to different people at different times. It could designate a choice or constraint, a means of social promotion, or an ideological commitment. In most cases, it was a state of mind'.⁶⁹ Although collaborators constituted a minority of the French population (an estimated one or two million, considering the circulation of collaborationist papers),⁷⁰ the Germans heavily relied on this minority and, irrefutably, the Nazis could not have rounded up and deported so many people without the collusion of the Vichy government.

In Rousso's view, cinema is both a 'vector of memory' and a symptom of society.⁷¹ It is also an opportunity to revisit the past. In *Female Agents*, the character of Suzy exemplifies this complex past. She is specifically chosen because she formerly had a relationship with Heindrich. If we now consider the issue of collaboration along gender lines, sleeping with the enemy or 'horizontal collaboration' was subject to the most severe forms of reproof. According to Margaret Collins Weitz, 'French womanhood symbolized the nation. Having physical relations with the enemy was the defilement of France'.⁷² Hence, an aspect of the 'cleansing' (*épuration*) directed particularly against women at the time of liberation was head shaving. By joining the commando and dying while attempting to kill her former lover, Suzy finally achieves redemption. Likewise, both Louise and her brother have thrown themselves headlong into the war to redress their parents' tacit collaboration as Pétainists. Thus, like most current French productions on the Second World War, *Female Agents* attempts to depict a wartime society in all its ambivalence, though in a somewhat melodramatic and heroic way.

Conclusion

Myths can play an essential role in the shaping of collective memory and in the way individuals comprehend their national past. As Mark Connolly (2004) has pointed out,

Myths and the study of them are vital for they reveal a great deal about how people relate to the past, particularly their own national past. Myths are important because they help people to make sense of their lives; they provide a popular memory of the past, which can shape expectations of the present and the future.⁷³

With regard to the cultural memory of the Second World War, even though Britain and France went through fundamentally different experiences, they share similar patterns in their process of myth making – albeit with slightly different purposes. In the case of France, the lingering but now waning myth of ‘resistancialism’ was a political and psychological expedient meant to build up national allegiance after the trauma of the *Occupation*. As for Britain, which experienced an equally traumatic episode during the Blitz, but which did not see wide national divisions, the cultural memory of the Second World War continues to resonate and is invoked to summon resilience, stoicism and the celebrated communal sense of the ‘Blitz spirit’.⁷⁴ As powerful ‘vectors of memory’, films and fiction, as well as other media, have played a major role in the preservation and crystallisation of this World War Two ‘mythology’.

As regards the SOE and the influence of fictions in the public perception of history, just a few of the 39 F section women have achieved any degree of public recognition and those who have mainly gained notoriety thanks to their depictions in films. Both *Odette* and *Carve Her Name with Pride* set very high standards for what has become a genre of its own within wartime or espionage films. These classics still exert a remarkable influence and can be viewed as yardsticks against which all subsequent films are measured. Unlike most traditional 1950s films where women played a peripheral part, *Odette* and *Violette* are at the centre of the screenplay. In a society where social norms and conventions expected women to be confined to the domestic sphere, the female spy or agent who traversed gender boundaries and ventured on masculine grounds created a certain fascination, which has endured up to this day through the release of new SOE epics.

However, the more recent films *Charlotte Gray* and *Female Agents* depart from post-war films in that they introduced twenty-first century standards. Indeed, the cinematographic representations of real-life spies have evolved to include complex and ‘contradictory accounts of femininity’,⁷⁵ reflecting the changes that occurred in British and French societies. We must nevertheless consider a few limitations as these representations still attempt to romanticise or glamorise clandestine life with a clear propensity for melodrama. The gaps between reality and fiction need to be borne in mind. As realistic as they attempt to be, the films remain first and foremost entertainment; they are fictional accounts of real experiences that are necessarily more multifaceted than their depictions can allow. Yet they all share the merit of demonstrating that war and the Resistance were not only a men’s affair and that women’s contributions have long been overlooked. In France, despite the acknowledgement of historians that several hundred women worked tirelessly behind the scenes, only six female members of the Resistance were decorated after the

liberation, a number that blatantly contrasts with the 1,036 men who were honoured for their bravery.⁷⁶ In spite of the missteps or historical inaccuracies that might occur due to dramatic effect or artistic licence, we can still appreciate these films for how they remember and pay homage to ordinary women who achieved extraordinary feats. As Jean-Paul Salomé put it, ‘these women put their lives in danger, they were equally [*sic.*] as committed as the men, but out of humility they never drew any profit from their heroism’.⁷⁷

The enduring popularity of the female SOE agent in films and other works of fiction is a clear indicator of the influence of earlier cinematic representations. Both *Odette* and *Carve Her Name with Pride* constitute milestones in the history of the SOE war film, which have had a lasting influence on all their successors, whether they be biopics or historical films like *Charlotte Gray* or *Female Agents*. They also testify to the importance of fiction in the shaping of cultural memory.

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Notes

¹ 'I want to reassure you that if we remain united and resolute, then we will overcome it. I hope in the years to come everyone will be able to take pride in how they responded to this challenge, and those who come after us will say the Britons of this generation were as strong as any, that the attributes of self-discipline, of quiet, good-humoured resolve, and of fellow feeling still characterize this country. The pride in who we are is not a part of our past, it defines our present and our future. [...] We should take comfort that while we may have more still to endure, better days will return. We will be with our friends again. We will be with our families again. We will meet again.' Telegraph Reporters, 'The Queen's Coronavirus Speech Transcript: "We Will Succeed and Better Days Will Come", The Monarch Invoked the Blitz Spirit in a Message of Hope to the Nation', in: *The Telegraph* (5 April 2020), <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/04/05/queens-coronavirus-speech-full-will-succeed-better-days-will>, date accessed: 22 August 2021.

² *Un village français* was broadcast from 2009 to 2017 on France 3. It was co-produced by France 3, Tetra Media and Terego and directed by Philippe Triboit, Jean-Marc Brondolo and Jean-Philippe Amar.

³ Harris, Carol, *Women at War, 1939-1945: The Home Front*, Thrupp, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Pub, 2000; Sheridan, Dorothy, ed., *Wartime Women: A Mass-Observation Anthology 1937-45*, 2. impr., reissued, London: Phoenix Press, 2002; Lee, Celia, and Paul Strong, *Women and War: From Home Front to Front Line*, Barnley: Pen & Sword Military, 2019; Storey, Neil R, and Fiona Kay, *Women in the Second World War*, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Amberley Publishing, 2019.

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⁵ This concept was first coined by French historian Henry Rousso in *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France Since 1944*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991.

⁶ White, Rosie, *Violent Femmes: Women as Spies in Popular Culture*, London; New York: Routledge, 2007.

⁷ Kramer, Rita. *Flames in the Field: The Story of Four SOE Agents in Occupied France*, London; New York: Penguin Books, 1996 (23).

⁸ Dalton quoted in Binney, Marcus, *The Women Who Lived for Danger: The Agents of the Special Operations Executive*, 1st U.S. ed, New York: William Morrow, 2002 (xiii).

⁹ Ciret, Chantal, 'Le SOE (Special Operations Executive), la section F et les réseaux Buckmaster en Région Centre', in: *Résistances en Touraine et en Région Centre*, *Bulletin de l'association ERIL (Etudes sur la Résistance en Indre-et-Loire)*, Vol. Hors-série n°3, 3-8, 2010 (7).

¹⁰ Pattinson, Juliette, ‘“A Story That Will Thrill You and Make You Proud”: The Cultural Memory of Britain’s Secret War in Occupied France’, in: Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*, London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2014, 133-154 (135).

¹¹ Some other SOE sections recruited female agents. See, for example, the other section operating for France under the supervision of Charles de Gaulle, the RF section, which hired 13 women. However, these recruitments were undertaken just before or after the Allied landing. Jones, Liane, *A Quiet Courage*, London: Corgi, 1991, (6).

¹² Jones.

¹³ Weitz, Margaret Collins, *Sisters in the Resistance: How Women Fought to Free France, 1940-1945*, New York: Wiley, 1995 (85).

¹⁴ Kramer (65).

¹⁵ ‘History’, in: FANY (PRVC) – Princess Royal’s Volunteer Corps, <https://www.fany.org.uk/history>. date accessed: 22 August 2021.

¹⁶ ‘Directives for the prosecution of offences committed within the occupied territories against the German State or the occupying power’, otherwise known as the NN decree. Kramer (98).

¹⁷ For further information on their training, see Jones (32-45).

¹⁸ For a detailed account of Pearl Witherington’s experience in the Maquis, see Binney or Pearl Witherington’s own narrative: Cornioley, Pearl, Hervé Larroque, and Kathryn Atwood *Code Name Pauline: Memoirs of a World War II Special Agent, Code Name Pauline: Memoirs of a World War II Special Agent*, Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2015 (for the English edition).

¹⁹ Rita Kramer reports that ‘by 1943, a radio operator in the field could expect to last about six weeks’. Kramer (39).

²⁰ Jones (329).

²¹ Mulley, Clare. ‘Sub-Machine Guns, Prosthetic Legs and “Uncivil Service”: The Hidden Lives of Britain’s Female Spies’, in: *The Telegraph* (12 June 2015), <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11669357/World-War-Two-Britains-female-spies-and-their-secret-pasts.html>, date accessed: 22 August 2021.

²² Starns, Penny, *Odette: World War Two’s Darling Spy*, Cheltenham: History Press Ltd, 2010.

²³ See for instance the previous article by Clare Mulley or an article on Eileen ‘Didi’ Nearne, who died in complete isolation: Brennan, Zoe. ‘Charlotte Gray Revealed: The Truth Behind the British Heroine Who Died Forgotten and the Scars of Her Secret War Which Drove Her to Become a Hermit’, in: *The Daily Mail* (18 September 2010), <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1313039/Charlotte-Gray-revealed-The-truth-British-heroine-died-forgotten.html>, date accessed: 2 August 2021.

²⁴ For a thorough analysis of the link between fiction and historical perception, see the thesis by Donahue, Katherine, ‘Fact through Fiction: A Case Study of Televised Historical Drama’s Influence on Audiences’ Perceptions of the Past’, doctoral dissertation, Boston: Boston College University, 2014, <https://dlib.bc.edu/islandora/object/bc-ir%3A102238/datastream/PDF/view>, date accessed: 21 August 2021. Regarding SOE female agents and their cinematic representations, see the thesis by Vigurs, Elizabeth, *The Women Agents of the Special Operations Executive F Section – Wartime Realities and Post War Representations*, doctoral dissertation. Leeds: University of Leeds, 2011, http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/1751/1/Ethesis_FINAL.pdf, date accessed: 13 July 2019. The thesis gives a very detailed analysis of post-war fiction and films on F section female agents.

²⁵ Pattinson, ‘A Story’ (149).

²⁶ Cornioley, Larroque, and Atwood (36).

²⁷ O’Connor, Bernard, *Agents Françaises: French Women Infiltrated into France During the Second World War*, Lulu.com, 2016 (23).

²⁸ Some former agents became wary of this hustle and bustle and decided to distance themselves from the media. Such was the case for Pearl Witherington-Cornioley, whose exploits were first fictionalised and overdramatised. For a long time, she refused to give any interviews and it was only in 1994 that she eventually decided to confide in Hervé Larroque, a French journalist whom she personally knew and trusted. In the preface to the biography that ensued, she declared: ‘I don’t like blowing my own trumpet.

I find it really difficult, but at the same time I want people to know what really happened.’ Cornioley, Larroque, and Atwood. For the French original version, see: Cornioley, Pearl, and Hervé Larroque, *Pauline: parachutée en 1943 : la vie d’un agent du SOE*, Clermont-Ferrand: Éd. Par exemple, 1996.

²⁹ Foot quoted in Vigurs (106-107).

³⁰ Idem (119).

³¹ Finney quoted in ibidem.

³² ‘Heroines of WW2: The Special Operations Executives’, in: *The Gazette*, <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/awards-and-accreditation/content/100273>, date accessed: 22 August 2021.

³³ Richards quoted in White (53).

³⁴ Starns (126).

³⁵ White (53).

³⁶ Regarding *Nurse Edith Cavell*, the film was released in 1939, just after the outbreak of World War II and ‘served as a welcome and timely warning against German aggression’. Burton, Alan, *Historical Dictionary of British Spy Fiction*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016 (116).

³⁷ The 2nd SS Panzer Division ‘*Das Reich*’ was notably responsible for the Tulle and Oradour-sur-Glane massacres which occurred on 9 June 1944 and 10 June 1944 respectively. Both towns are located in Limousin, a former administrative region of southwest-central France, now part of the new administrative region of Nouvelle-Aquitaine.

³⁸ ‘Violette Szabo (George Cross)’, in: *International Bomber Command Centre*, <https://internationalbcc.co.uk/about-ibcc/news/violette-szabo-george-cross/>, date accessed: 22 August 2021.

³⁹ This expression highlighting the strong connection between the actress and national identity is recurrent. See, for example, Bell, Melanie, and Melanie Williams (eds.), *British Women’s Cinema*, London; New York: Routledge, 2010 (96); White (56); or Geraghty, Christine, *British Cinema in the Fifties: Gender, Genre, and the ‘New Look’*, London; New York: Routledge, 2000 (167).

⁴⁰ In *Women in War Films: From Helpless Heroines to G.I. Jane*, Ralph Donald and Karen MacDonald mention ‘Virginia McKenna portrays Violette as an average person, not a superspy, who gets nervous and fearful and sometimes doubts her own ability’. Donald, Ralph, and Karen MacDonald, *Women in War Films: From Helpless Heroine to G.I. Jane*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016 (218).

⁴¹ Burton (84).

⁴² White (55).

⁴³ Ibidem.

⁴⁴ Pattinson, ‘A Story’ (140).

⁴⁵ White (56).

⁴⁶ Idem (54). As an illustration, Odette is left confused and distressed after giving phone calls to her three daughters.

⁴⁷ Pattinson, ‘A Story’ (136).

⁴⁸ Burton (84).

⁴⁹ Vigurs (202).

⁵⁰ Donald and MacDonald (218).

⁵¹ Holden, Stephen, ‘Film Review: She Does What She Must for Her Cause’, in: *New York Times* (28 December 2001), <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/28/movies/film-review-she-does-what-she-must-for-her-cause.html>, date accessed: 22 August 2021.

⁵² Donald and MacDonald (219).

⁵³ Grealis, Tom, ‘Charlotte Gray’, in: *RTE* (21 February 2002), <https://www.rte.ie/entertainment/movie-reviews/2002/0221/446136-charlottegray/>, date accessed: 22 August 2021.

⁵⁴ Brook, Tom, ‘Blanchett’s Resourceful Charlotte Gray’, in: *BBC News* (28 December 2001), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/1731524.stm>, date accessed: 22 August 2021. ‘Logic would dictate that this man [resistance leader Julien Levade] would be played by a French-speaking actor. But

that would necessitate subtitles, which are wildly unpopular with US audiences and could depress box office.'

⁵⁵ Vigurs (220).

⁵⁶ See for instance an article on SOE agent Eileen Nearne by Ward, Victoria, 'Real Life Charlotte Gray Was Scatterbrained Spy', in: *The Telegraph* (29 October 2010), <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/8093437/Real-life-Charlotte-Gray-was-scatterbrained-spy.html>, date accessed: 22 August 2021; Brennan, Zoe, 'Charlotte Gray Revealed: The Truth Behind the British Heroine Who Died Forgotten and the Scars of Her Secret War Which Drove Her to Become a Hermit', in: *The Daily Mail* (18 September 2010), <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1313039/Charlotte-Gray-revealed-The-truth-British-heroine-died-forgotten.html>, date accessed: 22 August 2021; or an article on the ceremony following Nancy Wake's death by Urquhart, Conal, 'Ashes of Charlotte Gray Heroine Scattered in France', in: *The Guardian* (11 March 2013), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/11/ashes-charlotte-gray-heroine-france>, date accessed: 22 August 2021.

⁵⁷ Though it was dismissed as a glorification of Gaullism at a time when De Gaulle was highly unpopular, in the troubled post May 1968 era, it is now considered to be a classic of the genre.

⁵⁸ Kermode, Mark, 'DVD Review: Female Agents', in: *The Observer* (5 October 2008), <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2008/oct/05/actionandadventure.drama>, date accessed: 22 August 2021.

⁵⁹ Douin, Jean-Luc, '"Les Femmes de l'ombre": un polar plus rocambolesque qu'historique', in: *Le Monde* (4 March 2008), https://www.lemonde.fr/cinema/article/2008/03/04/les-femmes-de-l-ombre-un-polar-plus-rocambolesque-qu-historique_1018625_3476.html, date accessed: 22 August 2021.

⁶⁰ Seaman quoted in Vigurs (224).

⁶¹ Bell, Susan, 'Sophie Marceau's New Film Sparks Resistance', in: *The Telegraph* (8 March 2008), <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1581142/Sophie-Marceaus-new-film-sparks-resistance.html>, date accessed: 21 August 2021.

⁶² Vigurs (179).

⁶³ Starns (129).

⁶⁴ In *Sisters in the Resistance*, Margaret Collins Weitz reports many accounts of torture inflicted on women, including a statement by Geneviève de Gaulle, Charles de Gaulle's niece: 'You never know if you will resist under torture. I could never have predicted my response. You can stand up to some things but you have no idea of your limits. If one of my children or grandchildren had been tortured in front of me, I do not know what I would have done'. Weitz (58).

In '"Playing the Daft Lassie with Them": Gender, Captivity and the Special Operations Executive During the Second World War', Juliette Pattinson provided a gendered analysis of captivity and showed how female captives 'experienced punishment with distinct sexist and sexual overtones'. As implied in the title, she also analysed how these prisoners resorted to gender stereotypes during interrogations. Pattinson, Juliette, '"Playing the Daft Lassie with Them": Gender, Captivity and the Special Operations Executive During the Second World War', in: *European Review of History* 13:2 (2006) 271-292, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13507480600785955>, date accessed: 22 August 2021.

⁶⁵ Rousso; Laborie, Pierre, *Les mots de 39-45*, Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 2006; Laborie, Pierre. *Le chagrin et le Venin: Occupation, Résistance, Idées reçues*, édition revue et augmentée, Collection Folio Histoire 232, Paris: Gallimard, 2016.

⁶⁶ French, Philip, 'Film of the Week: Female Agents', in: *The Observer* (29 June 2008), <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2008/jun/29/culture.review>, date accessed: 21 August 2021.

⁶⁷ Rousso. French version first published in 1987.

⁶⁸ See, for instance, Pierre Laborie's interpretation of Rousso's concept: 'Sa référence au résistancialisme renvoie aux reconstructions mémorielles qui auraient installé une vision rassurante des années noires: minoration de l'emprise de Vichy sur la société et vision complaisante de la résistance assimilée à la nation'. Laborie, *Les mots de 39-45* (103).

⁶⁹ Weitz (265).

⁷⁰ Idem (264).

⁷¹ Besson, Rémy, 'Le film comme symptôme – Henry Rousso', in: *Cinémadoc* (30 June 2010), <https://cinemadoc.hypotheses.org/1199>, date accessed: 22 August 2021.

⁷² Weitz (276).

⁷³ Connolly quoted in Vigurs (23).

⁷⁴ For a detailed analysis, see Noakes, Lucy, and Juliette Pattinson, 'Introduction: "Keep Calm and Carry on": The Cultural Memory of the Second World War', in: Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*, London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2014, 1 24.

⁷⁵ White (56).

⁷⁶ Diamond, Hanna, '70 Years After D-Day, Women of the French Resistance Are Finally Being Recognised', in: *The Conversation* (6 June 2014), <https://theconversation.com/70-years-after-d-day-women-of-the-french-resistance-are-finally-being-recognised-27598>, date accessed: 22 August 2021.

⁷⁷ Bell.