

# The orphan story of British women and internment in Occupied France

Ayshka Sené

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the 'orphan story' of British women in occupied France. It focuses in particular on the experiences of British women interned in Besançon and Vittel, two internment camps in Eastern France, during the Second World War. It contextualises such stories of incarceration within the broader experiences and narratives of British women in wartime France, and it questions why these experiences of internment have been overlooked until now. Existing work on British women in France has tended to focus on the exploits of young women who served as Special Operations Executive agents (Pattinson 2007), contributing to a highlighting of the heroic and glamorous aspects of resistance. This reflects a small proportion of the British women in Occupied France when compared with the 3900 internees in Besançon in December 1940, and does not account for the everyday experiences of British women from different generations and social backgrounds. Drawing on biographies published between 2007 and 2014 about British women interned in Besançon and Vittel, and a significant corpus of archival material (unpublished diaries, correspondence, oral history recordings, foreign office reports, photographs, and drawings related to their experiences), this thesis interrogates such current understandings and stereotypes about British women during the Second World War in France. Since wartime is a 'particularly fertile time at which to see the nation at work' (Purcell 2007, p.7), it does so by highlighting how notions of 'Britishness' and national identity influenced these women. Indeed, this study reveals the importance of national identity in shaping British women's experiences between 1939 and 1944. Until December 1940, despite the increasing Nazi threat, women with the strongest sense of belonging to France were the most likely to remain, undeterred by strong recommendations from the British government to leave. Categories such as 'enemy alien' meant that British women who had 'belonged' in France for decades were ostracised by some French people, as Britain was labelled an enemy and a traitor in Vichy and Nazi propaganda. This thesis reveals the slippage between national identities experienced by these women and demonstrates that many internees discovered or reawakened their sense of Britishness during this period. Some actively chose to 'flag' (Billig 1995), their British nationality over other identities to survive. Finally, using biographies written by relatives of these women, it evaluates the inter-generational transmission of these wartime experiences. It argues that their life stories have remained peripheral in popular memories of the war. These are 'orphan stories' as such life experiences sat in-between national narratives in Britain and France, and, even today, do not align with depictions of the British national self as 'triumphant' or 'tragically defeated' (Daase 2010, p.19).

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## 1. Introduction

On the 28<sup>th</sup> October 2013, the following headline appeared in *The Telegraph*, "It's never mentioned': Nicholas Shakespeare on the British women who became prisoners of war' (Shakespeare 2013 in *The Telegraph*). In an interview about his latest book, Shakespeare told the story of his aunt, Priscilla Doynel, who was living in Paris in December 1940 and was rounded up and interned with almost four thousand other British civilians. He asks:

Who were these women? Incredible to relate, no complete record exists. Priscilla's name does not appear in Besançon's archives, nor in documents relating to English internees in the French National Archives...Why was her experience not accurately reported, more widely discussed? (Shakespeare 2013).

The stories of these 'forgotten' British women form the basis of this thesis. It posits the memory of their wartime lives as an 'orphan story' which is largely excluded from national memory frames in Britain and in France. Shakespeare's comment in *The Telegraph*, combined with the emergence in the late 2000s of biographies about British women interned in Nazi camps in France, point towards a gap in the historiography of British women in France between 1939 and 1945, and a preoccupation with their lives. Their experiences have received little academic attention, as stories of resistance and female secret agents continue to dominate the field of British women and the Second World War (Pattinson, 2006, 2007, 2014; Vigurs, 2011). This thesis seeks to redress the balance and uncover what happened to the British women who lived in France and were interned by the Nazis during the war. It compares their stories of incarceration with current understandings and stereotypes of British women in wartime France. Drawing upon life history narratives from the women and their families, this study argues that notions of 'Britishness' and national identity strongly influenced their lives; shaped their choices and have even affected whether their memories have persisted at a national and transnational level over seventy years later.

This thesis functions as a piece of recovery history. Due to the lack of scholarly research on the subject of British women in wartime France, the dearth of primary sources and the potency of popular memories in the post-war period of wartime Britain and France, these women's stories have been silenced since they do not fit with either national memory. The thesis nuances



popular memories of British women in France using life history narratives which shed light on this 'unknown majority' (Thompson, 2000:p.24) of British internees in Occupied France. It argues that these women's stories do not fit with national popular memories in Britain of stoicism and the need to 'Keep Calm and Carry On' during the Blitz and Dunkirk. Neither do they align with French national memories, which have transitioned from the resistance myth, to a focus on collaboration, and more recently a cosmopolitan model foregrounding the memory of the Holocaust. The thesis contributes to methodological discussions concerning composure, which until now has been understood as a binary concept. It is argued that individuals should instead be positioned on a spectrum of composure, at times achieving a sense of composure and at others experiencing discomposure.

British women in France on the eve of war were a diverse group, both culturally and socially. Some were long-term residents, part of well-established British expatriate communities, notably in the capital and on the Riviera. Some were wives or daughters of British businessmen who were resident in France. Some women were born in France because their families had lived there for so long, and therefore considered themselves French, but possessed a British passport, since their father or husband was British. Other women were in France temporarily at the outbreak of hostilities, on holiday or visiting relations. In the summer of 1940, following the Phoney War and the signing of the armistice, British people found themselves in a particularly precarious position. They experienced first-hand the events which led to Britain's



Figure 1 - Map of France, location of Vittel and Besançon.

transition from being France's ally to her enemy. Whilst the Germans were establishing themselves as occupiers, one of their first acts was to round up all nationals from enemy territories who remained in France. Those British women who were either unable to escape or who had chosen not to, were deemed 'enemy aliens.' British men aged between 16 and 65 years old were interned from September 1940; three months later women, children and men over 65 were interned in December 1940 (Peschanski, 2000; Poinot, 2004). British women were first sent to Caserne Vauban in Besançon and later transferred to a camp in Vittel (see figure 1). Vittel is a spa town and the camp comprised of a series of luxury hotels, which were requisitioned by the occupying forces along with the extensive grounds, tennis courts, ornate gardens, and casino, all of which were surrounded with barbed wire fences. American women joined British internees in Vittel from the end of 1941 when America entered the war and then at the end of 1942, foreign Jews, notably around two hundred Polish Jews from the Warsaw ghetto, were also sent to the camp. The Jews were kept in a separate hotel from the British and Americans (Bloch, 2007).<sup>1</sup>

My interest in British women in France was first generated by the emergence between 2007 and 2014 of several published biographies about British women interned in camps in Besançon and Vittel (Lack, 2010; Manley, 2014; Say & Holland, 2012; Shakespeare, 2014; Zinovieff 2007). These biographies were all written by the relatives of former internees, based on diaries written during the war, except for *Rosie's War* (2012) which was co-written by Rosemary Say (former internee) and her daughter Julia Holland. Initial scoping revealed that there was a significant corpus of archival material related to British women in wartime France, and particularly those interned in Vittel. This material included unpublished diaries, written accounts, correspondence from British women, oral history recordings, official reports on civilian internment camps and photographs, Foreign and Home office reports, War Cabinet documents and correspondence between civilians and the British government, as well as survivors who could be interviewed.<sup>2</sup> Although the camp in Vittel was a transnational

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis focuses on the internment of British women in France; however there were other examples of British civilians interned by enemy occupiers beyond the Vichy regime. The Channel Isles, which were occupied by the Germans in June 1940, functioned in many ways as a large internment camp. After the fall of Singapore in December 1941, the Japanese occupiers also interned British men, women, and children.

<sup>2</sup> A detailed discussion the sources used in the thesis can be found in section 2.4 on 'Research design and source materials.'

community, with internees from America, Russia, India, Palestine, and Poland at different times, the abundance and heterogeneity of the source material meant that it was possible to focus solely on British women in France during the Second World War. The second reason that British women in France offered an interesting case study was that existing research has focused on the experiences of young, British women who served as SOE agents (Pattinson 2007; Vigurs, 2011), and several non-academic publications have the same interest (Basu, 2008; Braddon, 2009; Ottaway, 2013; Ottaway, 2014; Seymour-Jones, 2014; Witherington-Cornioley, 2015; McDonald-Rothwell, 2017). Sources related to British women's experiences of internment tell a different story from the more dominant resistance narrative of British women as SOE agents. The final reason for choosing British women was that family members emerged as key players in the transmission of their experiences, giving them a voice through publishing their wartime diaries or writing biographies about them. This suggested that there would be scope to analyse the role of the family as a space of transmission and to explore how British women's relatives function as 'bearers of memory' (Assmann and Czaplinka 1995, p.113).

This chapter will be structured as follows; first, existing literature about everyday life in France will be surveyed with a view to showing that the experiences of the British women cited above have been overlooked until now; then, the three research questions for this thesis will be outlined. These are: understandings and stereotypes of British women's experience of the Second World War in France; national identity and British women's wartime experiences in France, and remembering and the transmission of British women's experiences of the Second World War.

### 1.1 The place of British women in everyday life in Occupied France

British women in France during the Second World War are scarcely visible within the historiography of everyday life in occupied France. For the past thirty years historians have sought to shed light on the everyday workings of Occupied France, focusing on the Occupation as experienced by the French population (Gildea, 2002; Kedward, 1985; Vinen 2006). However, the British women who were also part of that wartime population do not feature at all in these

accounts. Such accounts have tried to 'break out of the straightjacket of interpretations based on the Resistance/collaboration version of events' (Gildea 2002, p.414) and move towards a more social history of the Occupation, as Veillon puts it: 'La vie des Français sous son aspect le plus banal est à peine étudiée par les historiens. Le temps ne serait-il pas venu de s'intéresser aux 38 millions d'hommes et de femmes qui n'ont été engagés ni d'un côté ni de l'autre, mais qui se sont contentés d'ajuster leurs conditions de vie au jour le jour?' (Veillon 1995, p.7). Kedward's *Occupied France* (1985) was one of the first works that brought people's everyday experiences of the Occupation to the fore. He observes that, 'the specificity of each locality and the particularity of every event...accentuated the relativity of people's lives and resulted in a complex multitude of different experiences and responses' (1985, p.245). Focusing on the daily lives of French people during the Occupation reveals these different and complex experiences, and has important consequences for this study, as British women were also part of these communities. It is hoped that these findings will provoke questions about whether British women living in France during the Occupation were preoccupied with the same concerns as the rest of the French population.

Richard Vinen writes, 'Curiously, academic historians have often neglected the very issues that the bulk of the population talked about most. Some seemed to feel that too much attention to society risked downplaying the moral and political choices that people made during the Occupation' (2006, p.4). Focusing on the social history of Occupied France draws attention to the complex choices faced by French people on a daily basis, the 'concentric circles of conflicting loyalties' (Gildea 2002, p.13). New networks were formed and old ones revived to deal with the challenges of the Occupation. Once again, existing research does not cover whether British women in France were included in these networks or whether their support systems were the same as the rest of the French population. Pétain described the family as the 'essential unit' (Fogg 2009, p.18) and 'frightened by the unfamiliarity and unpredictability of the new order, people fell back on their families, their churches, their trades, their villages, towns and pays'(Gildea 2002, p.16). The pressures of daily life during the Occupation created new forms of solidarity within families and communities. However, solidarity was neither inclusive nor open to all. Gildea observes, 'one of the most marked consequences of the Occupation was the narrowing of horizons' (2002, p.16). Communities divided and suspicion of others led to denunciations which were encouraged by Vichy. In her study of the Limousin,

Fogg writes that Spring 1941 'saw an increasing atomisation of society as jealousy, selfishness and suspicion [which] prompted Limousin residents to denounce their neighbours' (2009, p.31). While on the one hand there was a sense of solidarity as society unified in a common struggle, 'making do' (*se débrouiller*) together, on the other, divisions in society became more marked. Loyalties were conflicted, as individuals were encouraged to make sacrifices, and even sacrifice others, for the greater good of the regime.

British women in France may not have had the same access to family networks which provided such essential support, particularly if they had not lived in France for long. As potential 'outsiders,' they also may have been 'sacrificed' for the good of the regime during this period of common struggle. Even though existing research into everyday life under occupied rule does not include British women in France, it is helpful for this study as it illustrates the need to consider that various factors influenced people's experiences, such as time, location, money, access to networks, age, and social class. Vinen observes, 'life for most French people between 1940 and 1944 was miserable' (2006, p.237) but goes on to say, 'suffering was not evenly distributed amongst the French population' (2006, p.368). Did the British women in this study experience the same levels of suffering as the French population? Were their experiences uniform, or affected by the factors that Vinen lists above? These are some of the questions that this thesis seeks to address.

Gender historians have stressed the importance of different women's experiences under Occupation, although British women are not included in these studies. Mobilizing gender was central to Vichy's attempts to reorganize French society. Gender was important in Vichy's vision for France and women were 'vital to the private life of France' (Pollard 1998, p.5). Fishman's study (1991) traces the experiences of POW wives who were a unique group because of their numerical significance (1991:xv), as well as the special public attention they received under Vichy (1991:xix). She argues that in the absence of their husbands, women acquired new skills and took on new responsibilities (Fishman 1991, p.150). However, their sense of achievement was impermanent and family reunions after the war were often complicated and difficult (1991, p.51). The war did not represent an era of liberation and freedom, instead, it was a period of 'loneliness, hardship and anxiety' (Fishman 1991, p.167). Diamond's study (1999) also offers detailed insights into women's experiences during this

period, shedding light on the choices with which women were faced between 1939 and 1948, and the circumstances that influenced them. Through extensive oral history interviews, Diamond demonstrates that women often bore the extra burden of everyday survival during the war, and challenges the notion that there was a stark choice between collaboration and resistance. Instead she suggests that, 'women participated in a *spectrum of patterns of behaviour* which ranged from acceptance of Vichy to outright collaboration with the Occupying forces' (Diamond 1999, p.71 emphasis added). British women are not the focus of these studies and as enemy aliens, it is difficult to ascertain if they were influenced by Vichy's propaganda and gender mobilisation in the same way. The conclusions drawn by Diamond are helpful though, as they reveal that survival was a primary motivation for French women which affected their daily choices. It is useful to use the lens of survival to interrogate the sources for this study and question whether it was an equal concern for British women.

While our understanding of women's experiences in wartime France has been extended thanks to such studies, the specific experiences of foreign women have not gained so much academic attention. Once again, British women do not figure. By the end of the 1930s, France was the 'leading country of immigration in the world with a greater proportion of foreigners than any other' (Marrus and Paxton 1981, p.35). While the British were not really a part of this mass influx, there were many who found themselves in the country during the war and who were impacted by French, and in particularly Vichy, policy towards foreigners. The government improvised internment camps to respond to the waves of new arrivals. The policy of internment had been tried and tested in France during the First World War, as well as in other countries, and was perceived to be a logical way of surveying foreigners and illegal aliens, which is what British women became (Peschanski 2000, p.101). Internment camps in Southern France were created to respond to the waves of Spanish refugees crossing the Pyrenean border from February 1939 (Peschanski 2000, p.24). From 1940, the Vichy government broadened the definition of 'foreigner' to include 'both immigrants and refugees, and the term was even applied to some French nationals, such as evacuees from Alsace and Lorraine' (Shannon Fogg 2009, p.13). According to Koessler, 'The status of the enemy alien [was] subjected to scrutiny in an atmosphere that might be described... as a state of mind in which no report is too improbable, no theory too extravagant, no hypothesis too unreal for belief' (1942, pp.101–2). Rumours were rife in France of Nazi secret agents and fifth columnists; a rational approach to,

and application of, the criteria of 'enemy alien' was not employed (Koessler, 1942, p.100). To respond to the increased numbers of enemy aliens, internment camps were created across the territory, with camps in all French departments. The function of the camps varied considerably, as did the internee population. Foreigners were also termed 'undesirables' by Vichy, included with 'illegal aliens, black marketeers, French and foreign communists, some refugees, strident republicans, Jews, Gypsies, and, according to rural residents, some city dwellers in search of food' (Fogg 2009, pp.13–14). These definitions appear to have been narrowed and broadened throughout the war depending on the need to include or exclude a specific individual or group. There was a lack of consistency in terms of what constituted a 'foreigner,' and attitudes and policies were marked with 'confusion and ambiguity' (2009, p.83). Between 1940 and 1942 Vichy's *Révolution Nationale* required the removal of all Jewish and foreign influences (Fogg 2009, p.13), and it was in September 1940 that British civilians residing in France were termed 'illegal aliens.' Illegal aliens and 'undesirables' became 'the object of restrictive legislation, discrimination and persecution' (2009, p.13). The negative Vichy propaganda targeting Jews and foreigners, and discriminating against them at government level, meant that they were often unwanted in local communities (Fogg 2009, p.139). Money, influence and authority were a huge advantage in the struggle for survival and often determined whether one was an 'outsider' or 'insider.' The access to additional networks and resources which allowed the French to circumvent official policies and practices were often unavailable to foreigners, meaning that they were particularly vulnerable and exposed to discrimination. These findings have important consequences for the British women in this study. If they had access to money and networks, then existing research suggests that British women would find survival much easier than other foreigners in France and could be considered 'insiders' rather than being excluded from local communities.

There are few works which look specifically at the experiences of foreign women under Occupation, and, once again, British women are not included. Current work on foreign women in wartime France posits them as either vulnerable, persecuted by Vichy (especially if they were Jewish), and perceived as 'outsiders' in local communities; or as combatants, clandestinely engaged in resistance and mobilized against the Vichy and Nazi regimes. Maugendre (2013) applies the category 'protagonist' to the Spanish refugees who are the focus of her study. Although the term is not explicitly defined by Maugendre, she does state

her objective to illuminate the contributions of female military resisters who been overlooked in previous studies (2013, p.9). She traces the experiences of Spanish women from January 1939 to November 1942, crossing the border, to temporary refugee camps, then camps of internment and their release (2013, p.32). Maugendre argues that Spanish women in exile emerge as 'protagonists rather than subordinates' and she highlights that, 'Il s'agit de faire émerger les femmes comme sujets politiques, de dépasser le protagonisme masculin, de sortir de l'épopée qui classe les réfugiées en hommes-héros ou en femmes-victimes' (2013, p.552). Maugendre's category of foreign female combatant could be broadened to include foreign women in resistance who fought the Germans, some of whom were also hostile to the Vichy regime. Vormeier (2003) and Grynberg's (2003) work has been informative here, profiling the foreign Jews who were mobilised against the Germans, organising illegal border crossings (Grynberg 2003, p.244) or working to aid the clandestine press (2003, p.239). The second category of vulnerable victims is outlined by Adler who focuses on immigrant, Jewish women. She writes, 'immigrant women, visibly impoverished and revealed as foreign by their accents, were placed in positions of extreme risk when seeking safe housing' (2003, p.151). Foreign women and children could be at risk of deportation if the family were Jewish (Vinen 2006, p.145). Although women's historians have shown that in wartime, women assumed more responsibility and some felt a sense of freedom from pre-war constraints (Diamond, 1999; Schwarz 1987), this was not the case for foreign Jewish women, who lived in a culture of fear rather than freedom (Adler 2003, pp.151–2). Foreigners made up most Jews deported from France and so the fear of being denounced and deported to concentration or death camps was a very real one (Kedward 1985, p.267). British women are not included in the studies of foreign women who are categorised as vulnerable victims, nor those in which foreign women emerge as politically engaged resisters. This project asks whether the British women in this study will emerge as victims, combatants, or neither. Although British women are absent from the literature around foreign women in France, there is some literature about the British women who were trained as paramilitary secret agents by the British 'Special Operations Executive' (SOE) and dropped into France. The next section focuses on these individuals.

## 1.2 The 'heroic British woman' in wartime France and Britain



There is a body of literature on British<sup>3</sup> women in France between 1939 and 1945 which focuses on the heroic acts of those few British women who acted to resist the Vichy regime and Nazi Occupation. It concentrates on their contribution to the Special Operations Executive (SOE) whose actions have come to dominate representations of British women and France during this period. Juliette Pattinson's monograph on the women who were part of the SOE (*Behind Enemy Lines*, (2007)), traces the experiences of young, female, British agents 'who were recruited and trained by a British organization and infiltrated into France to encourage sabotage and subversion' (2007, p.2). The SOE was established in 1940, 'to coordinate all action, by way of subversion and sabotage, against the enemy overseas' (Pattinson, 2007, p.2). The move to recruit women to the French (F) Section in 1942 was proposed to Churchill in 1942 by Captain Selwyn Jepson, who argued that women, 'had a far greater capacity for cool and lonely courage than men' (In Stroud 2017: xviii). Women in F Section worked as couriers and wireless operators, they organised and trained resistance networks, and coordinated and undertook acts of sabotage against the enemy. 'Women were rarely stopped at controls...and searched. They were seldom picked up in mass arrests' (Pattinson, 2007, p.136). Despite this ability to pass unnoticed, by the end of the war, fifteen female agents in F section were arrested by the Gestapo, three survived their incarceration and were repatriated after the end of the conflict, thirteen of them were executed or died at Natzweiler-Struthof-Struthof, Ravensbrück, Belsen or Dachau concentration camps (Vigurs, 2011, p.71). A public appetite for stories about female SOE agents has led to publications on these women's exploits, most recently Stroud's *Lonely Courage: The True Stories of the SOE heroines who fought to free Nazi-occupied France* (2017), which unpacks the stories of seven of the thirty-nine female agents in the French section of SOE. Escott (2012) compiles life narratives of the female agents in the F Section, and several biographies have been published about individual women who were sent to France as part of the SOE (Basu, 2008; Braddon, 2009; Ottaway, 2013; Ottaway, 2014; Seymour-Jones, 2014; Witherington-Cornioley, 2015; McDonald-Rothwell, 2017).

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<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this study, the term 'British' relates to all citizens holding a British passport and includes citizens of countries within the British Empire in 1939. A more detailed discussion of the notion of 'Britishness' and the pre-war British community in France can be found at the beginning of chapter 3.

Women recruited as SOE agents came from various backgrounds [‘From a Polish aristocrat, to a shop assistant living in Stockwell, London’ (Stroud 2017:x)], many were recruited from the WAAF (Pattinson 2007, p.27), and their acceptance into the section was based on their ability to pass in France, as French (2007, p.27). An interview established their background; connection to, and knowledge of, France; and whether they could speak adequate French to ‘pass as a native’ (2007, p.29). In his memoirs, Maurice Buckmaster, the head of F section noted, ‘Language was, naturally, the first and vital hurdle...We could not afford to jeopardise valuable agents through the inability of a colleague to speak the French of a Frenchman’ (Buckmaster 1958, p.26).

Three conclusions about British women in France can be drawn from the sample of British women included in SOE’s F section; the first is that these women were not in France from 1942 onwards when they were approached by F section; if they had been in France before that point, they had escaped. Buckmaster stated that recruits were, ‘People who’d either been brought up in France, been at a French university, had lived half their life or possibly even all their lives virtually in France, but who were English and who had escaped, got out of France before the Occupation.’<sup>4</sup> It seems strange that our current understanding of British women in Occupied France is dominated by women who escaped the country before the German Occupation and who, if they returned to France, were living there as clandestine agents, reporting to the British government. This leads on to the second conclusion; that these women were remarkable, they were an exceptional group of individuals, and it is their ‘extraordinary experiences’ that Pattinson’s study aims to document (Pattinson 2007, p.2). Written accounts concerning female SOE agents highlight the daring undertakings of these heroic and courageous women, they were protagonists in Maugendre’s terms, challenging the narrative of the ‘male, soldier-hero’ and the ‘female victim’ (Dawson 1994; Rose, 2003). The third conclusion is that the sample of British women represented in SOE’s F section is relatively small, just thirty-nine women in total. What then were the experiences of other British women who were in France during this period who did not engage in these remarkable and daring endeavours? Who were the women who did not escape France before the Occupation, why did they remain, and what were their everyday experiences of war? The SOE experience represents a very partial vision that has

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<sup>4</sup> IWM 9452, Buckmaster, Maurice James, Oral History Interview, 17/10/1986.

become the dominant stereotype for British women in France during the Occupation; this study questions what other experiences it has hidden.

The memory of SOE agents has also pervaded at a national level and their experiences have been foregrounded in museums, memorials, television series, documentaries, novels, biographies, and press coverage. Popular representations of SOE agents in British memory and its relevance to this study will be examined in the section on memory and the transmission of British women's experiences. The dominance of the SOE narrative highlights the popularity of female heroism in the public sphere, in British national memory, and in the academy. The fact that our current understanding of British women in France is based on a group of only thirty-nine individuals, who were living outside the country and only returned after 1942, shows the potency of the SOE narrative. Do SOE agents in France represent the type of British woman in France that we want to remember because they correspond to notions of heroism and self-sacrifice which were promoted during the conflict? Understanding female SOE agents is vital to this study as it is a reference point for the comparison and contrast of other British women's experiences. Notions of female heroism have also been central to the depiction of women's involvement in the British war effort, and they have a bearing on the women who are at the centre of this study as they reveal the idealised version of the British woman promoted by the national government and revered in British wartime society. Oral history projects, such as Summerfield's research into war work and feminine identity (1998) reveal the extent to which women adopted these stereotypes during the war.

Based on interviews with survivors in the 1990s, Summerfield proposes that women on the Home Front identified with one of two narratives; either the 'stoic' or the 'heroic' wartime woman (1998, p.78). The 'heroic wartime woman' was a popular image in Britain personified by 'young, single woman actively engaged in war work' (Summerfield 1998, p.78), perceived as a heroine due to her sense of public duty and her successful work in 'unfeminine settings' (1998, p.78). Since the government demanded unprecedented levels of female mobilization in Britain [an additional 2.25 million women by 1943 (Toy and Smith 2017, p.11)] and non-combat roles were occupied by women to free up men to fight, the image of the female war worker was celebrated and promoted during the conflict. Female members of the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), created in 1938, also exemplified the woman who 'did her bit', initially assuming

only clerical and domestic duties, but then as man power decreased, working in heavy anti-aircraft batteries, doing everything but firing the guns [‘perceived as taking the transgression of gender too far’ (Fieseler et al. 2014, p.117)]. According to Summerfield, the heroic woman war worker was celebrated throughout the conflict in a manner which has not been seen in subsequent wars (1998, p.79). However, not all women engaged in military non-combat roles during this period (470,700 or 2% of the UK female population in 1943 (Fieseler et al. 2014, p.116). A small number registered as conscientious objectors, as explored in Nicholson’s fascinating article (2007), and the remaining majority of the female population continued to juggle multiple responsibilities whilst contributing to the war effort as best they could. These women were termed ‘the stoics’ by Summerfield (1998, p.92); women who did not find their wartime responsibilities particularly thrilling or valiant, but instead saw their contribution as completing mundane, but necessary tasks without complaint (1998, p.94). The British women in this study are not included in Summerfield’s ‘stoic’ category since they were absent from the British home front and did not contribute to the war effort in the same way. They were not promoted by the British government like the absent men who were fighting for their country abroad or pitied like those in prisoner of war camps in Germany or the Far East. Even though British women in France were excluded from the stoic or heroic women-worker role imagined by the British government and society, and are in turn absent from these academic studies, were they still exposed to the British wartime rhetoric motivating them to be strong and self-sacrificing? Did British women in France identify with the messages targeting British nationals, even though they were not on home soil? The next section outlines some of the messages concerning Britishness and national identity which were promoted during the conflict, with a view to exploring whether this rhetoric had implications for British women in France and their sense of belonging to Britain.

### 1.3 National identity and British women’s wartime experience

Purcell argues that wartime is a productive time to see nations at work ‘(2007, p.7). Scholars have researched notions of national identity and citizenship in wartime Britain, notably Rose’s *Which People’s War?* (2003) which asks what ‘Britishness’ looked like for those on the Home Front during the war. Obviously, British women in France were in a very different position from

women at home. In this 'foreign' context though, were they still influenced by national narratives? Rose observes, 'Britain was depicted by numerous social commentators as engaging in a war being fought by and for a country imagined as a unified land of 'ordinary' people' (2003, p.3). Similarly, in *Myth of the Blitz* (1991) Calder highlights that it was, "the people', improvising bravely and brilliantly, [who] were fighting the Luftwaffe without much direction from above' (1991, p.125). The 'People's War' emerged as a fundamental construct during this period in the propaganda aimed at the British people and their support for the war effort; it was an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991, p.6) in which 'Britishness' was 'extended and reworked' (Noakes 1998, p.14) in a people-focused narrative. Although it is evident that the concept of 'Britishness' was open to re-definition, there seem to be some common threads which bind this notion together; for example the need to make sacrifices and prioritise the 'common good' above one's individual needs (Rose, 2003:71). Was this 'inclusive, democratic sentiment' (Beech, A. and Weight, M. 1998, p.8) of the 'People's War' still present for British women who were overseas on enemy territory? Individuals or certain groups were labelled as 'UnBritish' if they did not prioritise the common good, or were perceived not to do so. The comparisons between 'Good-time girls and aliens' in Rose's chapter are illuminating; 'Both 'good-time girls' and Jews were depicted in terms that contrasted them with the 'ordinary' people of Britain who were self-sacrificing, community-oriented and conscientious...both were accused of engaging in activities that demonstrated that they were selfish' (2003, p.92). Wartime national identity is defined not only against an external, enemy 'other', but also in contrast to those who do not embody certain national values; it is 'the product of the marking of difference and exclusion' (2003, p.8). The Jewish community in Britain was perceived as a foreign group, as enemy aliens, and anti-Semitism was reported to be increasing in areas with significant Jewish populations. Jews were perceived as cowardly and selfish (Rose 2003, p.95). How did British women in France understand these themes of exclusion and inclusion? Were they still part of the imagined British community even though they were on enemy soil? Although they were abroad and more removed from these national narratives, did they exclude groups who they considered to be 'unBritish'? To what extent did they reflect their 'homeland's' wartime values? There is clearly scope to explore whether the British construct of the 'People's War' was important for British women in France and if they identified with their 'homeland' Britain; or instead felt a sense of allegiance to France, perhaps concerned predominantly with survival.

Ugolini's study of Italian internees in Britain (2011) provides an instructive example of the sense of conflicted loyalty as an enemy alien interned on foreign soil and we can speculate that British women interned in France may have experienced a similar sense of conflicted belonging. Belonging emerges as a strong theme in Ugolini's work. She states: 'The experiences of the Italian population in Britain during World War Two illuminates the complex and diverse ways in which ethnicity interacts with a sense of belonging to a nation in a time of conflict and how notions of who is entitled to be part of a "national" community can shift and evolve over time' (2011, pp.1–2). This highlights that an individual's internal sense of belonging and external entitlement to belong to a nation are disrupted for enemy aliens during wartime, and it also suggests that war can unmask the inconsistent and ambiguous characteristics of national identity. Some Italian internees in Ugolini's monograph felt allegiance to Britain: '...The country which had offered them hospitality...' (2011, p.105), whilst others participated in 'acts of defiance' (2011, p.106), such as playing fascist songs during a concert in the camp, to show support to their homeland. Although all the internees were classified as Italian, and therefore enemy aliens, it is evident that some self-identified with Britain, their 'host' country, rather than a Fascist Italy, their 'homeland.' There was clearly potential for slippage between identities and the gap between being labelled as Italian and self-identifying as Italian. The dominant theme of belonging in Ugolini's work, suggests that a similar question may be fruitfully investigated for British women in Occupied France. One of the key research questions of this project is to uncover the extent to which national identity and belonging shaped British women's experiences in France during the period. Although all these women in this study were classified as 'British,' was there a sense that some identified more with their 'homeland' Britain, or their 'host' country, France? Was there a gap between being labelled a British citizen and self-identifying as British, or French? How readily could these two national identities be defined and distinguished?

Anderson writes, 'Nation, nationality, nationalism – all have proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyse' (1991, p.3). Taking Ugolini's study as an example, an appropriate definition of nationality and national belonging should allow for both the individual's self-identification with a national community, and the external language and understanding of nation. Purcell's definition is helpful: 'National identity resides at the intersection of the

discursive language of national character and belonging embedded in public messages of nation, as well as in the personal negotiations and definitions of the same' (2007, p.4). Balibar and Wallerstein usefully describe the two 'camps' at the intersection of national identity as the 'external and internal frontiers of the state' (1991, p.95). These frontiers are defined as follows:

The "external frontiers" of the state have to become the "internal frontiers" or – which amounts to the same thing – external frontiers have to be imagined constantly as a projection and protection of an internal collective personality, which each of us carried within ourselves and enables us to inhabit the space of the state as a place where we have always been – and always will be – at home (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, p.95).

This concept of internal and external frontiers captures the disparity which can occur between our sense of self-belonging and the external definition of where we belong. It highlights the importance of our imagination, our self-identification with a nation as an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991, p.6). For the women in this study, this framework facilitates an analysis of how an individual's self-identification as British related to the state's designation of an individual as British. The internal frontier of the state also equates to where we feel we 'belong.' 'Belonging is about an emotional attachment, about feeling "at home" and...about feeling "safe"' (Yuval-Davis 2006, p.197). If an individual does not feel safe, as in a period of conflict, then their sense of belonging and emotional attachment would be challenged; emotional attachments 'become more central the more threatened and less secure they feel' (2006, p.202). In moments of conflict and crisis, individuals may return to their home countries to, 'be near their nearest and dearest, and share their fate' (Yuval-Davis 2006, p.203). Emotional investments of being and belonging are, 'continually adapted to the changing nature and strength of ties to the 'home' and 'host' spaces' (Howes and Hammett 2016, p.22). An understanding of emotional attachments and the need to be 'at home' and 'feel safe' can be used to interrogate source material related to British women in France and examine what motivated them to remain in France or choose to leave. This is particularly relevant during the Phoney War when British women were faced with this choice. This project questions whether their decision-making process was governed by their emotional attachments to Britain or France and how they negotiated their sense of allegiance to the two countries. The notion of 'internal and external frontiers of the state' is used in chapter 3 and 4.

As well as the notions of belonging and the two frontiers of the state, it seems important to find a way of describing how individuals enact their national identity. How can we determine whether an individual sees themselves as British, French, both, or neither? Different theorists have coined phrases which express this notion: Bechhofer uses the term, 'identity markers', defined as, 'those characteristics which are perceived to carry symbolic importance either as a signal to others of a person's national identity, or which might be mobilised by the individual themselves in support of an identity claim' (Bechhofer et al. 1999, pp.527–8). Butler's theory of performativity argues, 'Acts, gestures and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally constructed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means' (1999, p.185). Although used by Butler to explain the performativity of gender, this approach has also been applied to race and ethnicity (Butler 1999:xvi). Billig also introduces a similar concept in his 'flagging of nationhood' (1995, p.8). He states, 'In established nations, there is a constant "flagging" or reminding, of nationhood [...] National identity embraces these forgotten reminders' (1995, p.8). Butler's theory of performativity and Billig's flagging of nationhood both seem fitting theories to explain how a person expresses their national identity. Flagging of nationhood could include wartime songs (Purcell 2007, p.5); 'poetry, prose, fiction, music, plastic arts' (Anderson 1991, p.142); 'affection that national groups feel for their national language and the symbolic importance they attach to it' (Wright 2000, p.2); the media (Chadwick 2015; Purcell, 2007); and national organisations like the Women's Institute (Andrews 1998). 'Flagging of nationhood' and Butler's theory of performativity are applied in chapter 4 on British women in Vittel.

#### 1.4 Remembering: the transmission of British women's experiences of the Second World War

We have already established that national narratives were constructed during the war to create a sense of national identity and community, as well as to mobilise the public to participate in the war effort and 'do their bit.' Another point of interest in this research is to



address what happened after the conflict had ended and how British women's experiences were remembered and transmitted in the years which followed. The opening paragraph of a review of Shakespeare's *Priscilla* in *The Guardian* [online] (Lethbridge 2013) provides a helpful starting point for our discussion of British memory of the Second World War:

As the living memory of the Second World War recedes, the regular emergence in locked drawers of documents, letters and diaries helps bring to life the individual wartime experiences of men and women whose quiet later lives belied their heroism in extremis. Nicholas Shakespeare's gripping new book also features a box of letters and photographs, but his discoveries about his Aunt Priscilla's war take a different turn. His forensic researches into Priscilla's years in occupied France reveal experiences and choices that sit somewhat awkwardly among these stories of ordinary people's courage under fire. Shakespeare makes no claim to arrive at a grand conclusion in this book, but, if there were one, it might be that the struggle for survival is rarely as noble as comfortable peacetime generations might wish it to be. (Lethbridge, 2013)

Two important points from this article relate directly to one of the key questions for this thesis. The first point concerns how British women have been remembered; Lethbridge, the journalist, posits Shakespeare as 'the discoverer' of his aunt Priscilla's war. He had privileged access to Priscilla Doynel's private letters and photographs and a personal connection to her life story. His involvement in the transmission of Doynel's experiences invites us to question what the role of other relatives of British women was in 'crystallising their family's heritage and expressing their family's being' (Finnegan 2006, p.177). The second point touches on the potency of popular memories of the war in Britain; Lethbridge suggests that Shakespeare's book goes against a more prevalent narrative of men and women who led heroic lives during the war and he raises the complexity of remembering and understanding individual's wartime lives as a 'peacetime generation', over seventy years later. In order to address these questions, this discussion will first contextualise the popular memories that prevail of the Second World War in Britain, before addressing literature relevant to the transmission of British women's experiences and their legacy for individuals and British culture.

Understanding popular memories of the Second World War in Britain can help us to appreciate how British women in France fit with existing memories of the war, and why the experiences

of British women in this study have not been remembered. Winter succinctly observes, 'Remembrance follows armed conflict, as night follows day' (2006, p.281). Remembering is a way of immortalizing and recompensing those who suffered or lost their lives during a war, an 'act of symbolic exchange between those who died and those who remain' (Winter 2006, p.279). Memory scholars have highlighted the importance of the terminology used and concur that 'memory is a notoriously slippery term' (Noakes and Pattinson 2014, p.4). Winter favours the use of 'remembrance' rather than 'memory' as the former designates agency and asks who is remembering, how and where (2006, p.6). This study interrogates popular memories of the Second World War in Britain; the term 'popular memory' is neatly defined by Paul Cohen as, 'what people in general *believe* took place in the past...often quite a different animal from what serious historians, after carefully sifting through the available evidence, judge to have *actually* taken place' (2014:xiii). Malcolm Smith defines 'popular memory' as 'the things that people implicitly believe rather than what historians tell them' (2000, p.1). The lines between memory and history are blurred as 'the facts,' judged to be accurate by historians, are often less important to the rest of the population who instead favour a past with which they are comfortable and can identify (Cohen 2014:xiii). Popular memory is informed by popular culture (Smith 2000, p.3), by which we understand the mass media, broadcasting, film, photography, museums, music, literature, and education. Kidron argues that the family should also 'be understood as an essential co-producer of communal and national memory' (2015, p.51). Memories of conflict are 'built and maintained...by these elements of popular culture' (Connelly 2004, p.14). Rather than simply a one-directional process, Summerfield contends that memory-making is rather a two-way, 'cultural circuit' (2004, p.68), by which, 'Individual personal memories of an event or period are shaped by public representations of the same, while public representations, equally, draw on individual memories for recognition and validation' (Noakes and Pattinson 2014, p.5). This study questions the extent to which Summerfield's assertion is applicable to memories of British women in wartime France, and whether personal memories of their experiences have informed, and been validated by, public representations of them.

Even though the Second World War 'remains a cornerstone of the cultural memory of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, neither the content of that memory, nor its mediation is utterly fixed' (Rau 2016, p.24). It 'defies precise definition' (Connelly 2004, p.1), 'there is no singular, dominant and

uncontested cultural memory' (Noakes and Pattinson 2014, p.15), and the narrative of the war is 'not static' (Rau 2016, p.24). As Rau puts it, 'What is being remembered today is a bricolage of events, images, statements and myths' (2016, p.24). If scholars agree that our memory of the Second World War in Britain is constantly changing and evolving, and difficult to define, then are there any enduring characteristics to this shifting memory? There do seem to be distinguishing features which emerge including: collective participation, fearlessness, resilience, stoicism, selflessness and courage. These are displayed in what Connelly terms 'the big facts' about the war; 'The big facts about the Second World War known to every Briton are that Britain won, the British people fought for the best reasons and showed great heroism, and that the war was won by a collective act of fortitude and self-sacrifice. The big facts do not have many nuances or ambiguities' (Connelly 2004, p.7). The British women in this study do not fit into these 'big fact' narratives. 'The big facts' are displayed in certain key moments of the war, that Rose terms 'signal events', 'like Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain and the Blitz, D-day and the VE Day celebrations' (2003, p.1). These events are repeated and re-told in films, books, photographs, museums, and are also reference points in times of hardship, for example following the 2005 London terror bombings, the head of the Metropolitan Police remarked, 'If London can survive the Blitz, then it can survive four miserable events like this' (Noakes and Pattinson 2014, p.10).

What is remembered about British women specifically in France seems to echo the same narrative of 'heroism...[and] collective acts of fortitude and self-sacrifice' (Connelly 2004, p.7). As we have seen, the national memory of British women in France during the Second World War has focused on the Special Operations Executive. It has been popularised in literary form, and has also been foregrounded in museum spaces in the United Kingdom. There is a permanent exhibition, *The Secret War Exhibition*, at the Imperial War Museum in London which is an overview of twentieth century espionage in the UK and includes the role of male and female SOE agents.<sup>5</sup> Another permanent exhibition on the SOE exists at the former training centre for agents, Beaulieu, in the New Forest. On a local scale, charities have also pioneered the remembering of SOE agents; the Secret WW2 Learning Network was established in 2014,

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<sup>5</sup> 'Secret War,' Permanent display and free exhibition at the Imperial War Museum, London. See <http://www.iwm.org.uk/exhibitions/iwm-london/secret-war> for more information.

‘with the aim of creating greater public awareness of the contributions and experiences of the men and women who took part during the Second World War in Allied Special Operations.’<sup>6</sup> In November 2016, the charity held a ceremony to reveal four plaques for four Brighton-born SOE agents, with one female agent, Lieutenant Jacqueline Nearne, MBE, Croix de Guerre, who was posted in Occupied France. In an online search for ‘British women in France Second World War’ on Google, six out of the nine top results relate to female SOE agents.<sup>7</sup> Young argues, ‘Memorials and museums... remember events according to the hue of national ideals, the cast of political dicta’ (1993:vii). The fact that national museums, such as the Imperial War Museum, and local memorials have focused on the SOE narrative reflect Britain’s ‘hue of national ideals.’ As well as reflecting national ideals, Hamilton & Ashton also posit memorialising as, ‘a mode of expression for legitimating the identities of communities or groups’ (2001, p.23). Memorialising is about communicating who belongs, and who does not. The SOE narrative has doubtless dominated because it reflects Britain’s ‘hue of national ideals’ and foregrounds women who we want to belong to our national community. For a story to be told (and re-told), it ‘must contain something which endows it with exceptionality’ (Bruner 1991, p.71). A series in the *Daily Herald* in 1950 promised stories, ‘that will thrill you and make you proud’ (In Pattinson 2014, p.134), indicating that narratives which were heroic, daring, and which chimed with the stoic ‘Blitz spirit,’ were the most popular in the years immediately after the war.

The memory of ‘the other’ British women in France who were not SOE agents is an ‘orphan story’ which does not fit into these retellings; not all their experiences possess the distinguishing features of fearlessness and resilience which characterise ‘the big facts’ present in the auto/biographies of female SOE agents. British women’s experiences include nuances and ambiguities which mean that their stories cannot be repeated or re-told in the same way as the ‘signal events’ (Rose 2003, p.1) of the war. The women in this study are not alone in being excluded from these dominant narratives. Rau cites anti-Semitism in wartime Britain as an aspect which still needs to be fully explored (2016, p.23); other grey areas include the black

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<sup>6</sup> ‘The Secret WW2 Learning Network is an educational charity established in 2014 with the aim of creating greater public awareness of the contributions and experiences of the men and women who took part during the Second World War in Allied special operations, intelligence gathering and resistance - principally, but not exclusively, in Britain and France.’ See <http://www.secret-ww2.net/our-mission> for more information.

<sup>7</sup> Correct on 8 January 2017.

market, the internment of enemy aliens, and the Occupation of the Channel Islands which has 'habitually been squeezed out' (2016, p.14) of the British wartime narrative. Where do these memories fit with the 'big facts' which are tirelessly repeated and replayed in British popular culture? If what is remembered is a 'bricolage of different events, images, statements and myths' (2016, p.24) as Rau suggests, then surely it is not constructed in a way as to give each element equal prominence. Some experiences, such as the ones listed above, are tucked underneath or behind the more popular memories and need to be brought into view. British women in wartime France have also been 'squeezed out' of the 'big fact' narratives, meaning that they do not feature in British collective memories of the war.

Looking beyond the dominant SOE narrative to explore the experiences of British women in France throughout the Occupation should help to augment and broaden how the war is remembered. If we understand memory as a 'cultural circuit' (Summerfield 1998, p.68), in which individual narratives inform popular narratives, which then feed back into individual stories, then it is hoped that exploring lesser known accounts of British women in wartime France should contribute to, and hopefully nuance, popular memories of the Second World War. The narratives concerning British women who were interned in France do not seem to have pervaded at a national level, despite the pattern of biography publication by British women and their relatives on the subject (Lack, 2012; Manley, 2014; Say & Holland, 2012; Shakespeare, 2014; Zinovieff 2007). The integral role played by family members in the transmission of British women's experiences is immediately evident from these publications. Thomson argues that individual's memories develop over time and are, 'affected by the intimate relationships within which stories are shared and affirmed (or not)' (2015, p.25). Winter also recognises the importance of different generations in the composure of memory; 'The linkage between the young and the old – now extended substantially with increased life spans – is so central to the concept of memory that its significance may have simply passed us by' (2001, p.61). The role of the family in transmitting memories has clearly aided the preservation of British women's stories. They have been expressed through different mediums, including biographies and blog posts on online forums such as BBC WW2 People's War, or Fleeing Hitler.org. Storytelling also seems to have been a key medium of transmitting the memories of British women in France, either through published autobiographies, EBooks, diaries (some of which were edited later), and oral storytelling to friends or family members.

The final chapter of the thesis will focus on the re-tellings or mediations of British women's experiences by subsequent generations. It will refer to existing work on family and autobiographical memory (Welzer 2009) and the category of the 'non-witness' (Weissman 2004) and analyse the desire to 'remember' beyond first-hand witnesses or survivors. Although British women's relatives have been integral in the preservation of these stories, these stories do not appear to have been integrated into British popular memories at a national level. This study will ask why.

To summarise then, this chapter has offered an overview of the relevant literature and has identified the following research questions which have surfaced as central to the interests of this inquiry. Firstly, the project will examine whether current understandings and stereotypes about British women's experience of the Second World War in France adequately represent their experiences. How far do the life experiences of the British women under investigation challenge dominant historical modelling of British women in war? It will then ask how far national identity emerges as central to British women's wartime experiences in France. To what extent did national identity shape and determine these women's lived experiences and responses to their personal circumstances? Finally, it will question how British women's experiences of the Second World War have been remembered and what the consequences are for collective memories of the war in Britain. Who remembers, how and with what consequences for contemporary cultural memories of British women overseas in wartime? To answer these questions, the thesis will draw on particular sources, methodologies and tools of analysis which are discussed in the following chapter. It also outlines the research journey taken during the project and the structure of the thesis.

## 2. Methodology

In order to address the research questions posed in the introduction, a methodology using life history narratives and archival sources will be employed. Historians of Occupied France have mobilised life history narratives effectively to gain access to material which could not be found in any other way (Diamond, 1999; Schwarz, 1987; Collins-Weitz, 1995; Kedward, 1993). Eyewitness accounts, memoirs and diaries have also been successfully utilised to shed light on people's experiences of the exodus (Diamond, 2007). Kedward argues that such sources 'suggest hypotheses, provide personal details, reveal local colour, facilitate insights and preserve individuality' (1993:vii). Although archival material relating to the British women in this study is now available, their oral and written testimonies include other aspects of the 'quotidian' that are not covered by these written sources. Collecting testimonies from the few remaining survivors while we still can is important and ensures that first-hand accounts of life under the Occupation are not lost. Life histories are particularly beneficial when discussing national identity during wartime; in particular, they can allow us to gain access to the individual's interpretation of broader national narratives. Purcell argues, 'Personal narratives nuance and complicate the language of nation, and at the very least, shed light on the extent to which such messages were received, understood, bastardized, or ignored by individuals' (2007, p.4). Since the theoretical frameworks of national identity and questions posed by popular memory underpin the findings in this study, a methodology which supports both concepts seems appropriate.

A variety of sources are employed in the thesis (oral and written testimonies, diaries, letters, archival sources, photographs, newspaper articles, official reports and so on); the aim of this triangulation of sources is not a 'strategy of validation', as outlined by Denzin (1978). This assumes 'one reality and one conception of the subject under study' (Flick 1992, p.177). The reason for using multiple source materials is well articulated by Fielding and Fielding; '[to] get a fuller picture, but not a more 'objective' one...combining them can add range and depth, but not accuracy' (1986, p.33). Using various sources offers a fuller and deeper picture of what happened to British women in France during the war. A full discussion of all the sources used in the thesis can be found in the 'Conducting the Fieldwork' section of this chapter. This

chapter proposes a rationale for the methodology; outlines the research design including sources used for this project; and analyses and reviews the research process, including explaining the challenges encountered during fieldwork and how these were resolved.

## 2.1 Methodological considerations: using life history narratives

Women presenting their own testimonies has been an effective method of gaining access to women's experiences of the Occupation. Autobiographical and biographical accounts of women resisters have played a central role in illuminating women's contribution to resistance, highlighting the experiences of the 'unknown majority' (Thompson 2000, p.24) in contrast to the better-known figureheads of the resistance. Post-1968, there was a renewed interest in women's writing about the Occupation, due, in part, to the increasing visibility of women writers brought about by developments in second-wave French feminism (Gorrara 1998, p.23). The first initiative to examine women's contribution to the Resistance was organised by the Colloque de l'Union des Femmes Françaises in 1975 at the Sorbonne, and included important oral testimonies of female resisters (Thalman 1995, p.15) published in *Les Femmes dans la Résistance* (1977). Gorrara highlights that this 'renewed interest in women's accounts of the past meant that some women authors, who had never before written about the war years, have had the confidence to set down their experiences' (1998, p.24). Written life-history testimonies by resistance survivors such as Lucie Aubrac, Brigitte Friang and Madeleine Riffaud brought to light women's contributions to resistance and this has subsequently had an influence on the writing of this history. In conceptualising this project, it seemed likely that, in the same way that the testimonies of Aubrac, Riffaud and Friang emphasised women's contribution to resistance, a corresponding methodology drawing on life history narratives could bridge the gap between what we currently understand about British women in France and what the other British women who are the key interest of this study experienced. The next section evaluates an approach using life history narratives.

### Life history research



Life history narratives are ‘the ‘personal documents’ composing a life history: letters, diaries, personal records, open interviews, and finally, autobiographies and tape-recorded life stories’ (Bertaux and Kohli 1984, p.216). Some scholars have favoured a stricter approach which draws uniquely on ‘narratives about one's life or relevant parts thereof’ (1984, p.217). For this project, the first definition has been selected as it permits the inclusion of letters and diaries which may exist in public or private archival holdings. Including these source materials as well as written and oral narratives should allow a rich and ‘thick description’ (Bryman 2008, p.378).

Life history research has proved particularly useful in under-documented areas of history, as the narratives ‘suggest hypotheses, provide personal details, reveal local colour, facilitate insights and preserve individuality’ (Kedward 1993:vii). Germeten writes, ‘In life history research, researchers study and analyze how people talk about their lives, their experiences, events in life and the social context they inhabit... regardless of discipline and primary objective, life history research concerns people’s subjective and personal meanings and experiences.’ (2013, p.612). It documents the ‘inner experience of individuals, how they interpret, understand and define the world around them’ (Faraday and Plummer 1979, p.776). Although it has its roots in anthropology, life history research has been developing in other disciplines and offers an opportunity to ‘create unique personal histories as examples of the political histories being told’ (Germeten 2013, p.613).

In the case of this project, as witnesses tell their story and talk about their experiences (in written and oral form) it is expected that their personal histories will relate to a broader narrative of the political and social history during their lifetime. The first research question for this study asks whether current understandings and stereotypes about British women’s experience of the Second World War in France adequately represent their experiences. A methodology which mobilises life history narratives should prove fruitful in eliciting original, individual memories which can then be compared with existing national narratives. Germeten describes three principles upon which life history research should operate:

1. Good life history research recognises that people’s lives are not divided into hermetically sealed boxes such as “personal life,” “work life,” or “partner life.”

2. Good life history research also acknowledges that there are crucial interactive relationships between different individual lives and expectations of life (both from the storyteller and from the researcher).
3. Finally, it also recognizes that individuals will present themselves as a negotiated subject, always trying to make sense of their lives. In short, it acknowledges the complexity of social life. (2013, pp.614–5).

For the purposes of this project, these three guidelines will be kept in mind to ensure the validity of the research. As point one indicates, it is important to consider that in these narratives, women's personal lives before and after the war, and in some cases in different countries, will all be intertwined. Given the complexity of British women's wartime experiences, it is important that the methodology chosen accounts for this and facilitates an analysis of the different 'lives' British women lived. Point two outlines the interactive relationships between the individuals' lives and expectations of these lives, from researcher and storyteller. 'There will always be potential for different life stories (in plural), and most likely every subject has several "lives." Every "life" can be written into different discourses, first by the teller, then by the researcher' (Germeten 2013, p.615). The stories presented in this project are therefore only one discourse of their lives, and as the researcher, my goals will influence the version of the story that is told. The storytellers can also present different versions of their lives. This can be confusing if the story is not communicated clearly or if the teller 'calls the shots' (2013, p.615). Finally, point three highlights that storytellers are 'negotiated subjects' who are making sense of their lives 'both looking back and viewing the past in the light of today' (2013, p.615). For example, it is probable that the narratives chosen will vary considerably depending on when they are told, both in terms of time period (date and year) and the storytellers' own feelings or reflections at the time of telling the story. The positioning of the narratives in different time frames will have an impact on the stories that are told, and the researcher will encounter contradictions and divisions as the story is recounted. Passerini states, 'At the roots of our memory, in dozens of life histories, I find a rupture. Our identity is constructed on contradictions. Even those stories that emphasize the continuity of their own lives extract from the autobiographical material recurring themes of division, of difference, of contrast' (1996, p.22). In the narratives, there may be contradictions and contrasts, elements that do not make sense, or appear to be at odds with each other.

According to Passerini, the researcher should expect such contradictions as they form part of our own identity (1996, p.22).

### Written testimony

As life history narratives are being used in multiple forms in this project, the differences between written and oral history narratives need to be considered. Maynes et al. state, 'Typically, theorists of autobiography see it as a genre that tells a verifiable personal story written retrospectively from a single moment in time about the incidents of life that the author deems important for the reader to understand his or her motivations or actions' (2008, p.77). French sociologist, Phillippe Lejeune describes the 'autobiographical pact,' which is the concept that 'autobiography could not merely be defined by its form (a narrative) or by its content (a life), for fiction could imitate both, but by an act, which made it utterly different from fiction, and that act is the commitment of a real person to speak of himself or herself truthfully' (2005). The written accounts used could be defined as both autobiographies and memoirs. 'Autobiographies range more widely thematically and temporally,' whereas 'memoirs can be limited to describing or explaining a particular phase of a life or a limited range of activities' (Maynes et al. 2008, p.77). Many survivors' accounts span from their childhood to the time of writing and include events leading up to and following the Second World War. According to the above definition, these can be defined as autobiographies. However, there are also similarities with Maynes et al.'s definition of a memoir; it is a 'personal narrative analysis' revealing 'hidden histories or revisionist understandings of a particular phenomenon or event,' bringing to light 'new or untapped perspectives' (2008, p.8). Memoirs can reveal 'private or privileged information...normally beyond the reach of all expected insiders' (2008, p.8). In this project, it is hoped that the written accounts used will reveal privileged information about British women's experiences in France during the Occupation. Such information relies on the account of an 'insider,' someone who experienced the phenomenon first hand, and would otherwise be inaccessible. Furthermore, as previous studies have shown, such information cannot always be found in archival material (Kedward 1993), and historians have therefore depended on autobiographical/biographical material 'to give a fuller picture of women's experiences at the time' (Diamond 1999, p.10).

Despite the advantages of using written testimony to reveal 'new or untapped perspectives' (Maynes et al. 2008, p.8), the use of this material has not been without criticism. For example, AJP Taylor famously states, 'Written memoirs are a form of oral history set down to mislead historians' and are 'useless except for atmosphere' (In Thompson 2000, p.121). While this is a rather strong critique of the use of memoirs and autobiographical material, Thompson suggests other drawbacks to using solely written testimony. He writes: 'The printed autobiography is a one-way communication, its form usually following the conventions of a literary genre and its content selected with the taste of the reading public in mind. It cannot be confidential. If it is intimate, it is more in the self-conscious, controlled manner of an actor on the stage or in a film' (2000, p.121). As a purely one-way communication, written testimony does have some drawbacks as it does not allow for the author to be questioned about points of interest and one cannot ask them to elaborate if further information or detail would be helpful (2000, p.121). Thompson writes that for these reasons, written testimony 'lacks some of the advantages of the interview' (2006, p.121). Maynes et al. claim that, 'some analyses of personal narratives result in forms of knowledge that are accessible only through intersubjective or dialogic processes' (2008, p.9). Anderson and Jack also propose that additional insights can be gained through oral interviewing; 'With letters and diaries we can only infer what individuals mean by the language they use; with oral interviews we can ask them' (1991, p.163). Scholars suggest that some material can only be accessed in an interview, where narrators can be questioned and invited to elaborate. Therefore, using oral history interviews as well as written material could give me access to different, helpful and additional material. Using both forms of narrative would also allow me to compare the insights that both methods can bring. The following section reviews oral history literature and examines the advantages of and limitations to this method.

### Oral history

Grele writes that 'Oral history came into its own at a particularly fortunate moment of time during the upheavals of the 1960s [and]... was seized upon as one way to recreate the history of those who had been ignored in the past' (1985, p.39). As far as defining what oral history actually is, Yow states 'Oral historians have probably devoted more energy to definitional

issues and problems of application than other disciplines... Lamentations have been heard about the inadequacy, the imprecision, the misleading characteristics of the term, but is it possible to find a better one?' (1994, p.4). In order to account for possible inadequacies of the term 'oral history,' in her guide to recording oral history, Yow interchanges it with different terms such as, 'in-depth interview, recorded memoir, life history, the recorded narrative, taped memories, life review' which 'imply that there is someone else involved who inspires the narrator to begin the act of remembering, jogs memory, and records and presents the narrator's words' (1994, p.4). Such terms seem to be synonymous and are used across disciplines (1994, p.4), although 'oral history' is 'the one most frequently used to refer to the recorded in-depth interview' (1994, p.4). In Portelli's 'The Battle of Valle Giulia,' oral history is succinctly defined: 'Oral history is a specific form of discourse: history evokes a narrative of the past, and oral indicates a medium of expression' (1997, p.3). For this project, 'oral history' or 'oral narrative' will refer to the recorded in-depth interview, which accounts for the presence of the interviewer. 'Oral history' is therefore clearly distinguishable from the 'written narrative,' which is a 'personal story written retrospectively from a single moment in time' (Maynes et al. 2008, p.77).

'The most distinctive contribution of oral history has been to include within the historical record the experiences and perspectives of groups of people who might otherwise have been "hidden from history"... through oral history interviews, working class men and women, indigenous peoples or members of cultural minorities have inscribed their experiences on the historical record and offered their own interpretations of history' (Perks and Thomson 2005:x). Oral history is particularly valuable in uncovering hidden experiences and allowing previously untold stories to come to the fore. Feminist historians observed that life history narratives could integrate women into historical scholarship, where traditional sources had failed to do so (2005, p.87). According to Diamond and Bornat, when talking about the journal rather than the discipline in general, 'Articles in *Oral History* still typically reflected an interest in the retrieval of the details of the daily lives of, mainly, working-class women' (2007, p.26). Oral history offers new insights into women's experiences in their own words and uncovers their perspectives on these worlds (Anderson and Jack 1991, p.11). In the case of British women in France between 1939 and 1945, an oral history interview with a survivor could reveal their interpretation of life during the war, and give an opportunity for their experiences to be

uncovered. Portelli writes that 'interviews often reveal unknown events or unknown aspects of known events; they always cast new light on unexplored areas of the daily life of the nonhegemonic classes' (2003, p.67). It was hoped that using oral history would shed new light on previously unexplored areas, such as the daily lives of British women in Occupied France, what their concerns were, the choices they made and their lives after the war. Portelli adds that the 'organisation of the narrative reveals a great deal of the speakers' relationship to their history' (2003, p.67), the way in which the content of the story is arranged makes them unique and necessary. Therefore, paying attention to the order and organisation of the narrative should also shed light on the speakers' relationship to history.

However, it is not only the storyteller who influences the oral history narrative; the researcher also has their own part to play. Portelli highlights that oral history is a 'dialogic discourse, created not only by what the interviewees say, but by what we as historians do...it refers both to what the historians hear (the oral sources) and to what the historians say or write' (1997, p.3). Perks and Thomson add, 'Oral history is predicated on an active human relationship between historians and their sources, which can transform the practice of history in several ways' (2005:x). Oral history is therefore constructed between the historian and the interviewee in the context of fieldwork. As such, each oral history interview tells a story which has never been told in that form before (Portelli 1997, p.4). Portelli writes, 'an oral history interview tends to be a story untold, even if largely made up of twice-told tales, and the speaker tends to strive for the best possible diction' (1997, p.4).

Although oral history begins in oral form with the storyteller, its end destination is in written form, told by the historian (1997, p.5). Furthermore, because the speakers 'are aware of this written destination... [they] bear it in mind as they shape their performance' (1997, p.5). Perks and Thomson also point out that narrators add their own interpretation of the past as they recall it (2005:x), which also influences the interview's outcomes. Grele writes, 'In many cases our interviewing forces people to make their lives anthropologically strange. We ask people to justify actions and ideas which they in the course of their lives never dreamed needed justification. We thus force people into history in very unique ways' (Grele 1985, p.41). It is crucial to bear in mind the influence that one can have as a researcher on the story being told. Sensitivity to the direction that the narrator wishes to pursue must be therefore balanced with

the outcomes expected by the researcher. A feminist approach which accesses 'the muted channel of women's subjectivity' (Anderson and Jack 1991, p.11) helps to balance the 'researcher effect.' It suggests that the researcher must be equally aware of silences and what is omitted in written and oral narratives (Diamond and Bornat 2007, p.45; Anderson and Jack, 1991:11).

Listening becomes a 'radical activity' (Olson 1998, p.448) allowing, 'narrators [to] feel more free to explore complex and conflicting experiences in their lives' (Anderson and Jack 1991, p.11). The focus must move from 'information gathering' to the 'process, the dynamic unfolding of the subject's viewpoint' (1991, p.23). Sangster suggests that the creative process between researcher and storyteller becomes the central focus of the research, rather than being viewed as biased or problematic (2005, p. 88). In addition, benefits such as rich data and 'thick description' (Bryman 2008, p.378) outweigh the argued lack of generalisability (2008, p.440) and possible bias. According to Grele, the effect that the researchers' influence can have on the outcomes of the interview 'should be one of our main priorities'(1985, p.41). For this reason, my own influence on this research project is considered later in this chapter.

Finally, there is the issue of retrospective evidence, considered 'especially problematic for historians who are the most concerned about the past and who evaluate the reliability of evidence according to the amount of time that elapses between the event and its written description' (Yow 1994, p.19). Some historians would argue that an account given on the day of an event is more reliable than the event remembered thirty years later, recounted in an interview (1994, p.19). However, according to Grele, 'the documents we produce are not the product of the age we are investigating; they are the products of the here and now' (1985, p.41). For example, an interview conducted in 2016 about the years 1939-1945 is not a product of the Second World War, it is created here and now and is a product of what someone remembers or thinks about life during the war, in the present. Findings will therefore be influenced by memory, and by events which took place in the seventy years in between the two dates (1985, p.41). 'Any discussion of oral history must take cognizance of the facts of its creation now, and of how the now informs the discussion of the then' (1985, p.41). Despite the argued decrease in validity of the data, depending on the time that has elapsed, research indicates, 'people forget more about a specific event in the first hour after it happens than

during any other time' (Yow 1994, p.19). The accumulation and cross referencing of different sources can be used to create an approximate understanding of events, however absolute certainty can never be achieved (1994, p.21). Furthermore, Portelli writes that, even after sources have been factually verified, 'the diversity of oral history still consists in the fact that "wrong" statements are still psychologically "true," and that this truth may be equally as important as factually reliable accounts' (2003, p.51). As Grele neatly summarizes, 'History without biases and passions is probably impossible and if attainable would be as dull as dishwater' (1985, p.41).

## 2.2 Oral history, Composure and the Transmission of memory

One of the key research questions for this project asks how British women's experiences of the Second World War have been remembered and what the consequences are for popular memories of the war in Britain. To properly frame British women's memories of the Occupation, it is important to select an approach which allows for the intersection of individual and national narratives, as well as the relationship between memory and identity. In his study of trans-generational memory, Sakai outlines the process of 'crafting history' in which, 'the past is evoked to become a basis for the storyteller's life' (2009, p.1). The concept of 'composure' further explores the storyteller's role in creating a past that they can live with (Thompson 2015). Oral and written narratives feature throughout this thesis and an approach which recognises both the role of the storyteller and the researcher in 'composing' the past seems to offer a fruitful approach. The empowerment of individuals through remembering and remaking the past is also a primary aim of this project, giving a voice to those who have been previously 'hidden from history.' A life history narrative recognises the value of individual stories in crafting history, and acknowledges that, 'memories are living histories' (Thompson 2006:x).

The definition of composure is multifaceted; one aspect of this approach presumes that individuals will compose an account for themselves for an intended audience (Pattinson 2011). This suggests that the interviewees in this study will compose a narrative which they hope would be useful for me, the researcher. Those who have written and published their memoirs



will compose a narrative which will be popular with an intended audience, and presumably also sell copies. Prior to the interviews, interviewees were informed that the primary goal of the interview was to collect the participant's life story. Interviews were semi-structured; starting with an open question such as, 'Tell me about your childhood', and then the interviewees were prompted with further questions if there was a lull in conversation, or a point which could be further developed. The interviewees were otherwise free to discuss what they deemed important or relevant. This offered insights into what the interviewees chose to focus on, and provided a basis to explore why they chose to highlight or omit certain aspects of their wartime experience.

A further aspect related to composure is the idea that, 'we compose memories which help us feel relatively comfortable with our lives, which gives us a feeling of composure' (Thompson 2000, p.245). Graham Dawson sets out the creative activity of storytelling in which we all participate:

Even the most mundane of narratives is an active composition, created through the formal arrangement of narrative elements into a whole. In composing a story of the day's events, for example, a complex process of selection, ordering and highlighting gives prominence to some events over others and interprets their significance, thereby making sense of an objective world. At the same time, the telling also creates a perspective for the self within which it endeavours to make sense of the day, so that its troubling, disturbing aspects may be 'managed', worked through, contained, repressed (1994, p.22).

Using composure as an interpretative tool will help to determine what has been understood as 'significant' and 'given prominence' over other events, and what may have been 'managed' or 'contained' to give a sense of composure to the narrator. Composure is helpful in making sense of the interviewees need to complete the narrative in a neat way, to tie up any loose ends, and ensure that they and the listener can 'make sense' of the story (1994a, p.22). Those who work with the concept of 'composure' argue that subjective accounts are constructed by narrators to provide a sense of equanimity (Pattinson 2011), and memories which do not fit 'may be repressed or reconfigured so that they are easier to live with' (Jones 2004, p.2). Coleman states, 'There can be no such thing as a final account of a person's life. Any coherent

account is shaped by an underlying and continuing search for meaning, whether on the part of the subjects or their biographer' (1991, p.122). Using composure as a critical frame of analysis will help to identify the ways in which different subject identities may be assumed to aid the individual in coming to terms with their past. Chapter 5 will interrogate a selection of narratives from British women and their relatives to see whether different subject identities are created for themselves, or the subjects of the biography, and the reason for these choices.

A final element of composure focuses on the need for existing cultural narratives 'upon which interviewees can hang their own personal recollections of war' (Pattinson 2011, p.248). This suggests that if survivors are unable to 'hang their recollections' on certain cultural narratives, then their stories become overshadowed by other, dominant war narratives. They may be reluctant to tell them at all, or they may omit or downplay certain experiences because they do not fit. As outlined in chapter 1, existing research into British women in France focuses on their experiences as SOE agents (Pattinson 2011), and several auto/biographies of female SOE agents have also been published (Masson 2005; Seymour-Jones, 2014). This thesis will question how the experiences of the British women who are the focus of this study fit with current understandings and stereotypes of British women in France. Existing literature on composure shows that individuals draw on cultural narratives to provide a framework for their own memories. This concept could be further elaborated to explore what happens when no appropriate cultural narratives are in circulation for individuals to draw on, as has been the case for some British women. If survivors' testimonies do not fit with the dominant cultural and national narratives, then there is a danger that their individual memories of war may be lost altogether, even to themselves.

Scholars have observed that achieving composure, defined as 'the endeavour to achieve the state of being calm and in control of oneself' (Summerfield 2004, p.69), is not always possible for the narrator (Summerfield 2004; Pattinson, 2011). Summerfield states, 'A particular terrain of memory or line of enquiry, or an uncomprehending and unsympathetic response from an audience may produce discomposure' (2004, p.69). If those remembering 'cannot draw on an appropriate public account, their response is to seek to justify their deviation, or to press their memories into alternative frameworks, or to be able to express their stories only in fragmentary and deflected accounts' (Summerfield 2004, pp.92-3). The notion of

discomposure has not yet been extensively explored in existing literature on composure; this study will look for 'fragmentary and deflected' accounts from British women to further develop this idea and will analyse what happens if individuals cannot draw on appropriate public accounts to create their composed narrative. The following section outlines the research design for the project and focuses on the sampling of participants and ethical considerations.

### 2.3 Participant sampling and ethical considerations

A snowball or chain referral sampling approach was used to select the participants for the study. Waldorf and Biernacki state that this 'method yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest' (1981, p.141). From October 2014 onwards, the relatives of internees who had published biographies about their relatives experiences were contacted to see whether they would be willing to participate in an interview. After explaining the purpose, procedures and implications of the study, the participants were asked to refer others who might speak to me about their own experience of internment, or that of their family member. Although the intention was to recruit relatives of British women for second-generation interviews, this approach was fruitful in recruiting veterans who had been in France during the war, leading to three eyewitness interviews. A high level of interconnection between women who had lived in France meant that the chain referral system worked effectively. I also contacted the British Legion in Paris and in April 2015 attended an event at which I outlined the project and asked whether members knew of anyone I could interview. One participant was present at the British Legion and agreed to an interview. The curator of the local museum in Vittel also suggested former internees for me to interview. I wrote a letter to four former internees (see Appendix A) and received two replies, one from two sisters who were interned during the war, and the other from the daughter of a former internee who had died a year earlier.

When interviewing an older sample group, such as survivors from the Second World War, it is important to recognise that they are a vulnerable group, either because of their age or because of their health. As a result, this could lead to a power dynamic between the researcher and narrator. To address this, it was important that the interview was 'dialogic,' or 'an equal power

relationship' (Russell and Bohan 1999). By focusing on the narrator's own perspective of their experiences using oral history techniques, it was hoped that some of the power dynamics would be addressed. This also limited researcher control over the interview and allowed the narrator to guide the conversation (Beale et al. 2004). Anderson and Jack state, 'The researcher must always remain attentive to the moral dimension of interviewing and aware that she is there to follow the narrator's lead, to honour her integrity and privacy, not to intrude into areas that the narrator has chosen to hold back' (1991, p.25).

To adhere to the moral dimension of interviewing outlined by Anderson and Jack (1991, p.25), the following practical steps were put in place. Before each interview, informed and written consent was obtained from all participants. The Anonymous Informed Consent Form template from the Modern Languages Research Ethics Policy at Cardiff University was adapted to this research project and sent to all participants before the interview (see Appendix A). This was supplemented with an information sheet containing details about the purpose, procedures, implications and benefits of the study, with an invitation to ask any questions. The information sheet also informed participants of likely future publication plans. It outlined the extent to which any identifying information about the research participant would appear in the publication. Participants had the option to be informed of the results of the research and sent a copy of the research if they wished. They were also free to send feedback and comment on the research if they desired. Participants were asked whether they would like a family member or friend to be present during the interview, to offer support if needed. Participants chose where they wanted the interview to take place, which aimed to help them to feel more comfortable and afforded the discussions a level of privacy and confidentiality. The purpose of the study was reiterated before each interview. At the beginning of the interview, it was made clear that if there were any questions that the participant did not wish to answer, they were completely free to do so. Participants were free to ask any questions following the interview, either to myself, or my supervisor via email. Participants were informed that they could contact the School Ethics Officer at Cardiff University if they had any concerns about how the research was conducted.

For the interviewees, only their gender, age and nationality were recorded, if they agreed with this. Pseudonyms were used for all participants. In accordance with the Data Protection Act

1998 Advice for researchers (Cardiff University), all personal data was held securely to prevent unauthorised access or accidental loss. All documents containing personal data were stored on my drive only and were password protected.

## 2.4 Research design and source materials

The final section of this chapter outlines the research design, examines the challenges posed during the research process and how these were overcome. First, the practicalities of conducting the fieldwork and uncovering source material are examined; then, the challenges associated with transcription and thematic analysis; the role of gatekeepers; and finally, a self-reflexive account of the role of the researcher and researcher bias.

### Conducting the Fieldwork

For the reasons given in the methodology section, life history narratives are integral to this project and as such comprise a large proportion of the sources used. Seven published biographies about British women in internment camps emerged between 2007 and 2014 which were easily accessible. These biographies were all written by the relatives of former internees, based on diaries written during the war, except for *Rosie's War* (2012) which was co-written by a former internee and her daughter. Before these stories emerged, two notable autobiographies had been published by former internees, the first in 1968 by Sofka Skipwith and the second by Antonia Hunt in 1982. Online collections of testimony material, for example the website [www.fleeinghitler.org](http://www.fleeinghitler.org) and the BBC WW2 People's War, which invite people to upload their own or their family member's stories about life in Occupied France and the Second World War respectively, were valuable resources. A blog post on the Fleeing Hitler website by Daphne Wall pointed me towards her memoir which was self-published as an E-book in 2014 and offered helpful insights into the Phoney War period. A scoping trip to France in April 2014 indicated that the local archives at the Musée du Patrimoine in Vittel held more than anticipated, and the museum's curator suggested survivors for me to interview. I also contacted individuals who had published their accounts and they suggested potential interviewees. In total, I interviewed 12 individuals, 7 of them had been in France during the

war, 3 were relatives of British women who had been in France, and 2 were relatives of Vittel residents alive during the war. Three of the interviews were joint, one with two sisters and the other two with married couples. Four of the interviews were conducted in Paris, three took place in Vittel, and the rest were in the UK. On average, the interviews lasted between 1 and 2 hours. Details of the interviewees can be found in Appendix B. All sources listed here are used in the thesis, and a full list of which life histories feature in each chapter can be found in Appendix A. The research process, and problems encountered are elaborated in the section following this one.

Eleven local, private, national and international archival holdings were also consulted during the project: the Imperial War Museum featured unpublished diaries, written accounts and correspondence from British women as well as a catalogue of oral history recordings. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) archives in Geneva held official reports on civilian internment camps and photographs. The National Archives in London housed Foreign and Home office reports, War Cabinet documents and correspondence between civilians and the British government, which have been vital for the project. It was anticipated that archival holdings in France would house the most information about civilian internment camps, but in fact, the ICRC archives in Geneva and the National Archives in London held the most comprehensive records. French departmental archives in Épinal (for Vittel camp) and Doubs (for Besançon camp) yielded barely any results. It was hoped that these would hold lists of the number of British internees who died, particularly in Besançon where conditions were poor; unfortunately, these records did not seem to exist. Archivists at the ICRC in Geneva stated that it was likely such records were held by the Germans, but were destroyed at the time of the Liberation of France. The Archives Nationales in Paris provided photographs, private papers and correspondence concerning requisitioned goods; The Centre of Contemporary Jewish Documentation (CDJC) in Paris held information about the Jews interned in Vittel; and the British Library newspaper archive in London permitted insights into what was being communicated in the British press about 'Britishers' in France. Local archives at the town hall in Paris housed excellent records of correspondence between the Mayor of Vittel and the camp commandant. The personal archival collections of former internees, especially the Sonia Gumuchian Archives, were also very fruitful. It was anticipated that the Préfecture de Police archives in Paris would be useful in providing information about the arrest and internment of

British women in Paris and the surrounding area, as diaries indicated that it was French police officers who arrested them in December 1940. These archives did not prove fruitful and there were no apparent records of British women's arrest during the winter of 1940/41. It is possible that police records in other French departments may have richer sources on this topic, for example in Nice or Marseille where large British communities resided, but it was not possible to visit these holdings during the fieldwork phase of this project.

### Interview Transcription and Analysis

Interviews were recorded on an iPhone and transcribed according to key themes. Although this was time consuming, Bryman states that personal transcription brings the researcher 'closer to the data...encouraging [them] to start to identify key themes and become aware of similarities and differences between different participants' accounts' (2008, p.456). The interview transcripts were analysed using thematic data analysis, defined by Braun and Clarke as a 'method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in rich detail' (2006, p.82). Bryman states that these themes are 'the product of a thorough reading and re-reading of the transcripts that make up the data' (2008:554).

In terms of practical limitations to transcription, the process was extremely time consuming. Some interviews were conducted in English which was quicker to write up, as it is my mother tongue. Interviews in French took much longer and, for elderly participants, some words were unclear and even inaudible at times. For this reason, for one interview I transcribed the interview in part but could not include everything that was said. Although a complete transcription would have been ideal, as Lapadat outlines 'rather than seeking standards and conventions, interpretive researchers rely on critical reflection and contextualized negotiation of method' (2000, p.210). Given the context, I chose to negotiate and interpret the method accordingly and in line with Lapadat and Lindsay's (1999) observation that researcher's transcriptions reflect their own epistemological orientation, my transcriptions are a reconstruction rather than an exact representation of the interviews. I did not translate French interviews into English; all interviews are cited in the language in which they were conducted to prevent aspects being lost in translation.

When categorising the data thematically, Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggest looking for repetitions, metaphors, transitions, similarities & differences, theory-related material and missing data. It was during the thematic analysis that it became evident that a predominantly gendered approach to the data would not be suitable. Since previous studies of women during the Second World War have used feminist or gender theory as a lens through which to explore women's experiences, I anticipated that the theoretical frame of gender could also work well for this study. However, themes of belonging and national identity were far more prominent in the transcriptions. For this reason, an approach focusing on belonging, national identity and the transmission of experience was selected, rather than using gender as a primary tool of analysis. That said, this thesis is about women. It recognizes the importance of an approach which acknowledges the 'fragmented notion of a "woman"' [and] 'the plurality of identities' (Diamond and Bornat 2007, p.25) associated with this term. The life history narrative approach has been specifically selected as it can access the 'muted channel of women's subjectivity' (Anderson and Jack 1991, p.11), and a clear aim of this project is to foreground women's stories which were previously untold. It echoes the commitment of women's history and oral history to, 'reveal and reverse, to challenge and to contest what were perceived to be dominant discourses framed by gender and class' (Diamond and Bornat 2007, p.19).

### Gatekeepers

Gatekeepers are people who can provide or deny access to research, defined by Mandel as 'information brokers' (2003, p.202) and informal power brokers. 'Informal gatekeepers' do not hold official power to grant or withhold permission to undertake research, but 'are able to hinder the progress of a research project' (Ahern 2016, p.2). I would add that successful relationships with gatekeepers can contribute to the success of a research project. My encounters with informal gatekeepers during fieldwork were largely positive; the curator of the local museum in Vittel was very helpful and interested in the project, the information they volunteered enabled me to contact survivors and arrange additional interviews whilst in France. The relatives of survivors also play a key part as gatekeepers. In 'Reflections on the Memory Boom', Winter cites 'History and family history' as significant vectors of transmission (2012, p.62), and argues, 'one reason that [history] is such a popular and money-making trade



is because it locates family stories in bigger, more universal narratives' (2012, p.62). Several best-selling novels set during the World Wars focus on family stories (2012, p.63). This raises the profile of individual narratives of wartime but also highlights that stories have financial, as well as historical, value. There was a reticence from some individuals to share stories which may hold an individual value as a vector of memory, as a published biography. Some participants felt that sharing stories with me was diluting or devaluing the individual life history of their family member. Only one participant refused to talk to me about their relative's experiences of the Occupation for this reason. For others the purpose of the research was clearly articulated in our initial conversations and they were willing to participate. I shared that I did not want to 'take' anyone's memory; instead, my intention was to increase awareness of British women's experiences through the transmission of multiple survivor's stories. The other relatives of survivors who were interviewed were keen to share their relatives' stories. They had been told these stories long before this research project was conceived, and it seems important to underline the impact that family relationships have had on the creation, and continuation, of these stories. Survivor's families functioned as a 'space of transmission' (Hirsch 2008, p.103) for storytelling and the sharing of objects. They kept newspaper clippings, photographs, written memoirs, identity cards, pamphlets and newspapers produced by women interned in camps. Relatives also expressed their families' experiences through blog posts on online forums such as the BBC2 People's War or 'Fleeing Hitler' websites. As a researcher, I am conscious that I also function as a gatekeeper and am aware that the stories, which are uncovered during this project, are likely to silence other stories, which may remain untold.

### 2.5 Self-reflection: The researcher bias

This 'researcher bias' or 'researcher influence' has been highlighted as a limitation of oral history as it is a method that is based on 'direct intervention by the observers and on the evocation of evidence...the evidence is the result of the interviewer's questioning, this is the making of evidence. This is the worst sin one can commit, according to traditional methodologists in history' (Yow 1994, p.4). Traditional historians instead rely on written records which can be critically examined; this can be controlled by rigorous procedures to

ensure the validity of the data obtained (1994, p.5). However, Alessandro Portelli offers an alternative perspective on the researcher's involvement in oral history. He writes, 'The positivistic fetish of non-interference has developed outlandish techniques to bypass or remove this problem. I believe we ought to turn the question on its head, and consider the changes that our presence may cause as some of the most important results of our fieldwork' (1991, p.45). A balanced approach to the 'researcher effect' acknowledges the influence that the historian has on the narrative, but does not seek to eliminate it. Instead, we are self-reflexive and consider the changes that our presence may have. The definition of oral history chosen for this project accounts for the researcher's involvement in the process after all and sees the interview as a co-creation of the storyteller and the researcher (Yow 1994, p.4). This active relationship between historians and their sources can be transformative to the practice of history (Perks and Thomson 2005:x).



Figure 2 - *Vosges Matin*, 12 September 2016, copy of the author.

While doing fieldwork in Vittel, any attempt to separate myself from the sources, both oral history interviewees and archival material, was challenging. Vittel is a small town with a population of around 5,200 inhabitants and once people heard about my presence and the purpose of my research, they were keen to talk (INSEE, 2017). The local newspaper *Vosges Matin* also interviewed me and wrote an article about the project (Figure 2), which led to further discussion and contact from those keen to share their stories. I was known around the

town as 'la jeune Anglaise.' My nationality, gender and age were also referred to in the newspaper article; 'la jeune femme' researching 'le séjour forcé de plusieurs milles de ses *compatriotes* internées' (emphasis added). The fact that I am a young, British woman researching British women interned in the camp was either of interest to the journalist, suspected to be of interest to the readers, or perhaps both. Oakley argues, 'The goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship' (1981, p.41). My experience interviewing former internees and their relatives confirmed Oakley's observation. The women who were interviewed were keen to talk at length, they invited me into their home, offered me refreshments, one participant even invited me to stay at her house overnight so we would have more time to eat and talk together. Finch states, 'Women are always enthusiastic about talking to a woman researcher... their intentions are apparent, simply from the hospitality one receives... One is therefore being welcomed into the interviewee's home as a guest, not merely tolerated as an inquisitor' (1984, pp.72–3). Rapport came easily with all female interviewees, and the men who were interviewed along with their wives (this happened in two interviews). As I talked about my motivations for the project and my desire to give voice to those previously 'hidden from history', in short as I 'invested my own personal identity' (Oakley 1981, p.41) in the process, participants seemed keen to share. With minimal training, apart from a determination to 'listen in stereo' (Anderson 1991, p.11), this openness cannot realistically be attributed to my exceptional interviewing skills. It is more likely, as Finch suggests, that the participants 'found this kind of interview a welcome experience' (1984, p.74). During some interviews, women articulated their appreciation in having someone to talk to, particularly a young person who was interested in events which happened so long ago.

Three men were interviewed during the fieldwork; two were relatives of British women interned in Vittel and were interviewed with their wives; the third man was a relation of the Mayor of Vittel during the war. One of the two interviews with married couples was less conversational; the couple decided who would speak first and did not want to interrupt each other. The 'small talk' was between the wife and myself before the interview, while the husband remained silent and was seated further away, suggesting that he was 'less inclined to view the interview as a social occasion' (Pattinson 2011, p.249). Only one interview was

conducted with a man where his wife was not also interviewed. This was with a relative of the Mayor of Vittel during the Occupation. The interviewee was also a former politician and businessman, well known and respected, whose ancestors were viewed as the founding fathers of the town. Making a good impression seemed important, but the possibility of speaking to someone who might offer some insights into the life of Jean Bouloumié, mayor during the war, was an exciting one. The interview prompted questions about power and equality between researcher and narrator. Portelli writes, 'As long as the unequal hierarchy of power in society creates barriers between researchers and the knowledge they seek, power will be one central question raised, implicitly or explicitly, in every encounter between researcher and informant (1991, p.32). I am English, at the time of the interview I was 29 and starting the second year of my PhD. The interviewee was a French man in his late eighties, intelligent, polite, affluent, and a former politician who was used to public speaking and being interviewed. For our interview, the 'barriers' Portelli refers to, included language, age, class, gender, experience and nationality. The purpose of the interview was to focus on the interviewee's relative, Jean Bouloumié, who was accused of collaboration with the Germans after the war. The interviewee was polite and hospitable and I was reluctant to say anything which might offend and upset him. When I did eventually turn to the topic of collaboration, the participant was keen to make sure that I understood the context, repeating 'il faut savoir...'<sup>8</sup> Sarikakis argues, 'The status of an expert is not associated with the female sex, youthfulness or often with "foreigners" (1999, p.429). This could explain why the participant wanted to share what needed to be known and to make sure that I had grasped the complexities of the situation concerning the mayor at the time. His response seemed well rehearsed and his answers were based on 'facts' concerning the historical context, rather than what his relative may have felt or experienced, concluding, 'le maire a tout fait pour essayer.'<sup>9</sup> As Ball notes, interviews with politicians are 'political' (1994, p.97). Based on this interview, this definition could also be applied to retired politicians. Due to his seniority, experience and French nationality (as a young, British researcher, did I know enough to disagree?), I did not push the interviewee to elaborate on the issue of collaboration. Sarikakis observes, 'The physical and cultural characteristics of 'female', 'foreign' and 'young' became the first

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with M. Dupont , September 2016, Vittel.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with M. Dupont , September 2016, Vittel.

determinants when interacting within a social and professional environment' (1999, p.19). My reluctance to challenge the participant meant that our discussion of collaboration was not as developed as it could have been. Portelli warns against avoiding challenging the narrator in an interview, stating, 'Too often, people feel that it is safest to stick to accepted common sense when talking to a person they have never met before. A well-mannered challenge in an interview may elicit expansions, explanations, or analyses that would remain untold otherwise, or... make the speaker feel that it is alright to voice less conventional views' (1991, p.62). The observations from this interview will be useful in planning future fieldwork and further experience will enable me to better manage challenging issues.

The process of fieldwork also challenged my status as a historian. If history is a forensic task, then the historian 'is positioned as a judge – as one who is emotionally distanced from and sits in judgement on the past' (Kennedy in King 2000, p.11). If we understand that historians share the role of 'memory-making' then we must allow them to assume multiple identities during the process of research; 'an inquiry uneasily poised between the historian's task of representing the past accurately, the judge's task of apportioning blame and guilt, and the psychologist's task of bringing "closure," forgiveness, the ability to "move on"' (Graves and Rechniewski 2010, p.11). The value of testimony, whether written or oral, does not lie in whether it is true or can be proved; rather it illuminates how people interpreted lived events, the record of 'telling history' (Kennedy 1998, p.462). I felt a responsibility to foreground these women's stories and ensure that people knew about them. There was an urgency to this due to their age and I was aware that if I did not record their testimonies then they would be lost forever. Older people become increasingly self-reflective, concerned with leaving their mark, which often manifests in the reading and writing of memoirs (Butler 1970), and is also central to identity formation (Baddeley and Singer 2010, p.199). The desire for self-reflexivity and interest in posterity explain the increase in biographies and memoirs written or co-written by British women who survived the Occupation. It also accounts for the willingness of participants to speak to me about their lives. Second-generation memoirs and interviews often emerged and took place after the death of a relative who had been in France during the war and, 'the sharing of memories related to the loss [was] a way to sustain and/or reconfigure one's sense of meaning and purpose in the face of grief' (2010, p.198).

Working with older participants and their relatives, some of whom were recently bereaved, created ethical challenges. The first challenge was that I liked the women I was interviewing; they were strong, determined and passionate, which I found endearing. Two participants died during the PhD; it was a privilege to have interviewed them and I was sad to hear that they had died. In correspondence with one of the families, they said that they had talked about the interview a lot with their relative before she passed away. This caused me to consider the relationship between researcher and subject, my brief interjection in their lives meant something to them. I felt that I owed them something since they had entrusted their stories to me and I wanted to ensure that they were no longer hidden from history but given a voice. Scholarly material on how participants' deaths affect researcher is surprisingly scarce. Yow uses the term 'good will advocacy' (1994, p.56) to describe researcher bias due to her liking of the individuals with whom she was working. For me, 'good will advocacy' meant a strong desire to record their stories; when writing the thesis, it also resulted in a tendency to focus overly on their stories, particularly the anecdotes that I felt they wanted me to hear. When interviewing recently bereaved family members, it also caused me to rethink or avoid asking questions which may upset the participant or cause them to view their deceased relative in a different light. In this incidence, the goal of a full account comes into conflict with the goal of ethical responsibility. The informed consent form was useful in maintaining boundaries and clarifying expectations as it stated the purpose of the project; from this, participants knew my intentions for the interview and their stories, and they were also aware of their rights during the process.

The research process confirmed that the active relationship between the historian and their sources is a unique one, particularly when working with oral histories. For most interviews, my presence in people's home was not merely tolerated but welcomed and they were keen to discuss their own experiences or reminisce about the lives of their relatives who were living in France. Instead of seeking to eliminate my influence as the researcher, I acknowledge that I shaped the narratives created, during the oral history interviews and in my written analysis of the sources. My own subjectivity as a researcher, looking to gather stories and create a comprehensive picture of British women's experiences during this period, occasionally came into conflict with the subjectivity of participants who wanted to foreground their own stories. According to Germeten, 'Good life history research [also] acknowledges that there are crucial

interactive relationships between different individual lives and expectations of life (both from the storyteller and from the researcher)' (2013, pp.614–5). Life stories are not usually told alone but narrated to an audience, and, as mentioned, the stories presented in this project are only one discourse of the subjects' lives.

## 2.6 Timeframe and Structure

The timeframe for this thesis begins in 1939 as many written accounts from British women commence at the point when Britain and France declared war on Germany, on 3 September. The source material indicates that the Phoney War and exodus were significant moments for British women, and so it seems sensible to include them in the study's timeframe. The timeframe finishes in 1944 following the liberation(s) of France between June and September 1944. Chapter 5 is outside this time frame, looking at the legacy of the war from 1945 until the present day. Initial fieldwork highlighted the importance of considering how women self-identified and were categorised as British. Whether they were 'free' to be British in France altered during the first half of the twentieth century; from being actively encouraged to migrate in the early 1900s, to their status as France's ally before the armistice, then to enemy following the Franco-German armistice and subsequent occupation. British women's patterns of behaviour are hard to generalize across the periodization, as it was so disruptive. Since the theme of belonging emerged as central throughout these different chronologies, it seemed the most fruitful to look at each period independently and explore how British women's sense of belonging was affected. It was decided that choosing a chronological structure, rather than a thematic analysis, would offer deeper insights into the specific choices with which women were faced at different periods during the war.

This rest of this thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter 3 is concerned with the make-up of the British community in pre-war France and British women's transition from ally to alien during the Phoney War and up until August 1940. Chapter 3 will contend that the exodus was a pivotal moment for British women when they had to decide where their allegiance lay and whether to leave France and return to Britain. It argues that British women's emotional investments of being and belonging were subject to change during this period and asserts that

women with the strongest sense of belonging to France were the most likely to remain. Despite strong recommendations from the British government, they felt more 'at home' in France than in England. The slippage between 'external' and 'internal' definitions of belonging is also analysed here. Categories such as 'enemy alien' meant that British women who had 'belonged' in France for many years were ostracised by some French people as Britain was labelled an enemy and a traitor in Vichy and Nazi propaganda. For those women who were not able to leave or who chose not to leave in June 1940, unless they went into hiding, they were likely to end up in German hands. Chapter 4 spans September 1940 to September 1944, from the point when British women were labelled as 'enemy aliens' to the liberation(s) in the summer of 1944, including the internment of many British women in Vittel camp in the east of France. It explores the internees' sense of national belonging and asserts that this was key to their experience in the camp. It demonstrates that some young women realised their national identity in the camp, for others this was reawakened, and some internees even actively chose their Britishness over other identities such as being French or Jewish because of the protection their British identity afforded them. This chapter argues that groups of 'outsiders' were shunned because they represented the antithesis of British wartime values. Chapter 5 looks beyond the war, addressing the legacy of British women's experiences and investigating the transmission of their life stories. It contends that the families of British women have played a key role in co-creating and retelling their stories using life history narratives. It questions how successful they have been in bringing British women's hidden histories to life. It debates why these women's experiences have not been integrated into collective memories of the war in Britain. The final chapter offers conclusions to the thesis, lessons learned and implications for future research.



### 3. British women in transition: September 1939 to December 1940

On 3 September 1939, first Britain, and then France declared themselves to be at war with Germany, starting what would become known as the Phoney War, or *drôle de guerre*, an expression coined by novelist Roland Dorgelès referring to the 'strange' or 'funny' period of time when there was 'little evidence of hostilities' (Diamond 2007:x). Young men between 18 to 35 were called up on 1 September, which was met with widespread resignation in France (Kedward 2005, p.235). Diamond observes that there was a 'degree of panic during these first weeks' (1999, p.19), as families accustomed themselves to the effects of mobilisation. These fifteen months of transition, from September 1939 to December 1940, are particularly remarkable when considered through the lens of national identity.

As events unfolded, British people on French territory found themselves in a particularly precarious position. They experienced first-hand the unexpected turn of events as France was invaded and occupied by the German forces. France was no longer an ally of Britain and instead the collaboration of the Vichy regime with the Nazis meant that the British and French nations were now in opposition. This chapter will argue that British women's identification as 'British' in the transition from ally to 'enemy alien' was key to their experiences. It will evaluate the strength of their ties to France as a 'host' space, and to Britain as a 'home' space (Howes and Hammett 2016, p.22), and will interrogate how British women's internal and external frontiers of belonging to both nations were affected during these fifteen months of transition. This chapter will also argue that, based on the evidence of eleven women's experiences uncovered in this research, the powerlessness experienced by British people in the wake of this transition was magnified in the case of British women who were not only subject to these governmental changes, but were also steered by the choices made by male family members, whether present or absent. As outlined in chapter 2, themes of belonging and national identity emerged strongly in the life history narratives analysed in this thesis. However, as will be discussed in this chapter, other factors impacted on British women's choice to remain in France or to leave. The advice given to British women from male family members often influenced the decisions some women made, indicating that gender was also a key component of their experience.

This chapter is structured in three parts; looking first at the British community in France at the outbreak of war and introducing the life histories of individuals whose experiences inform this research. Using Balibar and Wallerstein's 'internal and external frontiers of the state' (1991, p.95), the chapter then goes on to question how British women negotiated their national identity or identities, from September 1939 to May 1940 at the time when the two countries were fighting on the same side. Finally, it investigates how British women's self-identification and categorisation as 'British' was affected between June and December 1940, as Britain became France's enemy. Before looking at the British women who were caught up in the rapidly changing events of this period, it is important to establish what constituted a British citizen in France in 1939. How were individuals classified as 'British'?

### 3.1 Defining terms

The terms 'British' and 'Britishness' are used throughout this study and understanding their meaning in the context of this analysis is key. The concept of 'Frenchness' or 'Francité' did not emerge particularly strongly in the life history narratives analysed, and the British women in this sample group seemed much more preoccupied with the meaning of the terms 'British' and 'Britishness' and their implications on their daily lives. Official understandings of these terms were also questioned, as evidenced in detailed correspondence between the Foreign Office and the Swiss Legation in Berlin concerning the criteria for British national identity. Some British women were not only juggling dual nationalities, but multiple identities, such as Jewish, Russian, or Scottish.<sup>10</sup> The life histories in this research reveal that discussions about Britishness and these other identities were also ongoing. Possession of British national identity ensured that these women survived, even protecting some individuals from deportation and death. The prevalence of the terms 'Britishness' and 'British,' compared with other identities, in the source material is the reason that more focus is placed in this study on understanding and defining British, rather than French, national identity.

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<sup>10</sup> See chapter 4, section 4.5, for a discussion of British and Jewish national identity. Sofka Skipwith was Russian and British (Skipwith 1968), and Janet Tessier du Cros was Scottish, but considered by German authorities to be French because of her marriage to a Frenchman (Tessier Du Cros 1962).

Determining how the 'internal frontier of the state,' an individual's self-identification as British, and the 'external frontier of the state' intersect is what this study seeks to uncover. In official, external classifications several different terms denoting 'British subjects' were used in government and administrative documents during the conflict, in some Foreign Office memoranda the term 'Britisher' was used, and the ICRC referred to 'Anglais de la Métropole' to distinguish between individuals who were British but lived in France, and those who resided in Britain. Discussions concerning the meaning of the expression 'British subjects' were ongoing during the conflict. In July 1942, the Foreign Office prepared a detailed memorandum about British nationality to determine who could receive relief payments from the Swiss authorities.<sup>11</sup> The memorandum outlined that, 'A person coming within any of the following categories may be deemed to be a British subject; A. By Birth, B. By Naturalisation, C. By Marriage.'<sup>12</sup> British subject status acquired by birth depended on the individual or their father being born, 'within His Majesty's dominions and allegiance.' British status by naturalisation required the individual to have been granted a certificate of naturalisation, or to have been included in their father's naturalisation certificate.<sup>13</sup> For this study, British status by marriage is of particular interest as a woman's British nationality was affected by her choice to marry. British nationality was accorded to 'Any woman who is the wife, divorced wife (not re-married) or widow (not re-married) of a British subject.' British nationality was deemed to have been lost, 'By a woman who has married an alien, and who was at the time of her marriage a British subject.'<sup>14</sup> These regulations were in accordance with the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act of 1914. The nationality of individuals born 'within His Majesty's dominions' was determined by the Nationality Acts of the Dominions which are declared in the memorandum as 'almost identical' to the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act 1914; this acquisition of British nationality was termed 'Imperial naturalisation.'<sup>15</sup> This definition of British nationality of course corresponds to the 'external frontier of the state,' as outlined in Chapter 1. Determining the 'internal frontier of the state' is more complex. One British woman separated the 'pure British' from the 'mongrels' (Skipwith 1968, p.193), referring to British born

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<sup>11</sup> The National Archives (TNA) DO 35 1201, Memorandum, Foreign Office, 6 July 1943, p.1.

<sup>12</sup> TNA DO 135 1201, Memorandum re British Nationality Questions, Part II, Dispatch from the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to His Majesty's Minister of Berne, 5 August 1943.

<sup>13</sup> TNA DO 135 1201, Memorandum re British Nationality Questions, Part II.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> TNA DO 135 1201, Memorandum re British Nationality Questions, Part IV.

individuals, and those who acquired their British status by other means (for example marriage or naturalisation). The notion of purity and breeding associated with British national identity is also referred to in another account; Doris Lecomte-Worthington's French memoir identifies 'purs English-speaking people.'<sup>16</sup> These British women associated 'Britishness' with ancestry, family or social status, in some respects echoing EM Foster's observation in 1920 that, 'The character of the English is essentially middle class' (In Richards, 1999, p.18). This hierarchy of 'Britishness' is set out in one British woman's wartime account from the sample mobilised in this research; "'British born of British parents" rates above "British born" which itself takes precedence over "British by marriage" with "British by naturalization" as the equivalent of not being born at all.' (Skipwith 1968, p.22). It is evident that some British women were all too conscious of their position on the 'spectrum of Britishness,' and that these categories had implications in terms of parentage, affluence, class, and social mobility. Former Vittel internee Doris Lecomte-Worthington, who had a French mother and British father (Frank Worthington was born and had always lived in France but his paternal grandfather was British), used the phrase 'pluri-nationalité.'<sup>17</sup> This seems an apt term to define how British women negotiated these frontiers of belonging, suggesting multiple layers of identity and belonging which contrast with the restrictive criteria expressed in the memorandum above. The complexity of categorising who was 'British' is revealed in these women's life histories, Lecomte-Worthington recalls that her sister, Elsie, who was born in 1919 was 'majeure' in 1940 and considered French according to German law, whereas Doris Lecomte-Worthington was a minor and considered to possess her parent's nationality.<sup>18</sup> As well as being complex, there were also discrepancies in how the criteria were applied; some women who were born in France but formally considered British by marriage were interned for the duration of the conflict, whereas others were released after only a short period of incarceration.<sup>19</sup> The criteria outlined in the Foreign Office memorandum in 1943 were used to select the sample group of British women in this study; however, as the life history narratives reveal, the fact that the British or German authorities categorised these women as 'British civilians' was often without

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<sup>16</sup> Lecomte Worthington, Doris. Diary. Unnamed collections. Musée du Patrimoine Archives, Vittel. p.17.

<sup>17</sup> Letter to Madame Clement and memoirs of Doris Lecomte-Worthington, Letter dated 23 July 2010, Unnamed collections. Musée du Patrimoine Archives, Vittel. P.92.

<sup>18</sup> Letter to Madame Clement and memoirs of Doris Lecomte-Worthington, P.33.

<sup>19</sup> Jeanne Phillips' mother was interned until 1943, Interview with Jeanne and Eva Phillips, Monday 22 February 2016 (Paris).

consequences for individuals on the ground. Many of these women considered themselves French, until this external classification began to affect their freedom and they were labelled 'enemy aliens' and interned in camps.

The second term which appears in this and the other fieldwork chapters in this thesis is the notion of 'Britishness.' The terms 'English' and 'British' seem to be used interchangeably in both the life histories and the formal archival sources mobilised in this study. In French accounts, 'les Anglais' or 'Angleterre' are synonymous with 'British' and 'Britain.' The four countries of the United Kingdom are also encompassed by these terms, considered as 'part of England.' Raphael Samuel's discussion of the terms 'English' and 'British' offers helpful insights for the discussion of national identity for this research:

English in its twentieth-century usage is an altogether more intro-verted term than 'British' and largely associated with images of landscape, beauty, and home rather than those of national greatness. It appears an ethnic term rather than a political one even when an unspoken politics accounts for its popularity. Because it is also the designation of a language ("the name English for the language is... older than the name "England" for the country") it carries a heavy freight of cultural meanings. Ethically it has often been associated with ideal virtues such as, say, sturdy independence, plain dealing, honest worth. It is also, because of the stress on common origin and descent, closely bound up with the idea of racial stock – its virtues, supposedly, are hereditary. Literature has normally been English; the Empire – it is argued – was always British (Samuel 1999, p.48).

Samuel's proposition that 'Englishness' is associated with national imagery, ethnicity, ethics, language, and literature are of importance to the discussion of national identity for this analysis. The context of war meant that notions of 'Britishness' and 'Englishness' were constantly shifting and being challenged. Keeping in mind what Samuel terms the 'heavy freight of cultural meanings' associated with 'Englishness' in the twentieth century, broadens our understanding of the term. British women were using the term 'English' or 'England' ('Anglais' or 'Angleterre') outside Britain at a time when their nationality was threatened. Thus, images of home, belonging, beauty, 'England's green and pleasant land', as well as virtues such as honesty, independence, and candidness, would have been especially meaningful. To greater

understand the significance of the designations 'English' and 'British', Samuel's notion of the cultural meanings associated with 'Englishness' will be kept in mind.

Chapter 1 analysed existing literature concerning British national identity during the Second World War, concluding first that the concept of 'Britishness' was reworked during this period, and second that the construct of 'The People's War' contributed to an association of certain democratic and societal values, such as self-sacrifice, stoicism, and community spiritedness, with 'Britishness.' Chapter 1 also posited that material cultures of the nation, such as flags, newspapers, coins, passports, photographs and more, give rise to feelings of national identity as they 'flag' and remind individuals of nation states (Billig 1995). As well as highlighting ways in which British women flagged, or chose not to flag, their national identity between September 1939 and December 1940, this chapter will also build on the theory that national identity and belonging are closely intertwined. We understand that identities are constructed by individuals to achieve a sense of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2006, p.202), and these constructs signify a desire for attachment and a willingness to emotionally invest (Martin 1995; Yuval-Davis, 2006). It is recognised that, 'The emotional components of people's constructions of themselves and their identities become more central the more threatened and the less secure they feel' (Yuval-Davis 2006, p.202). This is of importance for this chapter since there was an increasing threat and lack of security for British women during the fifteen months which followed September 1939, and especially from May 1940 onwards. How was British women's sense of belonging to either Britain or France affected during this transition period, and in what ways was this evidenced in how they flagged their national identity? This chapter seeks to address these questions.

### 3.2 The British Community in France

The corpus of women who form the body of this research were those who remained in France during the Occupation. In many ways, this was counter-intuitive, but they were not alone as the source material shows. In January 1941, a report from the American Consulate in Marseille

referred to 'a large British colony in unoccupied France.'<sup>20</sup> The report claimed that, 'Of the possibly 4,000 British subjects in unoccupied France in August [1940], at the most a few hundred have accepted opportunities offered to them for repatriation and the rest have apparently been content to remain.'<sup>21</sup> The fact that the Riviera continued to have a strong British presence after the signing of the armistice indicates that British people were sufficiently attached to France to remain there after the Occupation. In short, despite their British nationality, they felt that they belonged in France. These British people resided in the Non-Occupied zone, which was under the authority of the Vichy regime, rather than the zone occupied by the Germans. Given that the Occupied zone had a more intense German presence than the Non-Occupied zone, we can hypothesise that British people felt less at risk and therefore did not see an imminent need to depart. British civilians were receiving £10 per month in relief payments from the British government via the American Consulates in Marseille, Lyon and Nice, which was viewed by the Foreign Office as a 'substantial deterrent to the vast majority of these people' from leaving France.<sup>22</sup> Those who were elderly or unwell also found it an 'extreme hardship to return to the United Kingdom, particularly in inclement weather and with travel facilities which [had] considerably deteriorated.'<sup>23</sup> In letters to the British government from British civilians in France, poor travel arrangements back to Britain were cited as deterring them from leaving France. They resented the fact that there was no protection from submarines or aerial torpedoes, insufficient lifeboats on board, and that they had to cover the cost of repatriation themselves.<sup>24</sup> 'To sum up, if the B.G. [British government] want to get people out of the South of France, they must provide – what we are entitled to vis:- adequate facilities and convoying, and not treat us all as if we were merely cattle.'<sup>25</sup> The British government was conscious that the *zone libre* may not remain unoccupied forever, one diplomat at the Foreign Office wrote in May 1941, 'It seems quite on the cards that one day

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<sup>20</sup> TNA FO 916 132, Extract from Despatch no. 100 dated January 17 1941 from the American Consulate at Marseille.

<sup>21</sup> TNA FO 916 132, Repatriation of British subjects in France, 'Extract from Despatch No.100 dated January 17, 1941 from the American Consulate at Marseille.' P.2.

<sup>22</sup> TNA FO 916 132, Extract from Despatch no. 100 dated January 17 1941 from the American Consulate at Marseille.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> TNA FO 916 132, Letter from C. Pemberton Wooler to British government via the American Consul-General, 22 January 1941.

we shall see the Germans in complete control in that area.'<sup>26</sup> Despite this, the reluctance of British civilians to leave indicates that they did not feel sufficiently threatened to hurry their departure from France, and that they did not want to leave a place which they considered to be their home. According to the American Embassy, overseeing British interests at the time, a strong sense of belonging to France influenced most people to remain:

Consulates are unanimous in reporting that the greatest obstacle to be overcome in the repatriation of British subjects is their own reluctance to leave France, on account of family, or sentimental ties, old age, illness or mere inertia. Many no longer have ties in England and fear arriving there without friends or resources.<sup>27</sup>

The main reason that British civilians did not want to leave France was due to markers of belonging in France, rather than in England, such as family members, emotional attachments or having lived there for such a long time. This extract suggests that they felt 'safe' and 'at home' in France and saw no reason to depart; they felt a stronger affinity with France as their home nation, than the United Kingdom. The importance of 'feeling safe' as an emotional attachment to belonging (Yuval-Davis 2006, p.197) also applied to the British women in the Northern zone, some of whom were conflicted about whether they should return to England because of the effect of Nazi and Vichy propaganda, which convinced them that Britain would soon be invaded and therefore was no safer than France (Say & Holland, 2012, p. 40, 44).

How was it that there were such large numbers of British migrants who had settled on the Riviera and made France their home? As figure 3 illustrates, frequenting the south of France was popular with the upper classes, and the years between the two World Wars saw a transformation of the Riviera with, 'the presence of thousands of people who had come [to the Riviera] with the intention of living there permanently' (Howarth 1977, p.144). The caption to the above cartoon reads, 'Thanks Heaven we shall be in the South of France again next week.'

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<sup>26</sup> TNA FO 916 132, Letter from W. Roberts at Foreign office to Mr Beam, Romney House, S.W.1, 30 May 1941.

<sup>27</sup> TNA FO 916 132, Letter from the American Ambassador in Vichy to the Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, London. November 29, 1941





SCENE.—*Any expensive London Restaurant.*  
 "THANK HEAVEN WE SHALL BE IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE NEXT WEEK. WON'T IT BE TOPPING TO SEE ENGLISH FACES AGAIN?"

Figure 3 - Cartoon in *Punch*, 9 March 1921, Special Collections & Archives, Cardiff University.

Won't it be topping to see English faces again?' In 1929, there were 2,000,000 foreign tourists in France, of which 881,000 were estimated to have come from Britain (Pimlott, 1947:262). The Riviera was also popular with British motorists (an estimated 17,000 in August 1937) enjoying the new trend for speed and adventure (1947, p.263). The British on the Riviera were joined by royalty, most famously the Duke of Windsor and Mrs Simpson, as well as several well-known literary figures including Katherine Mansfield, Robert Louis Stevenson, D.H. Lawrence, H.G. Wells and Rudyard Kipling. Howarth argues that the new arrivals, 'ensured that a British way of life was imposed on the Riviera even more widely and deeply than it had been before 1914' (1977, p.144).

Secondary sources indicate that during the interwar period, the British community on the Riviera ensured that their home comforts were readily available, which would have contributed to their sense of security and belonging in France. Several tea rooms were opened, as well as the Richmond Restaurant and Tea Rooms in Menton, run by a Yorkshire woman, serving roast beef and Yorkshire pudding (Howarth 1977, p.152). British leisure and sporting activities were also exported; the Cannes Cricket Club and Cannes Golf Club were both established by the British. Yachting, polo and horse racing were popular and tennis was considered a 'particularly suitable pastime for English girls accompanying their parents to health resorts' (1977, p.63). The Girl Guides and Brownies were established in Menton in 1922, as well as many other British

charitable organisations, including a holiday home for ‘the dogs of those British residents who had occasion to leave the Riviera temporarily’ (1977, p.149). This indicates that British expatriates on the Riviera self-identified with both Britain and France and that those who had the means would travel between Britain and France, bringing Britain to France in the form of sports and other past times. Howarth states that interactions between these organisations and the local residents were few, aside from one example of ‘beneficent colonialism’ where the ‘Society for the Friends of Cannes’ raised funds to buy a Citroën car for the local police force (1977, p.151). In terms of national belonging, it is evident that the British expatriate community on the Côte d’Azur were keen to maintain connections with home, enabling them to remember the ‘everyday, familiar aspects of life’ (Purcell 2007, p.2). British expatriates did not integrate with the local inhabitants, nor the other foreigners living on the coast. That said, the British presence was significant to the local economy (Howarth 1977, p.155) and some local, French businesses even adopted ‘Franglais’ with a view to securing more custom from British visitors, ‘among the garments accepted for cleaning, a notice states, are “le pull cardigan”’ (1977, p.66). That the British community was so well established in the area, and yet remained so connected to home that they even influenced French locals to adopt British expressions, suggests a strong sense of belonging to the United Kingdom, despite having had a presence on the Riviera for almost two centuries.

The British community on the Riviera was clearly deep rooted, enjoying the benefits of a warmer climate and favourable exchange rate (Howarth 1977, p.144) with the same convenience of home (Nash 1979, p.64). The comforts afforded by this ‘home away from home’ were jeopardised in May 1940 as the German armies swiftly bypassed the Allied defence, the Maginot Line, advanced through the North of France, and entered the deserted capital on 14 June. Despite what the American Consulate described as ‘a large British colony’ who remained in the South of France in August 1940, there were huge numbers of British civilians who did leave France, or tried to, both as part of the Exodus, and following the Occupation. How can we then explain the motivations and experiences of those who could not, or chose not, to leave? This chapter will argue that it was because they had developed a strong sense of belonging to France. The women whose life histories form the basis of this thesis have been selected as they were in France at the outbreak of war for different reasons. Some feature only in this chapter, since they returned to Britain before the Occupation, others

are analysed in subsequent chapters since they were either interned by the Germans in December 1940, or lived under surveillance in their own homes. A complete list of which life histories are referenced in each chapter can be found in Appendix A. The first life histories that are introduced were women who had retired in France. They had chosen to settle abroad for their health, to be with their families, or because they enjoyed the lifestyle which France offered them. Secondly, there were women who had relocated abroad due to their husband's or father's employment in France. Thirdly, this chapter introduces young women who moved to France to pursue careers or to escape family constraints and expectations in Britain. These micro histories are used to shed light on the expatriate communities to which they belonged. First, British retirees are introduced; Claude and Germaine Serocold on the Riviera, Samuel and Elizabeth Hales in Paris, and Fanny Twemlow on the Cote d'Azur.

### Introducing the Life Histories

Claude and Germaine Serocold are emblematic of the wealthy, British expatriate community that was longstanding on the Riviera. For this reason, their diary, written between 1939 and 1942 and published in London in 1942, is a valuable source for this chapter since it offers insights into the experiences of those who had settled in the South of France and were suddenly faced with the dilemma of abandoning everything as the Germans invaded.<sup>28</sup> Claude and Germaine Serocold lived in a villa in the southeast corner of France, near Monte Carlo. Claude Serocold was retired in 1939, but had worked as a stock broker in London and served in Naval Intelligence during the First World War. Germaine Serocold's mother lived in Nice and the couple had decided to travel to France to be with their family, acting on medical advice that the milder winter climate would be beneficial for Germaine Serocold's health. The diary indicates that the couple travelled to France in November 1939, after the outbreak of war, but it seems likely that they had already spent time in the South of France prior to this, since they owned a villa, had family in France, and were well connected to several other British expatriate families on the Riviera. The diary suggests that they belonged to the British upper classes, employing servants, including maids and a chauffeur and were sufficiently wealthy to rent

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<sup>28</sup> IWM LBY 83/2130, A Short Account of the war experiences of Claude and Germaine Serocold, France 1939-1942, Claude Serocold, Published by Herbert Fitch, 1942, p.1.

accommodation where needed and pay for transit visas and permits during the three-week period in June when they tried to leave France. The couple planned to return to England six months after their arrival. Their villa was occupied by the French military, and between November 1939 and May 1940 the couple, 'continually entertained the officers to lunch and dinner at the villa.'<sup>29</sup> At the end of May 1940, French forces were billeted to the Italian coast as Italy prepared to enter the conflict. From June 1940 onwards, Serocold describes that 'people were very much on edge... rumours were flying about,' and British expatriates began to leave the area.<sup>30</sup> The Italian declaration of war on the Allies was the trigger for the Serocolds to leave their home as they were warned by the local Commandant that bombing was due to start at midnight; the couple left at 3.30am on the 11 June, abandoning most of their possessions.<sup>31</sup> Travelling west, they collected Germaine Serocold's mother and stayed with other expatriate families along the coast who had not yet left. They were unable to obtain passage from Cannes as the coal ships which had been requisitioned to collect stranded British civilians were severely overcrowded, and instead attempted to get Spanish permits to cross the border near Perpignan.<sup>32</sup> They were caught in traffic heading south, both civilians and military transport, although in his diary, Claude Serocold describes with enthusiasm his 'Mercury' motorcar which 'was fast and had wonderful acceleration...able to catch up and pass cars.'<sup>33</sup> Although on June 27<sup>th</sup> they could obtain permits to cross into Spain, the Spanish authorities refused to open the border, and they were caught with many other refugees in a small French town nearby. The Serocolds then decided to return to Monte Carlo, near their villa, as the border remained closed. They rented a room in Monte Carlo, and lived in various rented accommodation until August 1942 when Claude Serocold returned to England; Germaine Serocold stayed with her mother in France until she was interned in Vittel in March 1944. Monaco was exempt from legislation introduced in July 1941 which ordered British civilians to leave the coastal regions (see chapter 4 for further information), so the couple could remain in their accommodation in Monte Carlo until Germaine Serocold was interned.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> IWM LBY 83/2130, 1942, p.2.

<sup>30</sup> IWM LBY 83/2130, 1942, p.4.

<sup>31</sup> IWM LBY 83/2130, 1942, p.5.

<sup>32</sup> IWM LBY 83/2130, 1942, p.8.

<sup>33</sup> IWM LBY 83/2130, 1942, p.10

<sup>34</sup> IWM LBY 83/2130, 1942, p.29.

Although the Riviera was the longest established British colony in France, many British expatriates also settled in Paris. Paris in the interwar years housed a significant foreign population, of which the British community represented the fifth largest group, numbering 38,000 in 1923 (Green 2014, p.5). Benstock observes, 'All life in Paris during these years [1900-1940] was influenced by this influx of expatriates who appropriated the city as their own' (1986, p.4). Paris in the interwar years was termed the 'centre de la culture occidentale' (Mollier in Green 2014, p.373) and many American and English writers found their home on the Left Bank during this period (Benstock 1986). 'Shakespeare and Company', the bookshop run by Sylvia Beach, was regularly frequented by, and depended on, an English-speaking, expatriate community (1986, p.225). English and American women in Paris made significant contributions to the capital's literary scene, as explored by Benstock in *Women of the Left Bank* (1986). Samuel and Elizabeth Hales, a New Zealander and his Scottish wife, were both artists and were part of this cultural wave which was enveloping Paris at the turn of the twentieth century. Elizabeth Hales was sixty-three in 1940 and Samuel Hales was seventy-two. Elizabeth Hales kept a diary throughout the war years which was preserved by her grandson. Extracts from this diary are cited in this chapter. Both Samuel and Elizabeth Hales had travelled to Paris in the early 1900s to further their artistic development, met, married, and exhibited at the Paris Salon; Samuel Hales also ran the Paris American Art Shop (Lack 2011, p.30). The couple were interned as enemy aliens in Besançon in 1940, before being released due to their age.<sup>35</sup> Extracts from Elizabeth Hales' diary are cited in this chapter.

The final life history in the category of 'Retirees' is that of Fanny Twemlow, who moved with her family from Winchester to St Jean de Luz near Biarritz, as the doctor recommended a warmer climate to improve her father's health (Lack 2011, p.15). Although away from the Riviera where other British expatriates sought to cure their maladies, Twemlow describes, 'There were a good many English residents and visitors in St Jean at that time. We soon had many friends both English and American. The French were not so friendly' (2011, p.15). This suggests that expatriates did often settle near and socialise with other British people and that

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<sup>35</sup> TNA DO 135 1201, Memorandum re British Nationality Questions, Part IV, 'The definitions and limitations to be applied in the case of persons belonging to or naturalised in the United Kingdom should be regarded as applicable also where persons are British subjects by birth or naturalisation in New Zealand, Australia, or Newfoundland.'

friendship and family networks were a significant motivation for migration. Twemlow explains that they settled in St Jean de Luz as it was recommended by a Royal Engineer who had worked with her father (2011, p.15). A complete biography of Fanny Twemlow can be found in chapter 5, section 5.4 on 'Indirect generational accounts.'

The second group of British women whose life histories are mobilised in this chapter are women who were living in France due to their husband's or father's work. This was the case for Daphne Wall and Nora Fisher who were part of the expatriate community in Le Vésinet, in the Parisian suburbs. Daphne Wall lived in Le Vésinet between 1932 and 1940 with her parents; her father was the Chief Accountant for Lenthéric, a perfumery company. Wall self-published her memoirs, *The World I Lost: A Memoir Of Peace and War*, as an EBook on Amazon Kindle in 2014. About her own sense of national identity, she articulated;

I was aware of my English inheritance, but the home I knew was France, with England an exotic place that we visited from time to time for holidays. I was bilingual and switched from English to French without thinking about it; my closest playmates were French, and so was my school.<sup>36</sup>

The family went to the 'English Athletic Club' on weekends to socialise, play cricket and tennis. In early June 1940, Daphne and her mother travelled to Brittany, where they stayed in a hotel almost entirely filled with British expatriates who were also attempting to return to Britain. Her father joined them, and the family packed and left for Bordeaux, the last port in French hands. The journey took three days due to the many refugees on the roads, and they arrived in Bordeaux on 17 June 1940. Along with approximately 1,500 other British refugees, Wall and her family boarded the *SS Madura*, a British passenger ship which had been diverted to pick up the British refugees stranded on the French coast. The *SS Madura* arrived in Falmouth on the 20 June 1940 (Werth, 1940:213). Wall and her family were then transferred to London.

Nora Fisher's life history shares similarities with Daphne Wall's account; her father studied French and Accountancy and after working as an accountant for Price Waterhouse Cooper in Glasgow, he was transferred to Paris for 6 months. He was engaged and eventually married,

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<sup>36</sup> Wall, Daphne. 2012. 'Flight from France: a Child's Eye View.' *Fleeing Hitler*. <http://www.fleeinghitler.org/story/daphne-wall-flight-from-france-a-childs-eye-view/>

moving to Paris permanently in 1928 with his wife. Nora Fisher was born in 1931. Nora Fisher recalled that they led a 'comfortable life in Le Vésinet, where all the English colony had congregated.'<sup>37</sup> Fisher's father started working for 'Mobil Oil' in the early 1930s; her mother could not speak French and socialised more with the English residents in the community, and the family also frequented the English Athletic Club in Le Vésinet. Describing the events of June 1940, Fisher said, 'It was obvious that the Germans were sweeping through the north', and so the family abandoned their house and belongings and travelled to Bordeaux. She remembered that her family boarded a 'very small Dutch boat' with only 10 crew members, and the voyage took 'several days', before they arrived in Falmouth.<sup>38</sup> Fisher and her mother remained in Glasgow with relatives for the duration of the conflict.

Le Vésinet was popular with British expatriates, such as Daphne Wall and Nora Fisher's families, as expatriates could live in houses, rather than typical French apartments.<sup>39</sup> The first railway in Paris, from the Île de France to Saint-Germain-en-Laye, passed through Le Vésinet which also meant that it was well connected for commuters. British men based in Le Vésinet were transferred to France to work as managers or accountants for British companies or banks based nearby, and their families moved with them creating a community of British expatriates in the area. Some of their wives were more likely to socialise with other British women, rather than venture outside the expatriate colony: 'My mother for her social life would very much have kept amongst the English ladies because of her French not being... well it was adequate... but she kept very much with the other wives there.'<sup>40</sup> Language served as an importance inclusion to and exclusion from the community; for example, Nora Fisher's mother clearly felt safer with other women who spoke English. It was a marker of belonging and an important reference to home. Daphne Wall recalled her mother's comments about an English woman who had lived for so long in France that she had forgotten how to speak English: 'Poor woman, forgotten her mother tongue' (Wall 2014: ch 3). Wall also recounts the importance that her family placed on doing things differently from the French;

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Nora Fisher, Oxford, 7 August 2015.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Nora Fisher, Oxford, 7 August 2015.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Nora Fisher, Oxford, 7 August 2015.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Nora Fisher, Oxford, 7 August 2015.

There were other things “we” didn’t do. We didn’t let our dogs sleep out of doors, chained to their kennels. And English children went to bed early, which is why they had rosy cheeks... My father planted them [wallflowers] every spring, he wanted a fine, English-style show along the base of the veranda (Wall 2014: ch.1).

Highlighting the differences between themselves as expatriates and the local community was clearly an important part of national belonging for the British in Le Vésinet. Planting flowers, maintaining correct bedtimes, keeping dogs inside and speaking English could all be termed ‘identity markers’, defined as, ‘those characteristics which are perceived to carry symbolic importance either as a signal to others of a person’s national identity, or which might be mobilised by the individual themselves in support of an identity claim’ (Bechhofer et al. 1999, pp.527–8). For the Le Vésinet British community, identity markers were used to signal their ‘Britishness’ to the French community, as well as being mobilised to support their own identity claim. There was even the case of one British woman criticising another for not speaking adequate English. Interviewee Ted Fisher neatly summarised the importance placed on ‘Britishness’ as a marker of identity: ‘My mother used to say, “Remember Ted, we’re not 100% British we’re 150% British.”’<sup>41</sup>

The second life history which falls into the category of women who travelled to France because of their partner’s occupation, is that of Sara Abelson, whose wartime experiences were recounted by her daughter in an interview with the author in Paris in February 2016.<sup>42</sup> Sara Abelson died in 2014. Sara Abelson’s mother was from an upper-class, Romanian family who lived in Egypt; she went to a finishing school in Italy, and then the family settled in England. She met and married Abelson’s father in England, and Sara Abelson was born in Manchester and acquired British nationality. Abelson and her family were Jewish. Her father was originally from Russia but had fled to England during the Russian Revolution. He worked for the *Evening Standard* in London and was transferred to France as the Paris correspondent for the paper. He chose to remain in France during the Phoney War as he considered reporting the news an important responsibility. The family lived in the suburbs of Paris. Abelson’s mother and sisters were interned in Besançon and then Vittel. Sara Abelson met Jack Bourne in Vittel and the

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Ted Fisher, Oxford, 7 August 2015.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Laura Giraud, Paris, 23 February 2016.



couple married after the Liberation in 1944; they moved to London for a short period after the war and then returned to Paris. Sara Abelson's testimony is used in chapter 4.

Following the devastation of the First World War, a new age of modernity heralded change and a break with traditional value, and the third and final cluster of life histories used in this study represents younger British, expatriate women, for whom travelling to France was an opportunity to escape the traditional trappings of home. Rosemary Say was employed as an au pair for a French family in Avignon between January 1939 and June 1940 before travelling to Paris in June 1940 where she lived and worked until her internment in Besançon and Vittel from December 1940. She later escaped from Vittel in November 1941, and made the dangerous journey back to England via Marseille, Barcelona, and Lisbon (Say and Holland 2012, p.230). Her life history is recorded in a 249-page biography, *Rosie's War*, co-written by Say and her daughter, and published in 2011. Recalling her decision to move to France, Rosemary Say stated, 'I had a very comfortable, if rather predictable existence at home...I was bored with my safe and predictable life: I wanted out' (2012, p.17). One of the images which emerged during the interwar period was the flapper in Britain, or 'la garçonne' in France. She was the antithesis of continuity and represented complete change and a rejection of the past. The flapper or garçonne embraced freedom, pleasure, youthfulness and speed. Thébaud observes, 'L'acquis le plus manifeste et le plus général semble être la conquête d'une liberté, d'allure et de mouvement' (1992, p.72). All that *la garçonne* embodied appealed to Rosemary Say who, upon meeting the au pair who had held her prospective job the previous year, articulated: 'She was tall and slim. Her hair was cut into a delightful bob and her clothes were elegant. I couldn't help wondering whether France would have the same effect on me' (2012, p.21). Priscilla Doynel who moved to Paris with her mother in 1925, described the decadent and uninhibited expatriate community in which she was immersed: 'Their pattern was set by the time they arrived in France after the First World War – a pattern of bridge parties, alcohol and sex... promiscuous, gossipy and dependent on the lowness of the franc' (Shakespeare 2014, p.48). A more in-depth biography of Priscilla Doynel can be found in chapter 5, section 5.4 on 'Indirect generational accounts.' While Rosemary Say tentatively embraced the new sense of freedom which, for her, was embodied by a move to France, Priscilla Doynel moved into the lively scene of a 'worldly expatriate clique' (Shakespeare 2014, p.48) because of her mother's decision to relocate.

Sofka Skipwith (née Princess Sophy Dolgorouky) moved to Paris from London, to find work as a translator with her husband, Grey Skipwith (Skipwith 1968, p.169). Her wartime experiences are recorded in her 284-page autobiography written in 1968, *Sofka: The Autobiography of a Princess* (Rupert Hart-Davis, London). Sofka Dolgorouky was born in 1907 in Saint Petersburg, Russia. When the Russian Revolution began, she was taken to the Crimea with her grandmother and in 1919 was evacuated to England with other Russian aristocrats, although she and her grandmother also visited different countries in Europe including Budapest, Nice, and Paris (Skipwith 1968, p.48). Sofka Dolgorouky's first marriage was to Leo Zinovieff in 1931, the couple had two sons and then divorced in 1936 (1968, p.154). Sofka, then Zinovieff, married Grey Skipwith, a British heir to a baronetcy, shortly after. It was by this marriage that Sofka Skipwith acquired British nationality. The couple lived in London and then moved to Paris in January 1939 to find work as translators Grey Skipwith joined the RAF in September 1939 and although Sofka returned to London with her husband, she travelled to Paris twice during the Phoney War to support her mother who was also residing there. On her second visit in May 1940, Skipwith was trapped in Paris when the Germans occupied the city. She kept a diary from the 19<sup>th</sup> May 1940 until her internment in Besançon on the 7<sup>th</sup> December 1940, parts of which are published in her autobiography. Although Skipwith attempted to escape from Paris before the signing of the armistice, she was unsuccessful, and was interned for the duration of the war, first in Besançon and then in Vittel. Her husband was killed in combat at the end of 1942 (1968, p.214). During her internment, Skipwith connected with the local Resistance network and helped other internees escape (1968:204-5); she and another internee, Madeleine Steinberg, worked to try and save the Eastern European Jews who arrived in Vittel in August 1943 and were later deported to Auschwitz. Steinberg and Skipwith offered them English lessons, listened to their accounts of life in the Warsaw Ghetto, and smuggled letters out of the camp to various governments and Jewish organisations requesting their intervention, to no avail. An example of one of the letters sent by Skipwith to the British Foreign Office can be found in Appendix C.

There were, of course, British women who settled in France for reasons other than retirement, their partner's occupation, or a desire for adventure. Some women moved to France due to family connections; Antonia Hunt travelled with her mother to stay with a great aunt in Brittany

so that the family could remain near Hunt's father who was serving in the British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.) and posted nearby. Hunt wrote an account of her experiences in wartime France and the 150-page *Little Resistance* was published in 1982, which is cited in this chapter. Other women were led by employment to different regions; Rita Harding owned a stud farm north of Paris.<sup>43</sup> Interviewee Jacqueline Powell lived with her family in Le Touquet and describes the cocktail parties that her parents had with P.G. Wodehouse and family, who lived nearby.<sup>44</sup> These women's stories suggest that unless British women worked and lived in France independently, for example Rosemary Say or Rita Harding, then they often maintained close ties with other British women. If a husband's or father's work or ill health motivated relocation to France for example, women's lives were affected by these decisions and they tended to socialise with other wives and daughters, especially if the language barrier prevented communication with local French people, as with the women introduced from Le Vésinet. They might lack the necessary skills to integrate into French society or be excluded from the social circles to which their husbands or fathers were admitted. Although some favoured relationships with other expatriates, British people were welcomed and the British and French governments had even made changes to legislation to encourage travel across the channel (Howarth 1977, p.38). The outbreak of war served to intensify the bond between the two nations as wartime allies. The next section explores how these British women, who have been introduced, expressed their national identity and how this altered over the months which followed.

### 3.3 September 1939 to May 1940: Expressions of Britishness during the Phoney War

10/1/1940 - The war is v. strange, I suppose something will be doing in the spring.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> IWM 13626 Private Papers of A Vanson, an illustrated account (8pp, Autumn 2003) by a female relation of the Vansons, Mrs Rita Harding (née Muller), describing her family's wartime experience in France, particularly her internment at Besançon and Vittel, and the family's return to England in 1944, with a transcription of a newspaper article (6pp, August 1944) about the family and a letter (1p, 1942) written by Arthur Vanson to his ex-wife who was also an internee at Vittel.

<sup>44</sup> IWM 8854, Powell, Jacqueline, Miranda, Mary, Oral History Interview. P.G. Wodehouse and his wife Ethel lived in Le Touquet, Calais as part of a well-established English expatriate community. He was arrested and interned for 49 weeks by the Germans and was later released and made five broadcasts on Nazi radio in Berlin. Although the content of the talks pertained mostly to America, they were met with outrage in Great Britain and Wodehouse was denounced by Anthony Eden, the then Foreign Secretary, as an agent of the German propaganda machine in the summer of 1941 (Langley, 2011).

<sup>45</sup> Hales, Elizabeth. Diary. 1940-1944. Private papers of John Hales. London, United Kingdom.

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, young men between 18 and 35 were drafted to the French military on 1 September 1939, at the beginning of what would later be referred to as the Phoney War. British women who were married to French men were also affected by this general mobilisation, Priscilla Doynel's husband of nine months was sent to Rouen, while she remained with her sisters-in-law and mother-in-law in their chateau in Boisgrimot (Shakespeare 2014, p.132). For the women left behind, their lives were profoundly shaped by the absence of their husbands: 'At night in the drawing room, where Yolande with a pained expression stood in for Georges, they prayed for peace...[Priscilla] remembered September and October chiefly as a period of religious silence' (2014, p.132). British women who married into French families experienced similar sentiments of anxiety and loss to French women whose husbands were also absent (Fishman, 1999).<sup>46</sup> Sources indicate that to some extent British women's experiences in France during the first months of the Phoney War were like those of the French population, as initial reactions of shock and concern subsided to some sense of habitualness: 'Life in Avignon returned to a sort of normality after the first few weeks of panic and confusion... All my letters home over those months, whatever the content, sounded so happy' (Say and Holland 2012, p.43). Where ties with Britain remained strong, with family members back home or a house to return to, British women seemed to keep a 'foot in both camps' and self-identified as both French and British during the Phoney War. British women juggled dual identities, allowing each one to surface at different times. Yuval-Davis asserts, 'Identity narratives can shift and change, be contested and multiple. They can relate to the past, to a myth of origin; they can be aimed at explaining the present' (2006, p.202). British women's sense of belonging to either country was dependent on 'feeling safe' (Yuval-Davis 2006, p.197), and as an ally of France, they continued to feel safe in France during this period. This is evidenced by three factors, which will be evaluated in turn. First, the freedom to work and travel, second, the ease with which they could access information from 'home,' and third, the advice received from British authorities in France and in Britain.

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<sup>46</sup> Ministère de la justice, Les archives contemporaines de la justice - <http://www.archives-judiciaires.justice.gouv.fr/index.php?rubrique=10774&ssrubrique=10827&article=14900> 'une étrangère épousant un Français peut acquérir la nationalité française par simple déclaration devant l'officier d'état civil au moment du mariage' Loi du 10 Aout 1927.

For some British expatriates, their first conflict of belonging was realised with the outbreak of war. The events of September 1939 spurred a desire to return home for Gillian Hammond and her family, who left Paris for London on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, having grown tired of sirens and 'living off tinned food' (Shakespeare 2014, p.134). This research suggests that there were not many British expatriates who chose to return to Britain in September 1939; most were confident that they would be secure, and did not leave France, or try to, until the following year. Once the initial shock following the outbreak of war had subsided, Gillian Hammond and her family returned to Paris just a month after they had left, 'Fed up with shoveling shillings into a gas fire, fed up with drinking tea, and the excitement of Heinz tomato soup having waned' (2014, p.135). The fact that the Hammonds chose to return to Paris suggests first that the threat of invasion was not perceived as serious enough to prevent their return journey to France, and second, that they felt a strong tie to their host nation. Gillian recalled on her return, 'The bliss of seeing Vertès again' (2014, p.136). The Hammonds felt a desire to return to safety and to their 'home' in England at a moment of crisis and uncertainty; however, they were compelled to return to their other 'home' in France once they felt safe to do so (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p.197). Rosemary Say's letters to her parents were, 'More concerned with my family's safety back in England than with my own in France: "You should get out before the inevitable aerial onslaught," I pleaded' (Say and Holland 2012, p.41). Sceptical about the advantages of returning to a country which at times appeared more constrained by the effects of war than France, in a letter to her parents Rosemary Say wrote, 'Each day there seems to be another restriction or expense for you' (2012, p.42). British women's feeling of safety was further crystallised by their freedom to work and to travel. Those who had worked before the outbreak of war continued to do so, Rosemary Say took on an additional English teaching job, as the father of the family with whom she was living had been conscripted so they were no longer able to pay her as an au pair (2012, p.42). There was also freedom to travel and in this case, 'Britishness' was an advantage as they were, 'The only foreigners in France who could travel without a laissez-passer' (Shakespeare 2014, p.136). Priscilla Doynel visited her French husband at his post in Rouen in November 1939, and artists Samuel and Elizabeth Hales travelled to Blois on holiday. The only indication of the effects of the war mentioned by the Hales is that they 'Cannot sketch; forbidden in times of war. These of course are the rules...

One can't be too careful in war time.<sup>47</sup> As well as the freedom to travel within France, some British women also travelled back to England during the Phoney War. This illustrates that British women practised both national identities during this period, maintaining connection with both France and Britain. Rosemary Say travelled back to London in March 1940 for her twenty-first birthday, 'In hindsight it seems extraordinary that I was allowed to travel back to France in mid-April and that my family and I considered it appropriate' (Say and Holland 2012, p.43). Elizabeth and Samuel Hales' son also visited them in Paris in March 1940, highlighting that travel in the opposite direction from England to France was also straightforward and not perceived as dangerous. In correspondence with her son before his visit, Elizabeth Hales wrote, 'You will probably find Paris very little changed.'<sup>48</sup> This confirms the viewpoint that the war was expected to continue for some time; 'The French had anticipated a long and gruelling war of attrition' (Vinen 2006, p.17). Given the expectation that the war would be protracted, those in France entered into a sort of normality, even 'bemusement' (Drake 2015, p.37), which is confirmed by Elizabeth's observation that Paris remained largely unchanged. The feeling of relative safety and lack of foreboding experienced by British women during this period explains their choice to remain 'at home' in France and continue their lives as normally as possible.

The second indication that British women self-identified as both British and French during this period was their ongoing correspondence with family members 'back home' and their access to other British networks, such as the BBC and British newspapers. Paradoxically, this even meant that some British expatriates were in an advantageous position in terms of information about world events. Samuel Hales wrote in January 1940: 'The papers came also today. The Picture post is v good and the others always give us news that we don't get over here.'<sup>49</sup> The Hales choice to subscribe to additional news outlets suggests that they were keen to keep abreast of developments outside France. As they had children in England, it is unsurprising that they sought to keep informed of the latest events. The importance of emotional attachments, such as family members back home, is integral to the individual's sense of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2006). The fact that these emotional attachments become increasingly important when individuals feel less secure (2006, p.202), would explain why the desire to keep updated with

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<sup>47</sup> Hales, Elizabeth. Diary. 1940-1944. Private papers of John Hales. London, United Kingdom.

<sup>48</sup> Hales, Elizabeth. Diary. 1940-1944. Private papers of John Hales. London, United Kingdom.

<sup>49</sup> Hales, Elizabeth. Diary. 1940-1944. Private papers of John Hales. London, United Kingdom.

developments in England was intensified for the Hales during this period. In April 1940, Elizabeth Hales also wrote a letter to her son asking him to request copies of newspaper articles from *The Sunday Express* in London: 'Ask them to send 3 copies of Lord Beaverbrook's article to Mrs. Hales in Paris. Put a 1 ½ d stamp though they say they post them free. I would give one to the Marquise and some other English speaking friends.'<sup>50</sup> This indicates that not only were the Hales flagging their own national identity by subscribing to and reading British newspapers, Elizabeth Hales was also sharing their contents with other British and French acquaintances in Paris. In his study of the French press during the Second World War, Albert states 'La déclaration de guerre, le 3 septembre, avait été précédée par une série de mesures répressives et préventives, édictées par décrets lois' (2010, p.104). For Elizabeth Hales, expressing her British national identity was so important that it led her to provide English and French contacts with additional information from the British press. It also suggests an awareness that the French state was providing insufficient information, with censored news outlets which were inferior to their British counterparts. Hales' British nationality put her in an advantageous position, physically 'belonging' in France but intellectually and politically drawing on British frames of reference and persuading others, whether British or not, to do the same.

The BBC also provided a significant British reference point and an important connection with home. It was an alternative news source to the French radio, broadcasting what Vaillant terms, 'banalities from a censored public network' (2009, p.153). Chadwick states, 'Listeners turned to the BBC as a more reliable source of information than France's state-run radio *Radiodiffusion nationale* (RN), appreciating the BBC's provision of prompt and honest news, however disheartening its content' (2015, p.428). The value of the BBC went far beyond its ability to update listeners with information that was suppressed in the French media; it also had hugely significant connotations as a national emblem and a reference point for 'home.' The BBC played a powerful role in flagging national identity during this period (Purcell 2007), and listening to their broadcasts provided an opportunity for expatriates to belong to the larger 'imagined community' of Britain. In her diary, Gertrude Trewhella expressed:

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<sup>50</sup> Hales, Elizabeth. Diary. 1940-1944. Private papers of John Hales. London, United Kingdom.

After dinner Monsieur Bouchon, the proprietor of our hotel, asked us up to his apartment to listen to the BBC. It did not sound very clear, but in the midst of what appeared to be a disintegrating world, a steady English voice, even heard over the air, acted like a tonic (Manley 2014, p.19).

Tuning in to the BBC was particularly meaningful for Priscilla Doynel whose father, SPB Mais, was a broadcaster for the network [‘The best known voice in England!’ (Shakespeare 2014, p.134)]. Doynel recalls hearing her father’s voice in the autumn of 1939, speaking from the BBC’s new, secret headquarters; ‘Conversational, solid, at arm’s reach’ (Shakespeare 2014, p.134). It is clear from Trehwella and Doynel’s accounts that the BBC represented trustworthiness and consistency, providing listeners with comfort, reassurance, and a sense of belonging to their home nation. Significantly, for Priscilla Doynel, it also provided an opportunity for her to feel reconnected with her father.

The third factor influencing British women to freely express their British national identity whilst residing in France during the Phoney War was the messages communicated to British civilians by the British authorities on the ground in France. British women writing during the Phoney War expressed a sense of calm and confidence in the British authorities that they would be able to leave when it became necessary, Rosemary Say wrote in a letter to her father in early 1940: ‘With the help of the Consulate and authorities who are friends I shall manage perfectly all right when I want to leave.’ (Say and Holland 2012, p.43)

Interviewee Ted Fisher recalled his family’s experience with the British authorities near Paris during the Phoney War:

My father did a lot for the... the British colony, he was president of the club. [In] 1940 when he went up to the Embassy he used to say, “Do we evacuate?” “Oh no, no, no, no, no, no, we’re going to send them back. Oh no no no...” Stiff upper lip and all that kind of thing.<sup>51</sup>

A letter written by Mariette Smart to the American Consul in Nice in March 1941 indicated that she and other British civilians had been reassured since September 1938 that Britain would

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with Ted Fisher, Oxford, August 2015.



provide for them and arrange repatriation 'if danger should come.'<sup>52</sup> These testimonies suggest that British civilians were reassured by the British consuls and embassies that there was no immediate threat and that they would be provided for should the situation deteriorate. This was not the case for many British civilians, who were left stranded when the British authorities evacuated France in June 1940. Following advice from the British authorities, British civilians were confident that they could remain safely in France and, in the case of Ted Hales,' delayed their departures based on information received from the Embassy. Oliver Harvey served as minister for the British Embassy in Paris from December 1939 until the fall of France in June 1940. His diplomatic diary written during the Phoney War highlights the strength of the British government's pursuit of a policy of appeasement, due, in his opinion, to anti-Soviet sentiments in government: 'The rich classes in the Party [who] fear taxation and believe Nazis on the whole are more conservative than Communists or Socialists: any war, whether we win or not, would destroy the rich idle classes and so they are for peace at any price' (Harvey 1970, p.222). As late as February 1940, Neville Chamberlain refused to 'beat the Germans too hard for fear that it would 'create chaos and open the door to Bolshevism'' (Anievas 2011, p.626). The life history narratives from British civilians on the ground in France reveal the lack of concern and urgency present at the British Embassy, and Harvey's diary indicates that the desire for appeasement, even as late as February 1940, may well have influenced the advice given to British subjects in France during the Phoney War. Embassies are important for British civilians in terms of national identity and belonging on two levels; they are first an external frontier of the state, a physical representation of the British government, the place advice is sought, decisions are made, and permission is granted. The British Embassy in Paris, and British Consulates in other major French cities including Marseille and Bordeaux, were a diplomatic representation and symbol of the British government in France. The Ambassador, Embassy and Consulate staff are spokespeople for the nation state, and as indicated in the sources quoted above, British civilians depended on these institutions for advice. These institutions also carry an ideological importance for British civilians; they embody the themes and values of 'Britishness' mentioned in chapter 1; they are considered trustworthy, well-informed, and responsible. Wight and Beech argue, 'The nation could not survive without its people adhering

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<sup>52</sup> TNA FO 916 132, Letter from Miss Mariette Smart to The American consul in charge of British interests, Nice. March 15 1941.

to certain codes of conduct and receiving in return certain rights' (Weight and Beech 1998, p.1). The institutions which represented the British nation, the Embassy and Consulate, required British civilians to adhere to certain codes of conduct whilst on French soil, however British civilians also expected to receive certain rights from the British government. As the section analyzing 'Britishness' and belonging post May-1940 will reveal, although British civilians adhered to expected codes of conduct, it was the rights and support that they expected to receive *from* the British Embassy and Consulates which was a more contentious issue. Many were left disappointed following the German invasion as they arrived at embassies which had been hurriedly deserted. As well as support received from the British government, these women's family support networks were also threatened from September 1939 onwards, as several British women were separated from their husbands and fathers who were called up to fight.

For many British women, the Phoney War represented the first rupture in connection with their loved ones. Those living on French soil married to French men were separated from their husbands who were called up on the 1 September. British women were also affected by the mobilization of British troops. Antonia Hunt and her family were living in England in September 1939 when her father was sent to France with the B.E.F. (British Expeditionary Force). Hunt's mother decided to move the family to France to stay with her niece in Brittany so that her husband would not need to return to England to see them when he was on leave (Hunt 1982, p.7).

Finally...we left Dover for Calais in November 1939, to cross the heavily mined channel. We were the only passengers in a small cargo ship, and had to wear bulky, old-fashioned cork life jackets the whole way across. Minefields had been laid as soon as war broke out, so we dodged out way across. Keeping to the 'safe' lanes' (Hunt 1982, p.7).

The desire to be near her husband was clearly strong for Hunt's mother, so strong that it compelled her to cross the heavily mined channel with her daughter. Hunt writes, 'My mother's first husband had been killed in the 1914-1918 War only three months after their marriage' (1982, p.6). The desperation to be close to her husband during the second war in her lifetime would surely have influenced Mrs. Hunt's decision. Although many husbands and fathers were absent during this period, British women's lives continued to be shaped by them.

Higonnet & Higonnet use the image of two, intertwined strands of a 'double helix' to illustrate the 'persistent system of gender relationships' (1987, p.34) in which wartime women found themselves. Diamond articulates, 'Women whose circumstances were radically altered by the war because of absent husbands... had much more to cope with' (1999, p.69). Priscilla Doynel took on extra responsibilities at the family home because of the absence of her husband and brothers in law: 'Priscilla milked the cows, helped Monsieur Carer to paste brown paper strips on the windows, stitched curtains for the blackout' (Shakespeare 2014, p.133). In an entirely feminine household, Priscilla Doynel and her relatives were forced to take on additional responsibilities, and Doynel's circumstances were 'radically altered' (Diamond 1999, p.69) as she relocated to Normandy to stay with her husband's family, being required to complete tasks which were entirely unfamiliar to her.

The absence of husbands and fathers also influenced British women's ability to make decisions. For British families, access to outside networks could be further limited by the absence of men who were often better connected and informed due to their jobs. Antonia Hunt observed, 'Though we were not aware of the censorship of the French newspapers, and there were, of course, no British ones, as February slid into March our entirely feminine household became aware that all was not as it should be' (Hunt 1982, p.11). The phrase 'became aware' suggests that Antonia Hunt and her female relatives were somewhat isolated from the outside world. Unlike the Hales' in Paris who had access to British newspapers and regularly corresponded with their adult sons who were in London, Hunt's family did not have the same connections. Instead of actively seeking news and information like Samuel and Elizabeth Hales in London, Hunt's account suggests a sense of passivity, waiting for events to unfold around them, content to be close to her father, and steered by his responsibilities in the B.E.F. For younger women, such as Rosemary Say, fathers represented the voice of authority and reason, advising their young daughters about which course of action to take. Speaking of her parents, Rosemary Say wrote,

Once the war had started they wanted me home and they continued to worry about me throughout the period of the Phoney War. In October, my concerned father enlisted the support of the British Consul in nearby Marseille, a Mr. Norman King (Say and Holland 2012, p.41).

Although Say's father was absent (in England), he continued to worry about her and looked to British officials for assistance in helping his daughter to make decisions. Women like Antonia Hunt and her mother, and Rosemary Say, carried an additional emotional burden during this period due to the separation from their loved ones and their dependence on male family members to make decisions about how they should proceed. They were faced with the difficulty of negotiating the Phoney War as British expatriates in France, and were forced to do this alone, separated from the men in their lives who would normally help them to make choices. Conversely, women who were used to assuming additional responsibility, such as Pearl Witherington who worked for the British Embassy and was the main breadwinner in her family, did not appear as hesitant in their ability to make decisions. Without a father or husband to instruct her of the best course of action, Witherington was the decision maker in her family and determined herself what she and her family should do. Her role as personal assistant to the King's air attaché in Paris meant that she may have had access to some additional information, as well as the promise of a diplomatic pass should she need to escape France (Seymour-Jones 2013, p.21). Witherington did not need to consult a male family member to decide what to do, nor did she have the additional support networks which this may have offered. As will be evaluated in the final section of this chapter, this freedom to make decisions without consulting a male family member served Pearl Witherington and her family well as they were able to escape France before the German occupation. Witherington was later recruited to SOE where she served as an agent in the F section. She was in charge of the SOE 'Wrestler network' in the Valencay-Issoudun-Châteauroux triangle which comprised 1500 'maquis' fighters.<sup>53</sup> Both Witherington and the network played an important role fighting against the Germans during the D-day landings.

It is evident that the declaration of the Phoney War brought distinct challenges to women across France, and that British women were no exception. General mobilisation represented the first separation from their loved ones, which for some women would last for the duration of the war if their husbands or fathers were captured as POWs. This separation was particularly difficult for families who remembered the events of 1914 to 1918 all too clearly. The desire to

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<sup>53</sup> The 'maquis' or 'maquisards' were French guerrilla resistance fighters, most of whom had fled to the mountains to avoid Vichy's *Sévice du Travail Obligatoire*. The name 'maquis' refers both to the fighters and to the inhospitable terrain in which they lived.

be near to their husbands influenced some British women's decision making, and remaining near their loved ones motivated their choice to linger in France or even to travel to France from Britain, as with Antonia Hunt's family. The importance of 'feeling safe' in how British women conceptualised their national identity has also been established; because many British women continued to feel safe to belong and to self-identify as 'British' as an ally of France, their lives continued in much the same way as they had before the war. They assumed dual identities, were free to travel and work, and were often in an advantageous position due to their access to additional news networks such as the BBC or British press. The next and final section explores how British women's construction of their national identity changed during the period from June to December 1940, as Britain transitioned from being an ally of France to an enemy.

#### 3.4 June 1940 to December 1940: The transition from ally to alien

Friday 10<sup>th</sup> May. Now it has really started (Werth 1940, p.13).

'The reasons for the Fall of France remain a matter of debate, but whether this was a "strange defeat", in Marc Bloch's famous phrase, or a "strange victory", as historian Ernest May has argued, it was unquestionably a massive humiliation for France' (Reynolds 2013, p.199). The false security which had been perceived by many people in France during the period of the Phoney War was shattered in May 1940 as the German army surprised the Allies and attacked via the Ardennes. The Maginot Line, the Allies' primary defensive strategy, was left isolated and, 'having passed through the Belgian Ardennes without difficulty, nine Panzer divisions, supported by the élite divisions and in particular by fighter planes, pressed on towards the Meuze' (Azéma 1984, p.32). By the 15 May, the way ahead to Paris was open. Azéma observes, 'In the face of the invasion, everything collapsed' (Azéma 1984, p.32). Encouraged by the French government, the public had placed 'robust faith' (Alexander 2013, p.95) in the Maginot Line, and were confident in the superiority of the Allied armies. The sudden defeat meant that 'people had a long way to fall' (Diamond 2007, p.7). They found themselves in a relative 'no man's land' with limited information and where, 'the institutions which bound French people into some wider network of loyalties...all collapsed for a time' (Diamond 2007, p.16).

As the German armies advanced, so began the mass exodus; starting with the Dutch, Belgian and Luxembourg populations, and then joined by the population of northern France. 'It has been estimated that between 6 and 10 million people fled their homes' (Jackson 2001, p.120), and headed, panic-stricken, for the south of France. Diamond's account (2007) outlines the experiences of mostly women, children and the elderly who were fleeing the approaching armies. British women too were caught up in the mass population movement, which lasted around six weeks in between the invasion of the Germans and the signing of the armistice. British women's written accounts confirm the same panic and frenzy, and the importance of getting away before the Germans arrived:

Events began to accelerate like a speeded-up film. Now we were packing, flinging things into our suitcases and cramming down the lids. Most things had to be left behind.<sup>54</sup>

I hastened along to Sam and said something has gone wrong. With that the bell rang and Madeleine (Sam's secretary) appeared calling out. "It's 6 o'clock – the Germans are close to Versailles. I give you 20 minutes to prepare and get out of here."<sup>55</sup>

Daphne Wall and the Hales, individuals who had been residing in France for several years, both communicate a sense of urgency and disorientation. Their accounts suggest that receiving this news was a significant moment in terms of no longer feeling safe in France. Their sense of security was shattered with the news of the impending arrival of the enemy. Both Wall's family and the Hales had expressed a desire to be near family members in England should the situation deteriorate, and we can hypothesise that their primary concern would be how to get out of the path of the Germans and get to safety, first in France and then ultimately back in Britain. Pétain's speech on 17 June 1940 referred to the plight of refugees as justification for his decision to request an armistice, and following his address, 'stranded refugees halted their journeys and started to consider their next steps' (Diamond 2007, p.112). Pétain's speech seems to have been a significant marker for some British women too, bringing a sense of clarity to the chaos of the initial days of the exodus, yet it also left individuals such as Daphne Wall and family disappointed that France had fallen so suddenly. Wall recalled listening to Pétain's address with her parents in Bordeaux while waiting for a boat to leave France.

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<sup>54</sup> Daphne Wall, 'Flight from France: Bordeaux to London,' on Fleeing Hitler.org, available at: <http://www.fleeinghitler.org/story/daphne-wall-flight-from-france-from-bordeaux-to-london/> (accessed 30/9/16)

<sup>55</sup> Hales, Elizabeth. Diary. 1940-1944. Private papers of John Hales. London, United Kingdom.

‘The adults were silent, white faced. So that was it. For France. The proud country that had given us so much and where we’d been so happy, it was the end.’<sup>56</sup>

For Daphne’s family, Pétain’s call for people to lay down their arms severed their sense of belonging to France and confirmed that their decision to leave was the right one. Obtaining passage on a boat back to England was not an opportunity that was available to everyone. Vinen observes, ‘Escape overseas was an expensive luxury... a place on a boat was a huge privilege’ (Vinen 2006, p.144). Wealth was a significant determining factor in whether individuals could leave France. Serocold’s journal reveals the material wealth of passengers who arrived at Cannes, trying to secure a place on a boat home: ‘People arrived in Rolls-Royces etc., full of luggage, simply left them on the quay side, sometimes selling them for 1,000 francs or so, or leaving them stranded.’<sup>57</sup> British journalist Alexander Werth also outlines that the passengers sailing with him from Bordeaux to Falmouth were either from the British upper classes, or like himself, were journalists who had been following the French government, first to Tours and then moving on to Bordeaux:

Business men from Bordeaux, journalists from Paris [...] some slightly bewildered specimens of the retired-colonial class from the Riviera – that is the last people in the world who expected to see their well-ordered existence disturbed in this way (1940, pp.209–210).

Both Serocold and Werth’s accounts indicate that money was an advantage in securing passage on a boat home. They also reveal the extent to which the German invasion disrupted the lives of wealthy British expatriates who had been residing in France for many years. Their ‘well-ordered existence,’ the luxurious cars and vast amounts of luggage, suggest a life in France which had been lavish and comfortable, and which was completely disrupted by events in May and June 1940. The sense of bewilderment articulated by Werth also indicates the shock and trauma felt by wealthy British expatriates, expecting to see out their retirement with the many benefits a life on the Riviera as part of the British expatriate community afforded. Suddenly they were no longer ‘British in France,’ they were instead ‘British fleeing France,’ abandoning

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<sup>56</sup> Daphne Wall, ‘Flight from France: Bordeaux to London,’ on Fleeing Hitler.org, available at: <http://www.fleeinghitler.org/story/daphne-wall-flight-from-france-from-bordeaux-to-london/> (accessed 30/9/16)

<sup>57</sup> IWM LBY 83/2130, A Short Account of the war experiences of Claude and Germaine Serocold, France 1939-1942, Claude Serocold, Published by Herbert Fitch, 1942, p.9.

villas, expensive cars, and belongings. For those being repatriated to Britain, this point of departure marked an end to embracing dual national identities; as they abandoned their possessions they also left behind their sense of belonging and safety in France, the privileges which that life abroad afforded them, and they were faced with a crowded crossing on a coal liner back to the English south coast. Ports such as Bordeaux were teeming with British expatriates desperate to secure a passage home. Reports in the British press described chaotic scenes at French ports; people abandoning their cars, ships overcrowded ('1500 in a ship that holds 200'<sup>58</sup>) and machine gun fire overhead from German planes. On the 'large dirty-yellow ship' which Werth boarded on the 17 June 1940, there was accommodation for 150 and 'ten times that number' of refugees on board (1940, p.207). British expatriate's departures were so hasty that some families were separated and a reunion for British refugees in London took place in July 1940 in attempt to reunite them. A reporter at the reunion described, 'Stories of hurried departures, of relations lost, of friends vanished in the chaos were told and retold by these men and women.'<sup>59</sup> While most French people on the roads saw continuing their journey as futile after the signing of the armistice on 22 June 1940, the exodus for British people extended beyond this six-week period and repatriations continued into 1941.<sup>60</sup> The ongoing repatriation of British expatriates up until at least November 1941 offers a different chronology of the exodus from that presented in French historiography. Most repatriations took place via Lisbon, and in October 1941, around 30 British subjects per week were still being repatriated to Britain via this route.<sup>61</sup> The process for repatriation via Lisbon was lengthy and British people had to first apply to the American Consulates in Vichy, Marseille, Lyon or Nice who arranged a French exit visa, a Spanish transit visa and a Portuguese visa. Travel as far as Barcelona was arranged by the American Consulates and from then on, the British Consul-General in Barcelona arranged their journey to Madrid and on to the Portuguese border.<sup>62</sup> Delays to visas meant that British people were often forced to wait for some time for the American consuls in the Non-Occupied zone of France. Although most French people returned home by the autumn of 1940, those British people who had reached the zone libre continued their journeys well

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<sup>58</sup> British library, Monks, Noel, Reporter. '1,500 in a ship that holds 200.' *Daily Mail* [London]. 21 June 1940. *Daily Mail Historical Archive, 1896-2004*.

<sup>59</sup> British library, 'British refugees' reunion.' *Times* [London]. 27 July 1940. *The Times Digital Archive*.

<sup>60</sup> TNA, FO 916 132, Correspondence from the British Embassy in Madrid, 7 October 1941.

<sup>61</sup> TNA, FO 916 132, Letter to Consulate department from British Embassy in Madrid, 7 October 1941.

<sup>62</sup> TNA, FO 916 132, Letter from Mr J.P.Price, British repatriation office, Lisbon to Miss S.J. Warner O.B.E., British Red Cross society, London. 17 November 1941.



after this point. The next section explores what motivated some British people to leave France in June 1940, and what prevented others from doing so.

It has been established that the feeling of safety experienced by some British women in France during the Phoney War contributed to their sense of belonging and freedom to practice both their British and French identities. The invasion of France represented a turning point for these women in terms of where they felt free to belong. Emotional investments of being and belonging are, 'continually adapted to the changing nature and strength of ties to the 'home' and 'host' spaces' (Howes and Hammett 2016, p.22). Following the invasion, several British women experienced a change in their strength of ties to 'home' and a strong desire to return to safety. Rosemary Say recalled;

The events of the few weeks following my return to Avignon soon shook me out of my stubborn complacency... The rapid advance of the German army through the low Countries and Northern France stunned us all...As I cycled back from school with Biquet one warm afternoon at the end of May, I saw a car arrive with a mattress on its roof, holed with machine-gun fire. The boy thought this was an amusing sight but I was horrified. Reality had pushed its way into my dreamy little world and I was frightened. (2012, p.44)

Similarly, Gertrude Trehwella, staying with her husband in Paris, recalls their response to the arrival of the refugees;

No one spoke, and in that tense, unnatural hush we could hear the purr of motors as the cars crawled by at a snail's pace, the creaking of the wheels under the strain of overloaded vehicles, and the trudge of tired feet plodding doggedly along. The sight of so much suffering added to our misery as we sat there waiting for someone to come and relieve us from this awful monotony, which had the reality of a nightmare from which we could not awake (Manley 2014, p.22).

The desire expressed by Gertrude Trehwella to be rescued by someone, and the fear expressed by Rosemary Say, were also echoed by other British citizens who found themselves in France at this pivotal moment. The hope that they would be helped by someone may have placed British people in a more precarious position, as they lingered for longer while others made the choice to flee. Some found themselves in an advantageous position due to their British status;

Claude Serocold recalls that on their journey along the Riviera in search of a boat back to England, 'We were stopped by military controls several times but our English nationality always passed us without trouble, as at that time we were still allies.'<sup>63</sup> In British accounts of the exodus, including Serocold's, it is evident that access to a car was a great advantage and made arriving at a port much quicker and easier. Rosemary Say and Gertrude Trehella were left stranded in Paris dependent on public transport to travel anywhere beyond the city. Diamond's account of the exodus confirms the advantage which upper and middle class families experienced as they either had their own cars or access to one. 'Cars became such valuable currency that any that moved, however pitiful their state, were seen as desirable' (Diamond 2007, p.54). For those left stranded in cities, the British Embassy and Consulates were the primary port of call. In principal, the British embassies were designed to offer additional support and were the primary destination for all British citizens unsure of what to do. British subjects flocked to the Embassy in Paris and Consulates in Marseilles, Nice and Lyon hoping to find some instruction or contingency plan. In reality, many arrived at chaotic scenes and met officials who were often as shocked as they were at the rapidity with which the Germans had invaded.

11 June: At the Consulate found a room full of indignant Britishers and two officials mainly engaged in answering the constantly ringing phones. (Skipwith 1968, p.177).

His face seemed to have a perpetual look of worry. Maybe this resulted from being continually shouted and screamed at by irate English people who could not believe that the brave words "without let or hindrance" on their passport did not, in reality, mean much. (Say and Holland 2012, p.72).

As discussed in the Phoney War section, the British Embassy represented both an internal and external frontier of the British state. British civilians who were clueless about their next steps looked to the Embassy and Consulates as a representation of the British government, their staff as spokespeople for the ruling classes in Britain. Ideologically, these institutions were important for British civilians who expected them to embody British national values of dependence, trustworthiness, and responsibility. They assumed that they would receive the rights due to them as British citizens, as Rosemary Say articulated, the freedom to travel

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<sup>63</sup> IWM LBY 83/2130, A Short Account of the war experiences of Claude and Germaine Serocold, France 1939-1942, Claude Serocold, Published by Herbert Fitch, 1942, p.13.

‘without let or hindrance,’ as their passports indicated. These extracts reveal the disappointment felt by British civilians arriving at the Embassy in Paris, anticipating a level of organisation, an evacuation plan, well-staffed offices and instead finding chaos, or in the worst case, embassies and consulates completely deserted.

The main body of the Consulate left last night, together with the Embassy, having told no-one, nor made any provision to evacuate nationals. (Skipwith 1968, p.177)

When I arrived at the Embassy I found that the British authorities had left Paris the night before. There was a note pinned to the door advising those of us who were left behind to seek help at the US Embassy (Say and Holland 2012, p.54).

Mariette Smart expressed her outrage at the lack of support received in a letter to the British interests’ section of the American Embassy:

I am one of the many Britishers who as far back as September 1938 received assurances and circulars from our local Vice-Consul that if danger should come to these parts our Country would provide for us and send battleships to take us away. We lived on blissfully on these assurances. When danger did come, our Consuls fled first – our district officer did nothing.<sup>64</sup>

Mariette Smart’s letter highlights the disappointment felt by British civilians in ‘their Country’; they felt abandoned by the British authorities on the ground and had delayed plans to return to Britain based on assurances that they would be adequately warned, and provided for, if they were at risk. Having been relatively free to express both their British and French national identities during the Phoney War period, in this moment of crisis British civilians were forced to look to the British government, represented by the Embassy and Consulates on the ground, as their very last resort. Their testimonies reveal the complete confidence placed in the British authorities, the dependence on ‘battleships’ and provision, ‘if danger should come.’ One young British woman recalled suddenly realising the importance of her identity documents in confirming her national status as well as her own sense of identity, ‘Without them I was no longer myself, nor indeed anyone else’(Mackworth 1987, p.20). This was a moment when British people had no option but to give prominence to their British national identity; their

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<sup>64</sup> TNA FO 916 132, Letter from Miss Mariette Smart to The American consul in charge of British interests, Nice. March 15 1941.

'host' country of residence had been invaded and they needed to access help from their 'home' country which was still free. The level of disappointment and sense of being abandoned by their 'country' is apparent. Some British people also found themselves stranded or at greater risk because they acted on inaccurate advice from the Consulates. Gertrude Trehwella wrote in her diary:

By 9.30am, we were once again on the Boulevard des Capucines and met more Britishers there. Some had been directed to Paris from Nice and Cannes, to find that instead of being able to reach England more easily, they had fallen into a trap and would inevitably be caught by the Germans (Manley 2014, p.19).

Vinen states that during the summer of 1940, 'most French people had limited and often inaccurate information. They simply did not know what was going on and many decisions were made based on false assumptions' (2006, p.16). On 11 June, a British official advised Rosemary Say in Avignon to take a train north to Paris, 'slip through to Rennes and then... to St Malo.' (2012, p.49). Based on this information, Say travelled in the opposite direction to the thousands of refugees fleeing south and from her train carriage she watched the, 'steady procession of people [moving south], towards the place I had left... cars were jammed against each other. Prams, trolleys, carts and tired horses trundled along or were pushed with a resigned doggedness' (2012, p.51). Had Rosemary Say remained in the south of France, it is likely that she would have been able to escape much more easily. Despite the promise of safety back in England, these testimonies and letters in Foreign Office archives suggest that several British people delayed their journeys because they were waiting for information from the British authorities. On 10 June, Sofka Skipwith was told that there were no orders to evacuate British nations and that any plans would be announced in the press (Skipwith 1968, p.178). In her account, Sofka Skipwith does not mention that any such announcement was made. Those left stranded at the British embassies had to look for alternative means of getting back to England, and the longer they remained in France, the more precarious their situation became.

In his speech to the nation on 16 June 1940, Pétain stated that France had, 'too few arms, too few children, too few allies.' The British army's retreat at Dunkirk had left many French people feeling bitter and betrayed. Alexander observes, 'The withdrawal exposed afresh the selfishness of "les Anglo-Saxons" when life's chips fell badly' (2013, p.101). The British and

'Britishness' started to represent something negative to the French, and according to Jackson, blaming the British for defeat, 'psychologically paved the way for France to abandon the British alliance with a clear conscience: at the end of this road lay the Armistice' (2001, p.119). Key events, such as Dunkirk, did affect British women's conception of their national identity and many of their experiences were shaped by the negative perception of Britain in France during this period. Pearl Witherington recalls the reaction of a Frenchman when she arrived outside the deserted British Embassy, "Les Anglais?" the man snapped. 'Les Anglais ont foutu le camp' (Seymour-Jones 2013, p.17). Although Pearl Witherington spoke fluent French, was born and had always lived in Paris, she acquired British status due to her parent's nationality (Seymour-Jones 2013, p.18). Witherington had to negotiate her British and French national identities, this negotiation became increasingly important, and complex, as those two nations transitioned from allies to enemies. The invasion of France and the retreat of the British armies created a crisis point for her in terms of her national identity. It was not safe for her to remain in France as a British citizen and employee of the British Embassy; all her colleagues had been ordered back to England (Seymour-Jones 2013, p.20). However, she had lived all her life in Paris; 'I was only local staff... Je n'avais pas de point de chute en Angleterre' (2014:20). Where was she supposed to go in England? The invasion, armistice and subsequent occupation compounded these complexities of national belonging and British women were faced with difficult decisions about where they should, and could, belong.

In addition to the sense of betrayal and abandonment following Dunkirk, the British attack on the French navy stationed at Mers-el-Kébir on 3 July 1940 also had a significant impact in terms of anti-British sentiment. Over 1,200 French sailors were killed in the attack (Vinen 2006, p.83) which fuelled, 'Anglophobia and the fear that the British were intent on undermining or taking over the French empire' (Alexander 2013, p.85). Following the bombing, Laval declared, 'France has never had and never will have a more inveterate enemy than Britain' (In Shakespeare 2014, p.150). 'External' events such as Dunkirk and Mers-el-Kébir influenced the 'internal' realities of British women in terms of where they felt safe to belong. Cecily Mackworth, a Welsh writer and journalist who eventually escaped to Lisbon from Marseille in August 1940, articulated her fear of being 'discovered' as British following the attack:

Late afternoon. Something has changed; those quiet streets are full of people now. Talking and angry shouting. A boy appears with a bundle of newspapers... People push and jostle... They are shouting now, “Murderers! Assassins!” eyes gleaming with hatred, more frightening by far than the German bombs. If these people guess the truth they will turn on me, beat me, claw at my face, trample on me (Mackworth 1987, p.19).

The need for a scapegoat meant that these events were maximised in Vichy and Nazi propaganda and the British portrayed as traitors and enemies (see figures 4 and 5). By association, British women found themselves in a precarious position. Mackworth’s observation that ‘something has changed,’ reveals the impact of events which flagged Britain as an enemy of the Vichy regime for British women still in France. Mackworth was afraid of being physically attacked because of her British nationality, suggesting the extent to which she felt like an enemy alien on French soil, no longer free to belong after having lived in Paris since 1937. Propaganda targeting France’s former ally is also noted in British women’s accounts and for some contributed to their unease. Elizabeth Hales wrote in her diary:

‘The people on the island read the newspapers which are controlled by the Germans. And they the French are ignorant enough to believe all they read in heavy propaganda against Britain.’<sup>65</sup>



Figure 4 – Anti British propaganda poster (Sumpf, 2018)

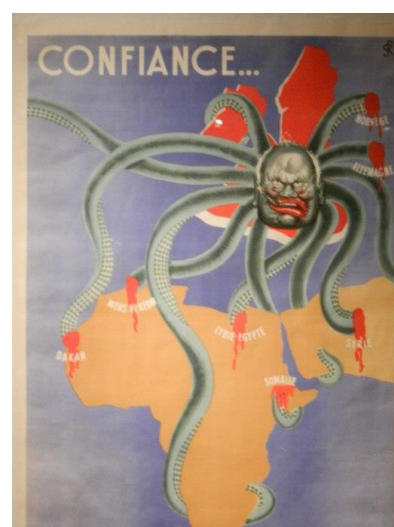


Figure 5 - Anti British propaganda poster (Sumpf, 2018)

<sup>65</sup> Hales, Elizabeth. Diary. 1940-1944. Private papers of John Hales. London, United Kingdom.

This suggests that some French people did pay heed to the negative stories about Britain which occurred in the press. Pearl Witherington's mother recalled an anti-British poster when she went to the Kommandantur in Port-en-Bessin;

Behind the Kommandantur's desk was a large poster showing an English army officer with a monocle, Sam Brown belt and swagger stick, his hands on his hips and a smile on his face. A broken down French family sat at his feet with the caption: "Ce sont les anglais qui vous ont fait ça" (Seymour-Jones 2013, p.28).

Rosemary Say describes the propaganda posters targeting the British on the walls in the centre of Paris, 'John Bull the killer; Churchill as a menacing Octopus crushing screaming victims...' (Say and Holland 2012, pp.70–1). The gendarmes in the police canteen in which Say worked were divided into pro-German and pro-British factions, the pro-Germans would taunt her with propaganda stories from Dunkirk, and rumours of a 'successful German landing at Dover' (2012, p.70). Anti-British rumours and publicity were used to deride British women and contributed to the fear of being labelled as British. The Anti-British propaganda to which Witherington's mother was exposed in Paris mid-July 1940 appears in stark contrast against the pro-Allied posters which journalist Alexander Werth saw in Paris on the 21 May, less than two months before.

The "Sailor" poster for the armaments bonds...has been torn down; they have put in its place the map of the world poster with 'nous vaincrons parce que nous sommes les plus forts' – and with the British and French Empires, Canada, the Sahara and the rest shown in large splashes of red, and a tiny little black Germany (Werth 1940, p.64).

Figure 6 shows the poster to which Werth was referring. Referencing a quotation from Paul Reynaud, the poster highlights the strategic importance of the British and French colonial empires contrasting them with the isolated, small German territory. The transition from Allied, pro-British propaganda before the armistice, to the anti-British, Vichy publications which were disseminated from the end of June 1940 onwards is a visual representation of the swiftly altered relationship between France and Britain. For British women, it would have been unsettling and disturbing to be exposed to the propaganda promoted by the occupying forces. Gertrude Trehwella confessed in her diary to, 'the constant fear of being overheard or spied on' (Manley 2014, p.40). British women chose to deny and conceal their British national identity in order to ensure their survival and acceptance into French society, whereas only a month before, their British passport was their only hope of escaping France. Some women also articulate being worried for their families back in Britain - so effective was the propaganda that Britain was likely to fall any day.

Rosemary Say - 'I realised that I was hiding from this mild-mannered official the desperate concern that I felt for my family in London. I had recently witnessed the chaotic fall of Paris and the frightening exodus of its inhabitants. I was convinced that London was about to experience a similar fate' (Say and Holland 2012, p.72).

Gertrude Trehwella - 'I see London: London under German bombs, familiar quarters of London totally destroyed: houses crumbling down, smoking heaps of ruins' (Manley 2014, p.42).



Figure 6 – Pro Allies French Propaganda poster, Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris (online), 2018.



French radio was also predicting an imminent invasion of Britain and that very soon the British would share in French defeat. The 'external', public messages of the nation shaped British women's 'internal', personal negotiations of national belonging. Not only did they feel vulnerable and afraid as national representatives of a country which was deemed to have betrayed France, but were told that their primary place of belonging, England, was on the brink of invasion and no longer safe. This would have left some British women feeling that they did not belong anywhere. The external classification of the British as enemies and traitors continued to shape British women's experiences, beyond their association with the actions of their homeland, as individuals they were classified as 'enemy aliens' from 9 September 1940 (Peschanski 2000, p.350).

British men aged between 16 and 65 years old were ordered by the Germans to be interned on 9 September 1940 and women, children and men above 65 were ordered to report at their local German commandant's office in the Northern zone (2000, p.250), or to their local French police station in the Southern zone (Koessler 1942, p.122). Internment of those coming from enemy territories was a tried and tested method of close surveillance in France, the precedent having been set during the First World War with the classification and subsequent internment of around 60 000 people (Peschanski, 2000, p.103). The categorisation of 'enemy alien' was not restricted to France, and 'restrictive measures against alien populations *throughout Europe* could be justified on the grounds of military necessity or national security' (Ugolini 2011, p.91, emphasis added). Enemy civilians, 'were not only resented as non-participants in a national endeavor, but also came under suspicion as spies or potential recruits in the opposing army' (Stibbe 2008, p.51). Ugolini argues that the outbreak of war, 'necessitated powerful definitions within the national imaginary of 'we' and 'them' with the articulation of a unitary [British] identity inevitably raising questions of 'who was included and who was excluded'' (2011, p.2). Whereas before the war national identity had been clearly defined, they now had to interpret and negotiate a new 'constellation of beliefs, characteristics and values' (Purcell 2007, p.5) according to their revised identity as British enemy aliens. The classification of British civilians as enemy aliens in France separated British expatriates from the French population in the national imaginary and excluded them from belonging. This separation was intensified as Britain civilians had to weather the transition from France's friend to her enemy in a matter of weeks.

The impact of this classification as enemy aliens affected British women's freedom and safety to 'belong' in France as a British citizen. From September 1940, Rosemary Say started working as an au pair for a French family in Paris, and was aware of the risk that her employer was taking in hiring her.

Madame Iazard showed much patience and kindness (and also courage) in taking me into her house in the first place. Not all her friends approved: Serge Lifar, already busy directing a ballet at the Opéra, asked that the English girl wait outside when we went to visit him (Say & Holland, 2012:82).

Not only was finding employment challenging for British women as 'enemy aliens', but this extract highlights that some people were afraid that they may be tainted by mere association with British people, to the extent that they asked them to wait outside their apartments, in Rosemary Say's case. On October 17<sup>th</sup> 1940, a German order stated that 'Any British subject over 15 years of age had to be denounced to the nearest German military command...The sanctions against any such contravention of this decree extended all the way up to the death penalty' (Koessler 1942, p.123). The threat to anyone housing an illegal 'enemy alien' was therefore very real, explaining the reticence of some French nationals to interact with British women. Rosemary Say did not feel that she belonged in France due to her external classification as an enemy alien. To literally erase their association with Britain, Sister McGauley recalled that, when travelling to Angers, she and another English nun called into a shop and asked for water to remove all the English labels from their cases.<sup>66</sup> This suggests that some British women attempted to disappear into the French population, removing any signs of belonging to Britain. The separation and exclusion created by the classification of the British as enemy aliens is epitomised by Priscilla Doynel's interactions with her husband's French family. Doynel recalls her sister-in-law bursting into her room and demanding that she flush her British passport down the toilet (Shakespeare 2014, p.155). Doynel refused, however when notices appeared stating that anyone hiding a British national would be shot, her husband's family decided that they were no longer comfortable with her presence in their house. 'What she remembered was how rigid Georges looked. "You can't stay here." The voice was emphatic...

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<sup>66</sup> IWM 9396 Private Papers of Sister Patricia McGauley, An Account of the War Years spent in Captivity in Angers Barracks, Camp Vauban Barracks Frontstalag 142 and Vittel Frontstalag 194.

“My mother is too old to run the risk of hiding you. Go back to your flat in Paris and go to the police.” (Shakespeare 2014, p.157). Priscilla Doynel’s national identity was perceived to be so much of a liability that her husband’s family would no longer shelter her. She was no longer welcome in his family due to her classification as an enemy alien. It is evident that some British women found themselves isolated because of their British status, without friends and excluded from communities. Their enemy status forced some women to be nomadic; they stayed in one place, either working or living, until they were told that it was too risky, and then were forced to move on to the next destination. Gertrude Trehwella and her husband moved around various hotels in Paris so that they could avoid the Germans who were requisitioning different guesthouses. Rosemary Say had three different jobs in the space of a few months as different organisations or individuals were unwilling to run the risk of employing her. The longer British women remained in France, particularly in the capital, the more dangerous it became for them as enemy aliens. Their lives became migratory as they were either told to leave by French people who did not want to be associated with them, or because they were avoiding the occupying forces.

Given that British women no longer felt safe to signal their British nationality in public, ‘identity markers’ or ‘flagging’s of nationhood’ usually took place in secret. Both Gertrude Trehwella and Priscilla Doynel mention the continued importance of the BBC as a connection to home after the signing of the armistice, as it had been during the Phoney War. Not only was the BBC appreciated because of its, ‘provision of prompt and honest news’ (Chadwick, 2015, p.429), it was also popular in, ‘boosting French morale, restoring and maintaining belief in Britain, fostering hatred of the Germans, and positioning Vichy as Germany’s instrument’ (2015, p.429). The BBC broadcasts were a lifeline for Gertrude Trehwella and her husband, who tuned in regularly, desperate for news of home.

As each ghastly day follows the other, we can only sit waiting for news, wondering what we shall hear next...until it is time for the next news and we listen once more, tense, straining every nerve to hear better, wondering how much we are told and how much remains hidden from us (Manley 2014, pp.41–2).

Priscilla Doynel also continued to listen to her father’s BBC broadcasts; when she was with her husband’s family she would secretly listen in her bedroom while the rest of the family listened

to the French radio downstairs, predicting English defeat (Shakespeare 2014, p.150). Although living in the same house and part of the same family, the classification of Priscilla Doynel as enemy alien meant that 'internal' state frontiers were poignantly drawn in the Doynel family home. Priscilla Doynel, British, listening to the BBC upstairs, whilst the rest of the family, French, listened to the Vichy radio in the living room. Doynel's 'Britishness' suddenly became a cause of fear, isolation and persecution. The segregation within families and separation from home were difficult for all British civilians who found themselves in France during this period. However, life for British women became particularly challenging when British civilian men between 16 and 65 were interned from September 1940. The specific challenges this created are explored in the next section.

Through tracing British women's experiences during the Phoney War, this research has established that separation from loved ones was an additional burden to women's negotiation of daily life in France. From June to December 1940, many British women's choices and experiences were further shaped by their relationships with their husbands. Rumours of internment and the fear of separation from their loved ones because of their newly acquired status as 'enemy aliens' weighed heavily on some women's minds. Gertrude Trehwella wrote in her diary in August 1940.<sup>67</sup> 'The Nazis have begun rounding up British civilians and we live in an atmosphere of almost constant apprehension. At night I lie awake, thinking every time I hear the lift that the soldiers are coming to fetch my husband away' (Manley 2014, p.39). Fishman concludes that one of the characteristics of POWs' wives was the burden of waiting for their husbands, 'waiting for an uncertain return' (Fishman 1991:xi). In many ways, their lives paused as they focused on maintaining (*garder*) the household until the absent one returned (1991:127). The extract from Gertrude Trehwella's diary suggests that the waiting began even before their husbands were taken away. British women were aware that their husbands would be interned ['Our turn will come in time' (Manley 2014, p.45)], but did not know when this would be. The torment of waiting for the knock on the door meant that these British women's lives were consumed with anxiety and uncertainty. Waiting for absent husbands also characterised some women's experiences. Priscilla Doynel recalled that in her

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<sup>67</sup> Although the order to round up British men between 16 and 65 was issued in September 1940, Gertrude Trehwella mentions that British civilians are being rounded up as early as August 1940. This suggests that in some areas of France arrest and internment preceded the date of the official decree.

husband's family home, 'Three empty chairs kept the men's places at dinner' (Shakespeare 2014, p.149). It was the role of a dutiful French wife to continue waiting for one's husband and to be ready for his return at any moment (Fishman 1991:xi). Although Fishman's study referred to French wives of prisoners of war, we can see parallels between the French women who waited for their husband's return, and Priscilla Doynel waiting for her partner. This sense of immobilisation also marked British women's lives in different ways during this period; either anticipating their husband's return from the army or waiting for them to be arrested and interned due to their enemy status. It also affected their ability to make decisions, as some paused to defer to their husbands for instructions of what to do next. In Priscilla Doynel's case, the problem with waiting for her husband to guide her next steps was that when she went to visit him in a POW camp near Chartres he was so affected by his experiences of war that he was incapable of deciding anything.

He had fled Rouen on foot – his battalion reduced from 1,200 to a few sergeants and corporals. No orders. No officers... Robert had stuffed a serviette into the barrel of his rifle as a sign of surrender, and walked and walked towards the south, walking until his shoes flapped apart. He had stolen chickens and lived off half-eaten meals in houses that had been hastily abandoned... The tears started to fall again...

Priscilla asked: "What am I supposed to do?"

But Robert had frozen up. He told her, staring at his hands: "I can't make any decisions."

(Shakespeare 2014, pp.153–4).

The trauma of fighting, escaping, and imprisonment deeply affected Robert Doynel's character and, helpless, he told his wife to return home and ask his brother for advice. When she did so, his brother told Priscilla Doynel that she could no longer live with them as her British enemy status was too dangerous for them to house her, and that she must go to Paris (2014, p.157). Doynel was unable to make her own decision about what she should do and her choices were dictated by the different men in her family. This tallies with the observation that during wartime, 'Relationships of domination and subordination are retained through discourses that systematically designate unequal gender relations' (Higonnet and Higonnet 1987, p.6). After being told that she must return to Paris, Priscilla Doynel stated, 'As usual, I did what I was told' (Shakespeare 2014, p.157). Female dependency characterised Doynel's experiences during

this period and illustrates 'the identification of woman with her culturally assigned subordinate position' (Higonnet and Higonnet 1987, p.38). Doynel's deference to her husband and brother-in-law's instructions led her straight into the hands of the occupying forces. She was required to register daily at the local police station and connected with other British women who were still in the capital. Priscilla Doynel was then rounded up with the other British civilians who had not managed to escape from France and were not yet interned; men over 65, women and children.

The next chapter explores what happened to these British women who remained in France from December 1940. A number were rounded up at the beginning of December and interned in Nazi camps in Besançon and then Vittel. According to Koessler, the roundup of British women in Paris in December 1940 was known locally as *l'affaire des nannies* since so many of those arrested were older women (1942, p.124). National identity and belonging continued to shape British women's experiences throughout the war, some women even rediscovered a new sense of national identity whilst they were interned.

This chapter has established the importance of national identity in shaping British women's experiences during their transition from ally to enemy alien. British women's emotional investments of being and belonging were 'continually adapted to the changing nature and strength of ties to the 'home' and 'host' spaces' (Howes and Hammett 2016, p.22). Strength of ties to the 'host' space, France, remained strong during the period of the Phoney War as British women still experienced a relative freedom to express their British identity. They often assumed dual identities, travelling back and forth between France and Britain and encouraged their family members to do the same. The importance of 'feeling safe' contributed to their sense of national belonging and their freedom to belong in their 'host' country. The invasion represented a turning point and because they no longer felt safe to remain in France, the majority of British women joined the exodus and tried to escape the approaching German armies. In some ways, British women's experiences paralleled the wider context of the exodus, their departures were hurried, their belongings abandoned, and their anxiety apparent. In other ways, British women's exodus differed as it stretched beyond the signing of the armistice, the point at which many French people responded to official instructions, turned around, and began their journeys home. For British people who had now lost their 'home',

journeys back to Britain continued well into 1941. Nonetheless, those women with the strongest sense of belonging to France were the most likely to remain and ignored strong recommendations from the British government. The slippage between 'external' and 'internal' definitions of belonging is also apparent. Categories such as 'enemy alien' meant that British women who had 'belonged' in France for several years were ostracised by some French people as Britain was labelled an enemy and a traitor in Vichy and Nazi propaganda. The 'external' definition of women as 'British' also proved problematic as some British women's 'internal' self-definition included aspects of British and French national identity. The specific context of the war and the way it played out in France did not allow for the nuance of hybrid British and French national identities.

Relationships with male family members emerges as key to British women's negotiation of the period between September 1939 and December 1940, and these shaped the choices that many of them made. The influence of men on women's choices was evident at different points during the fifteen-month period, including general mobilisation (in Britain and France) in September 1939, and the internment of British men in France in September 1940. Women often found themselves waiting; waiting for loved ones to leave, waiting for them to be arrested and imprisoned or waiting for them to return. Waiting for husbands also affected women's ability to make decisions; they needed to take the initiative. However they were often paralysed because they were separated from their loved ones; because their husbands were no longer able to make decisions for them or because they had little or no experience of making decisions for themselves. Women who were confused or hesitant missed their chance of escaping and were trapped in France, whilst those who were independent and were more used to making decisions could leave. This reveals that advice from male family members shaped British women's decision-making process; they depended on husbands, fathers, or brothers for advice and if their relatives were unable to help them, British women were stranded.

The next chapter focuses on the Occupation and continues to examine the importance of national identity for British women. Selecting women who chose to remain in France because they felt a strong affinity with their 'host' nation, the chapter will interrogate whether these feelings evolved as measures targeting 'enemy aliens' became more severe. It focuses on the

internment camp in Vittel in which most British women were incarcerated for varying lengths of time during the conflict. It will question whether British women's sense of 'Britishness' was reconfigured between 1940 and 1944 and how their interactions with 'enemy aliens' of other nationalities impacted on their individual sense of belonging.



#### **4. Complexities of Belonging: British women in Vittel**

As the previous chapter has highlighted, the exodus was a period of significant upheaval for British women when they were forced to decide whether to remain in France or to return to Britain. Research undertaken for this thesis suggests that the response of British women was shaped by their sense of belonging to Britain. For those without a clearly defined identification with 'home', the choice was more complicated, and they were likely to remain in France. In June 1940, those women who were not able, or who chose not to leave, were labelled 'enemy aliens' and were likely to end up in German hands, which normally meant internment in a camp. If they held a British passport they were most likely to be sent to Frontstalag 142 in Besançon in the first instance and then to Vittel (Peschanski, 2000). Internment therefore emerges as a dominant experience for British women in Occupied France and as such forms the primary focus of this chapter. British women's experiences of internment in Vittel is an under researched area, despite the fact that the camp is often featured in British women's own memories of the period. It was the largest camp of British women in wartime France and is therefore instructive and exemplary in understanding how British women negotiated this period of conflict on enemy soil.

This chapter asks to what extent British women's responses to internment were shaped by their sense of national belonging and identity. It will question the importance of 'Britishness' for internees, especially those who had limited ties to Britain before the Occupation and will evaluate how 'Britishness' intersected with internees' other identities, such as being Jewish or French. The chapter will interrogate the acts and rituals performed by internees to determine whether these were used to belonging to a larger national community. It will scrutinise the arrival of non-British internees to the camp from the end of 1942 onwards, questioning the effect this had on notions of national identity for British women. It will also analyse British women's external classification and self-identification as British once released from Vittel, either because of their age or at the Liberation of the camp in September 1944, in order to establish whether questions of national identity persisted outside the collective experience of internment. The chapter will analyse life history narratives and archival sources to address these research questions.

This chapter first briefly sets out the theoretical framework of national identity which serves as a lens to view British women's experiences between 1940 and 1944. It is then divided into five main parts focusing on these experiences. The first three sections concentrate on British women in Vittel. Firstly, 'Belonging: internal and external frontiers', uses Billig's notion of the external classification of the state, and an individual's self-identification with the nation state, as a framework to evaluate internees negotiation of different national identities in Vittel. Secondly, 'Performing Britishness', analyses how British women flagged their national identity whilst interned, focusing on individual and collective notions of belonging. Thirdly, 'Hierarchies of identity and the "Other"', focuses on how notions of national belonging were disrupted when first the Americans and then the Eastern European Jews arrived in the camp. The fourth part, 'Beyond Vittel,' looks outside the camp to British women who were not interned for the duration of the Occupation and questions whether 'Britishness' still impacted their wartime lives. Finally, part five analyses the 'Liberation of Vittel' in September 1944, and the impact of notions of national belonging on women's lives after the war had ended.

#### 4.1 Negotiating National Identity

National identity and belonging are crucial frameworks through which British women's wartime experiences can be understood. This chapter will argue that the evidence that emerges from this fieldwork indicates that the ways in which women defined themselves as British was key to their internment experience and that some women even discovered their British identity, or 'Britishness', in Vittel. The intersection of gender and national identity during periods of conflict has been the subject of several studies (Higonnet & Higonnet, 1987; Noakes 1998; Rose, 2003; Purcell, 2007) and war serves as a magnifying glass through which gendered forms of national identity are made particularly visible (Noakes 1998). Studying gender and national identity through the lens of war, 'reveals the importance of the rhetoric through which women are perceived, by themselves as well as by others' (Higonnet and Higonnet 1987, p.45), and these approaches inform this chapter.

During the war, '...The people became central to ideas about British national identity and many of "the people" were women' (Noakes 1998, p.14). The 'People's War' emerged as a fundamental construct in the propaganda aimed at the British people and their support for the

war effort; it was an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991, p.6) in which 'Britishness' was 'extended and reworked' (Noakes 1998, p.14) in a people-focused narrative. The Vittel camp was created by the Nazis as a place to hold British, civilian women. It was therefore a gendered community and British women's experiences there were shaped by their interactions with other women in this community. British women participated in rituals and 'performances' (Butler 1999) through which they expressed their national identity in a gendered manner (see 'Performing Britishness' later in this chapter). However, as Ugolini states, '...In certain circumstances, gender is far less central than race, ethnicity, or class in the construction of personal identity' (2004, p.157). The theme of gender is flagged here since women constituted most internees in Vittel, however their wartime lives seem to have been more explicitly shaped by their self-definition and external categorization as British, as much as their gender category. In the specific circumstances of internment in Vittel, the centrality of gender emerges from the evidence as a lesser influence in the creation of personal identity, as Ugolini suggests (2004, p.157).

#### 4.2 The camps in Besançon and Vittel

As the previous chapter set out, following the defeat of France and the armistice, from September 1940, British women residing across France were required by the German authorities to report to their local German command office (Peschanski, 2000). In December 1940, those who had registered were rounded up and interned by the German authorities at 'Caserne Vauban' in Besançon. There were 3,900 British subjects interned in Besançon on the 10 December 1940.<sup>68</sup> Only those who were seriously ill could remain in their own homes or in hospital.<sup>69</sup> Upon arrival in Besançon, the most elderly and infirm internees were hospitalized. On the 7 December, there were 157 British civilians hospitalised in the Hôpital Saint-Jacques in Besançon, and this number rose quickly to 484 on 20 December 1940 due to the poor conditions in the camp.<sup>70</sup> In January 1941, those in the camp aged over 60 and under 16 were

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<sup>68</sup> Archives du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge (ACICR), CSC, France (Frontstalags), Visite au camp des internes et internées britanniques de Besançon, 28.1.41.

<sup>69</sup> TNA FO 916 135, Visite au camp des internes et internees britanniques de Besancon, 28.1.41, Red Cross Report.

<sup>70</sup> Doubs Departmental Archives, 57W 37, Administration des Hospices Civils Réunis de Besançon, Letter from Le Vice-Président de la commission administrative à Monsieur le Préfet du Département du Doubs à Besançon, 20 December 1940.

released by the Germans and were then required to report to their local German command office.<sup>71</sup>

In June 1941, the 1,481 remaining British civilians (of which 120 were men and 11 were children) who had been held at Besançon were transferred to a new camp in Vittel following complaints from the Red Cross about the conditions in Caserne Vauban.<sup>72</sup> Besançon was ill equipped, cold, infested with vermin and the women had little to eat there. In contrast, the camp to which they were transferred, Vittel, was very different with good conditions and was hailed as a model internment camp by the Nazis (Soussen 1997, p.114). Vittel was a spa town and the camp was comprised of a series of luxury hotels which were requisitioned by the occupying forces along with the extensive grounds, tennis courts, ornate gardens and casino, all of which were surrounded with barbed wire fences.

The reason for choosing Vittel as the destination for British internees was twofold: first, the Germans were anxious that British women should be seen to be treated well as this affected the way in which German prisoners were treated by the British. A telegram from the American Embassy at Vichy on March 28<sup>th</sup> 1941 outlined;

Von Pedaler of German Internment Administration states that persons interned at Besançon will soon be transferred to Vittel where it will be possible to make them more comfortable and where they will be lodged in house. It is probable that this move is the result of a favourable report received through the Swiss authorities concerning conditions under which German women are interned in Great Britain.<sup>73</sup>

A letter sent to Winston Churchill by a former internee after her liberation in 1944 indicated that the German officers in charge of the camp were aware that reports of conditions inside Vittel regularly reached the British authorities and that internees would use Churchill's name as a warning against mistreatment: 'Your name acted like a magic charm [...] The Camp

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<sup>71</sup>TNA, FO 916 135, Visite au camp des internes et internees britanniques de Besancon, 28.1.41, Red Cross Report.

<sup>72</sup> ACICR, CSC, France (Frontstalags), Camp d'Internees civiles britanniques de Vittel (Vosges) Frontstalag 142, Visité le 4 juillet 1941.

<sup>73</sup> TNA, FO 916 135, Visite au camp des internes et internées britanniques de Besançon, 28.1.41, Red Cross Report.

Commandant said, 'I cannot turn in my bed without Churchill knowing it!'"<sup>74</sup> The second reason for choosing Vittel was that the camp served as a 'vitrine' (Soussen 1997, p.118), a very public window into the Nazi party, which propagated the idea that Nazi camps were more like holiday resorts.<sup>75</sup> Internees recall regular visits from high-ranking Nazi officials who were shown round the camp, as well as film crews who documented their arrival for propaganda purposes (Say and Holland 2012). Vittel was inspected regularly by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) whose report described it in July 1941 as 'The best camp that we have ever visited.'<sup>76</sup> The internees received weekly ICRC parcels and at the time of the camp's liberation in September 1944, a report stated that, 'sufficient parcels are on hand to feed the camp for at least three months.'<sup>77</sup> In terms of activities to keep the internees occupied, there were sports, theatre productions, an orchestra, adult-learning courses, and a school for children, art classes, various religious services, and séances. According to the American authorities, 'Tennis and golf are particularly popular at the moment, a new putting ground has just been completed.'<sup>78</sup> The ICRC inspectors also noted the tranquil and calm atmosphere in the camp. 'Dans Vittel si tranquille et presque vide, il jouit d'un calme, absolu; ici, nous entendons le chuchotement de quelques religieuses, la, c'est un vieux monsieur qui lit en fumant sa pipe, plus loin, des internés prennent un bain de soleil'<sup>79</sup> The ICRC report on the camp reinforces the theory that the German authorities were attempting to create a model camp. The images of nuns whispering, an old man smoking his pipe, and women sunbathing contrast completely with other accounts of internment in France during this period which present the internment experience as one of lack and deprivation (Peschanski 2000). The British internees were a diverse group, both culturally and socially, and had only their British passports in common. As outlined in chapter 3, some were expatriates; others were wives or daughters of British

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<sup>74</sup> IWM LBY [E] 93/2299, The Prisoner of War: The Official Journal of the Prisoners of War Department of the Red Cross and St John War Organisation, No. 27, September, p.16.

<sup>75</sup> The internment camp in Theresienstadt (Terezin), near Prague, was also a Nazi 'show camp', designed to mislead the Jewish and the international communities about the Final Solution. Elderly and prominent Jewish civilians were interned in the camp, propagating the myth that they could 'retire safely' in this spa town. Once the camp had been visited by the ICRC, Jewish internees were deported to Auschwitz up until October 1944.

<sup>76</sup> ACICR, CSC, France (Frontstalags), Camp d'Internees civiles britanniques de Vittel (Vosges) Frontstalag 142, Visité le 4 juillet 1941.

<sup>77</sup> The National Archives, HO 215 68, Memorandum: Internment camp at Vittel. 11 October 1944.

<sup>78</sup> The National Archives, HO 215 68, Internment Camp at Vittel, HQ Third United States Army Report, 17 September 1944.

<sup>79</sup> ACICR, CSC, France (Frontstalags), Camp d'Internees civiles britanniques de Vittel (Vosges) Frontstalag 142, Visité le 4 juillet 1941.

businessmen who were resident in France; some were second-generation British civilians. Other women were in France temporarily at the outbreak of hostilities, on holiday or visiting relations. There were nuns from various denominations, some of whom were caring for the elderly, who were interned with their charges. One interviewee described them as women who ‘avaient l’habitude de voyager,’ suggesting also that many internees belonged to a particular social class and had the financial means to travel to Europe.<sup>80</sup> In terms of nationality, according to a ICRC report in January 1941, there were Australians, Canadians and English (‘Anglais de la Métropole’).<sup>81</sup> Given the heterogeneous nature of the British internees in Vittel, united only by their British passport, they experienced varied levels of connectedness with Britain. Although they were all defined as ‘British’, the level of belonging and association with their ‘homeland’ varied considerably for each woman. The next part of this chapter explores this concept of belonging for British women in Vittel using Balibar and Wallerstein’s framework of ‘external and internal frontiers’ (1991, p.95).

#### 4.3 Belonging: internal and external frontiers

As outlined in chapter 1, Balibar and Wallerstein’s concept of internal and external frontiers of the state (1991, p.95) permits an analysis of the slippage between an individual’s external classification as ‘British’, and how they self-identify with the nation as an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1991, p.6). As internees, British women were negotiating internal and external frontiers of national belonging; for some women, these frontiers had common elements, and for others the two were completely polarized. This discussion of belonging in Vittel questions what constituted the internal and external frontiers of belonging for British women and argues that many British women flagged dual or even multiple national identities during their internment. Some women would prioritise, or even perform, one identity over others when it was to their advantage.

British civilians were arrested by the German authorities based on their categorization as British ‘enemy aliens.’ Significantly for British women, if they were not born in the United

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<sup>80</sup> Interview with Jeanne and Eva Phillips, Paris, 22 February 2016.

<sup>81</sup>TNA, FO 916 135, Visite au camp des internes et internées britanniques de Besançon, 28.1.41, Red Cross Report.

Kingdom, their citizenship was determined by their father or their spouse, even if divorced or widowed, provided they were not remarried, as outlined in chapter 3.<sup>82</sup> This meant that women could possess British status having never lived in Britain, or even visited, and having no real connection with the country apart from via their husband or father. This was the case for several 'British' women who were rounded up and interned in December 1940. One internee recalled the variety of women living in her room in Frontstalag 142 in Besançon.

The forty of us in room 29 were a mixed collection. Two were pure British, 'by Birth of British parents,' a mother and daughter who kept themselves apart from the mongrel rest of us. There was a Lady Something who spent most of her time in bed... There were one or two older women with British fathers and French mothers who had spent their whole lives in France [...] and, on the other side of the room, "the fishwives." They were that in actual fact, born and bred in Arcachon, where they sold their fish in baskets on the quayside and where once, long ago, they had had their brief romances with English Tommies in World War One (Skipwith 1968, p.193).

The external categorization of these women as 'British' highlights the ambiguous nature of national identity; as Noakes suggests it is 'loosely defined and malleable' (1998, p.7). Skipwith draws on multiple phrases to communicate the different levels of 'Britishness' in her room; there are the 'pure British,' the 'mongrels,' and then seemingly at the opposite end of the 'Britishness' spectrum, 'the fishwives' who are even physically separate from the other, 'more British,' internees. The selection of terms such as 'pure' and 'mongrel' suggests a hierarchy of national identity which is also intertwined with class; the terms conjure imagery associated with breeding and parentage. The 'pure British' do not associate with the 'mongrels' who are, in turn, completely detached from the women labelled 'fishwives.' 'Fishwife' is defined as a 'coarse-mannered woman' (Oxford Dictionaries Online, 2018); Skipwith's choice of term, although explained in the text, implies that these are working-class women, perhaps women who are promiscuous, having had 'brief romances' with British soldiers during the First World War, and women who have not travelled ('born and bred in Arcachon'); they are not as enlightened or sophisticated as the 'pure British' or 'mongrels' who have had the opportunity to explore other countries and cultures. The term 'mongrel' suggests that there are several

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<sup>82</sup> TNA, DO 35, 1202 Memorandum re British nationality Questions, August 1943 (C).

internees who, due to parentage, possess multiple national identities and cannot be clearly categorised as either French, British, or neither. As well as providing insights into national identity and 'Britishness', the 'mixed collection' of British women who were arrested and interned by the Germans also raises a question about how national identity was determined during this period. These women found themselves in an inferior position as women because their identity was determined by the man who was closest to them, pointing towards a 'systematic subordination' (Higonnet and Higonnet 1987, p.34) of women labelled as 'British' in France. Even though these men were absent, the women's lives were still shaped by them. The image of the two, intertwined strands of a 'double helix' (1987, p.34) is a useful illustration here and 'permits us to look at women not in isolation but within a persistent system of gender relationships' (1987, p.34). For the 'fishwives', although they were born and bred in France, their brief unions with English soldiers had resulted in their internment as British 'enemy aliens.' For these women, the external frontier of the state was defined by the nationality of their British husband, who they may not have seen for decades but to whom they remained married. It is even possible that they had not considered themselves British before this point, and only when Britishness became associated with being an enemy of the French state did they realise that they were in fact British. The slippage between the external frontier of those categorized as 'British,' and the individual's self-identification as 'British' is evident here.

The 'external' definition of 'British women' led to considerable ambiguity and confusion. This was particularly evident when British women were arrested in December 1940. One interviewee articulated the confusion that she and her family felt being interned as British when they in fact identified themselves as French. 'Une fois on a été interrogée [...] parce que en fait on est françaises, on a été ramassé mais on n'a jamais dû être ramasser. Mais c'est parce que mon père était anglais. Mais alors on l'a dit, on l'a expliqué [...] on est française.'<sup>83</sup> This quotation implies a case of mistaken identity; the interviewee feels very strongly that her categorization as 'British' was an error and she is desperate to rectify this to avoid being interned. Her sense of belonging to a nation is completely different from the criteria of belonging which is applied to her and her family and which results in their internment in Besançon and Vittel. This narrative reveals the individual's negotiation of the external, public

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<sup>83</sup> Interview with Jeanne and Eva Phillips, Paris, 22 February 2016.



discourse and highlights that this negotiation was far from straightforward. It aligns with Hinton's observation that, 'You can see them twisting and turning, pushing the boundaries of given identities, refashioning received ideas – and thus in their own small ways, exercising agency, making history' (In Purcell 2007, p.4). The importance of life history narratives is key in revealing these women's internal negotiation of the external frontiers of belonging. Their individual stories reveal the paradox that some British women had legal citizenship, but not social citizenship. This dilemma of belonging was neatly summarized in an interview with ex-internee Margaret Williams, who explained, 'After the war I went to London, I wanted to visit the country that I had been imprisoned for.'<sup>84</sup> Many Vittel internees wrestled with what it meant to belong to Britain, when their direct experience of that nation was very limited. These women's stories reveal the slippage between identities, they 'crystallize contradictions between ideology and actual experience' (Higonnet and Higonnet 1987, p.37). They also highlight the distinction between being labelled and self-identifying as British and point to the role of 'individual agency in the construction of national identity' (Purcell 2007, p.2).

The consequences of conflict on British national identity created a dilemma for British women in France. An expression of the dilemma of belonging in Vittel was the use of language. Wright outlines the, 'affection that national groups feel for their national language and the symbolic importance they attach to it' (2000, p.2). Given this affection and symbolic importance, it is interesting that the most common language amongst British internees in Besançon and Vittel was not English, but French (Say and Holland 2012, p.149). On her arrival in Besançon, internee Antonia Hunt observed; 'Forty people streamed into that room, and apart from our little group of eight, no one even spoke English! They were all French or Belgian or Polish' (1982, p.31). Since everyone in Besançon held a British passport, the fact that Hunt describes her roommates as French, Belgian or Polish accentuates the discrepancy between external categorization as British and individual interpretation of nationality. Hunt's comment, 'no one even spoke English,' reinforces the hierarchy described by Skipwith of the different 'levels' of 'Britishness' in the camp. Hunt is a 'true Britisher,' born in the United Kingdom to two British parents; from this comment we might understand, 'This is supposed to be a British camp! At

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<sup>84</sup> Interview with Margaret Williams, Paris, 17 April 2015 (Paris).

the very least we should speak English!’ Hunt’s perception of the centrality of the English language in determining an individual’s right to citizenship flags the importance of the English language in national identity formation. As Jeffrey Richards observes, language is, ‘The groundwork on which everything must stand’ (1997, p.305). Hunt questions how women can belong to the community of British women when they do not share this common marker of national identity. An extract from another life history reveals the twisting and evolving nature of this unique ‘British’ community which was being formed, first in Besançon, and then in Vittel. Internee Rosemary Say indicated that, paradoxically, some British women were excluded from the camp because they spoke only English:

She was all alone in the world. I knew this because she had told me just a few days before that she had spent her life looking after other people's children as a governess. Not only was she alone in the world but, like many older women, she spoke very little French which was the common language of the different nationalities in the camp. (Say and Holland 2012, p.149)

The fact that *French* was the prevalent language in a *British* internment camp nuances our understanding of national identity in the context of British women in Occupied France. It forces us to recognize that belonging to a nation far exceeds the stamp on one’s passport and it sheds light on the ‘individual’s relationship with the nation and how the nation is reproduced, experienced and expressed in their own lives’ (Purcell 2007, p.2). These contrasting extracts from two internees’ life histories reveal the different kinds of women who were encompassed in the broad category of ‘British,’ and more interestingly, that different women in the camp admitted or excluded women from the community in the camp based on varied, even opposing, criteria; for Antonia Hunt inclusion was based on the ability to speak English, and for Rosemary Say, on mastery of the French language.

Exploring internal and external frontiers of belonging indicates the disruptive impact of war on the ‘vertical and horizontal bonds between the individual and state’ (Biess and Moeller 2010, p.7). Some internees were forced to negotiate different national identities and did not necessarily self-identify as British, like the ‘fishwives’ who had assumed this nationality based on relationships from the Great War. Certain internees were considered by others to be insufficiently ‘British,’ based on their command of the French or English language, their

parentage, place of birth, or class. The multiplicity of identity is summarized by Riviere, who states, 'Each personality is a world in himself, a company of many' (1991, p.317). Internment in Besançon and Vittel forced British women to negotiate different identities. This reiterates the importance of individual agency in the construction of national identity (Purcell 2007); it also suggests that national identity was a choice and that internees who did not immediately self-identify as British in the camp, over time and once they learnt of the advantages this could bring them, may have chosen to adopt a British identity.

Embracing British national identity as an internee in Vittel gave rise to certain advantages in terms of protection, safety and security. The wellbeing of British internees was prioritised in part due to their nationality and for fear of repercussions on German civilians interned in Britain. The ICRC inspected the camp regularly; internees could request items such as musical instruments for the orchestra, books for distance learning courses, and material for making clothes. One internee sent a letter to her cousin in Belgium to which she attached pink satin and other material, described as 'cadeau de la x rouge.'<sup>85</sup> In her letter she wrote, 'Avec les colis qu'on reçoit, nous n'avons rien à nous plaindre, mais je pense à vous mes chéries. Si seulement je pouvais vous parvenir ce qu'il vous manque.'<sup>86</sup> Internees were evidently aware that they were better supplied within the camps than those on the outside. As articulated in the letter, they looked to the ICRC to supply additional needs, even calling supplementary resources 'presents.' This indicates that internees had more than they needed inside Vittel, even suggesting that they felt that the Red Cross indulged them. British internees were therefore in an advantageous position compared with the non-interned French civilians outside the camps. Not only did they benefit from the protection of the ICRC but their needs were also prioritised above those outside the camp due to their special status as British citizens. The benefits of remaining as an internee were so significant that some women who were due to be released because of their age, even elected to remain in the camp as voluntary internees. They were safer and better resourced inside the camp. The following extract highlights the difficult conditions outside the camp which could motivate women to become voluntary internees.

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<sup>85</sup> Letter to Mademoiselle Méliné Covan from Lucie Gumuchian, 15 April 1942, p.2. Private papers of Sonia Gumuchian. Paris, France.

<sup>86</sup> Letter to Mademoiselle Méliné Covan from Lucie Gumuchian, 15 April 1942, p.1. Private papers of Sonia Gumuchian. Paris, France.

La situation de nombreuses internées qui quittent le camp est difficile à cause des difficultés de ravitaillement en France. Grâce à l'appui de la Croix Rouge britannique et à ses nombreux colis de vivres, les internées de Vittel sont parmi les privilégiées. C'est pourquoi plusieurs d'entre elles, sans grandes ressources financières, préfèrent prolonger leur séjour au camp.<sup>87</sup>

It is evident that British women were aware of the protection and privileged resourcing that they experienced as internees. Whether they identified easily as British or were bewildered by their newfound identity, there were clear advantages to being interned in Vittel as a British civilian. In some senses their experiences parallel those of residents in Britain during the war: 'One of the commonest refrains in the literature on the Second World War is that during the war British people "discovered" a new sense of national identity' (Nicholas 1998, p.36). However, it is evident that, despite their privation of liberty, this 'discovery' of British national identity did have distinct benefits. Indeed, one internee deliberately denounced her mother and younger sister who were living outside the camp, so that they could be repatriated to Britain together.<sup>88</sup> The following section will explore some of the rituals and structures in which British women participated in the camp, and how this cultivated their sense of belonging to Britain and led many to 'realise' their national identity.

#### 4.4 Performing Britishness

As outlined in chapter 1, Butler's theory of performativity argues that individuals use corporeal signs such as acts, gestures and enactments, to construct and express their own identity (1999, p.185). For British women in Vittel, this theory provides a helpful framework through which to examine the rituals performed by internees to express or perform their national identity. Another theory relating to individual's external expression of their internal national identity is Billig's 'flagging of nationhood' (1995, p.8), whereby individuals remind themselves of the national to which they belong. This 'flagging' might include material objects, songs, performances, repeated individual or group activities, or language. Examples of Butler's theory

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<sup>87</sup> ACICR, CSC, France (Frontstalags), Camp d'Internees civiles britanniques de Vittel (Vosges) Frontstalag 142, Visité le 4 juillet 1941.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Jeanne and Eva Phillips, Paris, 22 February 2016.

of performativity and Billig's flagging of nationhood are clearly visible in Vittel and will be explored in this section.

Connection to Britain was an important part of British women's internment experience and links with 'home' were maintained in several ways. Internees received a Christmas card from the King and Queen (see figure 7<sup>89</sup>), which was copied and posted up in the camp along with messages from other parts of the Empire.<sup>90</sup> The Royal message was shown on the cinema screen in the camp and was 'greatly appreciated by all.'<sup>91</sup> In his chapter on 'Monarchy and Empire' (2004), Ward posits that, 'From at least the late nineteenth century to at least the late twentieth century, monarchy was seen as central to British national identity' (2004, p.14). British women in Vittel were obviously living in this era in which the monarchy was fundamental to the British Empire and national identity. Loyalty to the nation state was heavily intertwined with loyalty to the crown and the Empire, and the royal family was even used as a means of uniting British dominions and colonies (2004, p.14). The fact that messages from different parts of the British Empire were displayed in Vittel reveals that 'flagging imperialism'



Figure 7 - Christmas card from King George VI, December 1942, in Poinot (2004:7)

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<sup>89</sup> Private papers of Sonia Gumuchian. Paris, France.

<sup>90</sup> ACICR, CSC, France (Frontstalags), Camp d'Internés anglais et américains de Vittel, Visité le 11 et 12 janvier 1943.p.14

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

was a key part of flagging British nationality. Ward's argument that the monarchy was instrumental in the 'making of the nation as *family*' (2004, p.18, emphasis added) is especially significant for this chapter on British women in Vittel. At the turn of the century, the image of the monarchy transitioned from private and lacking appeal, to 'splendid, public, and popular' (Cannadine 2002). Developments in media and culture, such as the BBC and cinema, played a crucial role in creating a sense of participation and conversation between the monarchy and its subjects. This promotional appeal to participate in the British Empire was extended to Vittel internees, as evidenced by the transmission of the Royal message on the cinema screen. This message effectively extended the invitation to belong to the 'family' of the Empire to all British internees in Vittel, positioning the British nation as inclusive, warm, and welcoming. Figure 7, the Christmas card with George VI, The Queen, and Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret, epitomises the popularity of the monarchy as a family. Following Edward VIII's abdication in 1936, 'The representation of the royalty as a family group became the key factor in the new restoration of the monarchy' (Ward 2004, p.21). George VI was adeptly portrayed as both father and King, the head of a respectable and loving family, as well as a vast Empire. Figure 7 reinforces this narrative effectively; the royal family are photographed in casual attire, in an informal stance either leaning on the doorframe or 'perched' on a windowsill, they are not looking at the camera but gazing at each other. Elizabeth, next in line to the throne is central, standing taller than her mother and sister, and with her eyes fixed on her father, the King. They appear content, untroubled, and at ease. They are backlit with bright light, signifying hope in the prospect of uncertainty and war, and the crown is suspended above the photograph, showing their sovereignty as a canopy, sheltering their family as well as any who were part of the larger family of the British Empire. Notably, this message of family, contentment, and peace targeted British women, many of whom could identify with the family life of the monarchy due to their prominent role in families themselves (Ward 2004, p.21). We can hypothesise that for British women in Vittel, this image of a sovereign family which was united and at peace would have engendered hope and faith in the British nation, particularly for those separated from relatives or loved ones. For those who were without families, isolated or lonely, these messages promoted the idea of a national family, to whom they could belong. Communication from the British monarchy was vital in boosting morale and reinforced the popular discourse in Britain that this was a 'People's War' and that, 'they were all in it together' (Rose 2003, p.286). These messages communicated to internees that they were not forgotten

and that they belonged to a larger, imagined national community outside the camp. Messages from home, especially at poignant moments of national celebration such as Christmas, were used to 'bond disparate beings across the imagined community of nation' (Purcell 2007, p.5). Even when released, some internees felt a sense of gratitude towards the Royal Family, the symbol of the British nation. When the first group of internees left the camp in July 1944 to be repatriated, 'Some took back flowers growing on the embankment as a present for the Queen!'<sup>92</sup> This performance of national belonging reveals the deep-seated loyalty British women felt to the monarchy, they responded to the symbolic gestures of inclusion and hope in the written and visual messages from the Royals, with their own symbolic gestures of gratitude and loyalty. An example of what sociologists have termed an 'act of national communion' (In Ward 2004, p.18).

The arrival of parcels from the ICRC brought further connection and communion with home.

In the little parcels hut, Christine and I eagerly opened the first package from Britain. The familiar labels of Crosse & Blackwell, Peek Frean and Cooper's marmalade brought back such strong memories of England and our local grocer's store that tears streamed down our faces. (Say and Holland 2012, p.121)

These material objects were 'forgotten reminders' of home (Billig 1995, p.8) which connected internees with the 'everyday, familiar aspects of life' and 'reinforce the nation within individual's lives' (Purcell 2007, p.2). For internees who had lived in Britain before their internment, these brand names had been part of the fabric of their everyday lives and were a tangible sign that they had not been forgotten. Although the memories of home associated with the British brands in the Red Cross parcels were especially important for internees who had spent time in Britain, the literal performances of 'Britishness' which took place in the camp seem to have impacted most of the women interned. Vittel internees organised and starred in several productions during their period of internment. Performances often featured references to Britain (see figure 8), such as the Union Jack or the King's Guard. Songs were also used to boost morale and remind internees of home, and consequently their national identity. 'The force of popular wartime songs [...] was in the absence of specific content: it doesn't

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<sup>92</sup> IWM Documents 9396, Private Papers of Sister Patricia McGauley, 1999.

matter what England means, as long as it means something' (Purcell 2007, p.5). Women who had never been to Britain, such as the Phillips, were learning 'what England meant' to them for the first time.

On a pris ce train pour Besançon, il y eu quelqu'un dans le train qui a chanté au milieu de la nuit, tu ne te rappelles pas ? Moi ça m'avait frappé ça, je pensais que c'était Mrs Harding, qui avait chanté, quelqu'un a chanté, une voix de femme. (She sings) "There's no place like home." Mais jolie, une jolie voix. Tu ne te rappelles pas de ça ?<sup>93</sup>

Anderson asserts, 'It is useful to remind ourselves that nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love. The cultural products of nationalism – poetry, prose, fiction, music, plastic arts – show this love very clearly in thousands of different forms and styles' (Anderson 1991, p.142). Music and song were used by the internees to boost morale and rally women around their common love for Britain. It reminded them that the sacrifice of freedom that they were undertaking was motivated by the love of their nation. These representations and symbols of 'Britishness,' 'work to generate what we might term the pull of unity – of absolute belonging – the desire to be part of a grand, unified collective.' (Rose 2003, p.7).



Figure 8 - Performance in Vittel internment camp, undated, unnamed collection, Musée du Patrimoine Archives.

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<sup>93</sup> Interview with Jeanne and Eva Phillips, Paris, 22 February 2016.



At times, the pursuit of 'Britishness' caused women to step into the domain of illegality, for example listening to the BBC, as this interviewee explained. 'Il y avait des gens qui se promenaient avec un morceau de radio, un morceau de radio comme ça. Et le soir, tous les radios étaient mis ensemble. Et on écoutait à la radio. Ce n'était pas nous, mais il y en avait qui faisait ça. On allait...on allait à la cuisine, il y avait une cuisine en bas, et là, on arrivait à avoir toutes les nouvelles.'<sup>94</sup> It has been established that the BBC played a significant role during the war in 'flagging nationhood.' Purcell argues, 'Churchill, J.B. Priestley, Orwell, the BBC, newspapers, movie directors – the entire media it seemed – all weighed in on what it meant to be English or British during the war' (2007, p.1). During the Second World War, the BBC played a vital role in uniting the British Empire and rallying support for the war effort (Robertson 2008). The BBC was the 'Voice of Britain,' with a 'reputation for reliable, objective broadcasting' (2008, p.465). For internees in Vittel, although listening to the radio was forbidden, they chose to take risks for their country to prioritise their national identity. The different parts of the radio were hidden by multiple internees, indicating that this was a united and collective performance of Britishness. It was a welcome alternative to the 'triumphant paeans shouted by the German press' (Skipwith 1968, p.219). Listening to the BBC provided an opportunity for internees to belong to the larger 'imagined community' of Britain. It is also significant that the practice was repeated every evening, 'This repetition was at once a re-enactment and a re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established: and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation' (Butler 1999, p.191). In addition to the repeated act of listening to the BBC, tuning in to the broadcaster for the latest 'news from home' was also an act which did not require strong affiliations with Britain prior to internment. Interviewee and former internee Jeanne Phillips, who described the nightly assembly of the radio in the camp, was herself French born and had never lived in the United Kingdom. Yet, she recalled with clarity the regular, illegal practice of listening to the BBC. This indicates the potency of British radio programming in creating a sense of allegiance to the British nation and Empire. As Robertson argues in her article on BBC versions of 'Britishness' (2008), the broadcaster was able, 'to embrace a complex version of Britishness suited to the diverse allegiances of their expatriate audience' (2008, p.468). These transmissions brought a human

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<sup>94</sup> Interview with Jeanne and Eva Phillips, Paris, February 2016.

face and voice to the British nation and grounded abstract or distant ideas of 'Britishness' for women who had had little or no contact with the country before their internment.

The British women in the camp were well organised and just two months into their arrival had created a British committee charged with the daily running of the camp.<sup>95</sup> The committee included a representative for each hotel and then various heads of department ('chefs de service') for the library, canteen, Red Cross, church services, education, gardening, finances, music, post, information, ironing, and sports and gymnastics.<sup>96</sup> The ICRC described the 'British camp' in January 1943 as, 'déjà bien adapté aux conditions de vie d'une communauté privée de liberté.'<sup>97</sup> This indicates that British internees had a strong sense of communal identity, which we can hypothesize was forged during their time in Besançon. As Baumel suggests, 'Long-term crisis situations may strengthen women's communal identities' (1999, p.344), and Rose also links self-sacrifice and community in her discussion of national identity in wartime Britain (2003, p.31). Because they had survived the difficulties of internment in Besançon where they struggled to get enough to eat and were in horribly cramped and unsanitary conditions, this shared experience was the basis of a sense of community and identity amongst British internees. Indeed, archival evidence shows that despite the challenging conditions in Besançon, where British women were first interned by the Germans, internees were already performing collective identity markers of 'Britishness' to foster a sense of solidarity and optimism in the camp. Weekly shows took place in Besançon; some of the internees were dancers from the *Folies-Bergère* and would perform.<sup>98</sup> On the 15<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> December 1940, 'The British Committee' in Besançon provided two evenings of entertainment with songs, dancing, and sketches (one entitled, 'Les Gaites de la Caserne Vauban').<sup>99</sup> The fact that a *British* committee existed in Besançon after less than a month of being interned showed that internees were not only resourceful, but also keen to flag and gather around their British identity. The British committee organised evenings of entertainment with a programme

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<sup>95</sup> ACICR, CSC, France (Frontstalags), Camp d'Internés britanniques de Vittel, Visité le 4 juillet 1941.

<sup>96</sup> ACICR, CSC, France (Frontstalags), Camp d'Internés britanniques de Vittel, Visité le 4 juillet 1941.

<sup>97</sup> ACICR, CSC, France (Frontstalags), Camp d'Internés anglais et américains de Vittel, Visité le 11 et 12 janvier 1943.

<sup>98</sup> 'More reminiscences of Frontstalag 149. Yvette Goodden', p.2, Private Papers of Sonia Gumuchian. Paris, France.

<sup>99</sup> 'Program' of entertainment, Organised by Miss Kempton, Wednesday 25 December and Thursday 26 December. Private Papers of Sonia Gumuchian. Paris, France.

written in French, and sketches performed in French indicates the unique sense of 'Britishness' which was being created, first in Besançon, and then in Vittel.

The British committee in Vittel created a sense of unity and an opportunity for women to bond together with other women. Traditional English rituals, such as teatime at 4 o'clock were maintained in the camp. There was a canteen where the internees could heat water and they came together to drink tea. Butler argues that repeated rituals are a 're-enactment or re-experiencing' of social meanings (1999, p.191). This ritualized tea drinking legitimized the internees' connection to Britain and allowed them to re-enact their Britishness daily. This runs parallel with the role of the Women's Institute (WI) in Britain during this period. The WIs 'were run by a committee, with their activities centred on a monthly meeting, held either in the afternoon or evening, lasting two to three hours [...] After tea, known as the 'cement of the movement', there was a social half hour involving singing, dancing [and] playing games' (Andrews 1998, p.117). As well as their enthusiasm for traditional, English rituals, there was also a concern in the WI that women should show 'responsible citizenship' (1998, p.125) and the movement was able to offer training in this important role. The British committee in Vittel was also concerned that internees acted responsibly as British citizens, and the committee's head of department for the Red Cross organised some of the excess supplies provided for the internees to be sent to local children and families in need.<sup>100</sup> The committee could also negotiate permission for activities which would normally have been forbidden, for example, the creation of a market stall every Friday so that internees could swap their cigarettes or chocolate with local residents in exchange for fresh eggs or fruit and vegetables.<sup>101</sup> A male civilian worker in the camp, whose wife was expecting, was given wool by internees so that his wife could knit clothes for the baby.<sup>102</sup> These performative rituals drew on some of the values which were perceived as essential attributes of the responsible, British citizen. Rose links the, 'willingness to make sacrifices and put community needs ahead of personal ones with Britishness' (2003, p.71). The British committee in Vittel exhibited these British wartime values of self-sacrifice and community.

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<sup>100</sup> Vittel Town Hall Archives, 4.5H60.D, Ville de Vittel: Extrait du registre des délibérations de la commission administrative du bureau de bienfaisance, 6 August 1941.

<sup>101</sup> Interview with Jean Michel, Vittel, 16 September 2015.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Madame Clement, Vittel, 14 September 2015.

Shared rituals, memories, and familiar food instilled and affirmed a connection to home which, for some, had not been present before internment. Internee Sara Abelson had lived in England until she was four or five years old, and in Paris for the rest of her life before being interned aged seventeen. In interview, her daughter explained that Abelson's time in Vittel shaped her self-identification as English.

Il y a toujours un [pays] qu'on aime plus qu'un autre. Ils aimaient plus l'Angleterre. La Reine...maman parlait de la Reine. Il n'y avait pas de doute. En plus ils ont vécu encore, c'est vrai que maman avait quitté là, en Angleterre tôt, mais là, internée quand même avec les anglais. Pour eux il n'y avait pas de doutes. Ils étaient anglais. Ils ont continué à grandir là [dans le camp].<sup>103</sup>

The interviewee associated the camp with England, stating that the formative years of Sara Abelson's life were spent interned with English people. She observed that Abelson matured, and her sense of national belonging grew during her time of internment in Vittel. Sara Abelson "'discovered" a new sense of national identity' (Nicholas 1998, p.36); her love for the queen also confirms the association with Britishness and the monarchy, and shows the potency of this narrative in 'recruiting' British civilians who had little direct experience of the British nation and Empire. However, the British community which was so well established during the first two years of the Occupation was disrupted at the end of 1942 with the arrival of internees from other nations. This disruption led to a hierarchical organization of national identities, with internees from some nations treated significantly better than those from other parts of the world. As the nature of the camp changed and different nationalities arrived in Vittel, the pull of unity experienced by many British internees was unsettled. The next section explores hierarchies of identity and the impact of an 'Other' on the sense of national belonging and identity in the camp.

#### 4.5 Hierarchies of identity and 'the Other'

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<sup>103</sup> Interview with Laura Giraud, Paris, 22 February 2016.

The communal identity shared by British internees was complicated by the arrival of American internees at the end of 1942. This affected the atmosphere in the camp as the following ICRC report from January 1943 outlines: 'L'atmosphère de ce nouveau camp ne peut être que très différente de celle du camp britannique, déjà bien adapté aux conditions de vie d'une communauté privée de liberté.'<sup>104</sup> The camp was no longer exclusively British; the Red Cross described it as a 'new camp' housing both British and North American civilians. On the 11 January 1943, there were 1,502 British, and 277 North American, internees.<sup>105</sup> The Americans were housed in a separate hotel and formed their own committee which reported to the ICRC on their regular visits to the camp.<sup>106</sup> From 1943 onwards, other nationalities were also sent to Vittel. In interview at the camp's liberation in November 1944, former internee Father Albert A. Chatel stated that at one stage there had been 48 nationalities and 36 languages spoken in the camp.<sup>107</sup> Most of these new arrivals were Jews who had obtained passports or documents from several different South American countries. Internee Sofka Skipwith observed, 'It was only too obvious to us that these South American Certificates which had been bought for such exorbitant amounts were worth nothing, although their possessors still clung to their faith in the efficacy of the documents as their last hope' (Skipwith 1968, p.225). Bloch estimates that the number of Jews with South American papers in Vittel was between 400 and 450, although he has only been able to 'formally identify' 334 (2007, p.10). Over half of the Jewish arrivals came from the Warsaw ghetto and hoped that their newly acquired papers would allow them to be exchanged for German prisoners held by the Americans (Bloch, 2007:10; Skipwith 1968, p.222). The Jews were kept in a separate hotel to the British and Americans. Their hotel could be accessed by a bridge up until February 1944 when it was closed to British and American internees (Poinot 2004, p.13). These Jewish internees were deported in two convoys from Vittel to Auschwitz in April and May 1944.

Khalid asserts, 'Gendered identities do not exist independently of other factors, and must be viewed as intertwined with, for example, race or ethnicity if we are to understand the

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<sup>104</sup> ACICR, CSC, France (Frontstalags), Camp d'Internés anglais et américains de Vittel, Visité le 11 et 12 janvier 1943.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Musée du patrimoine, Vittel, Yank Weekly, 'The story of Germany's 'model' internment camp, November 5 1944, Vol 3, no. 21, p.2.

hierarchical organisation of identities' (2011, p.19). With the arrival of other nationalities and ethnicities, a more visible hierarchical organisation of identities started to emerge in Vittel. In terms of American internees, aside from the fact that their arrival 'changed the nature of the [British] camp,' little is said in testimonies or archival sources about relations between British and American women.<sup>108</sup> Skipwith writes, 'It was noticeable throughout that the Germans always treated the British and Americans far better than any other nationality – maybe an instinctive insurance "just in case"' (Skipwith 1968, p.199). This suggests that American internees received the same level of protection as British internees, for fear of reprisals against German prisoners held by the Americans.

However, belonging to a different race or religion did affect the hierarchical organisation of Vittel internees; this is clearly seen in the treatment of Jewish internees. The Germans classified Jews in Vittel into three categories:

1. Jews from America and Great Britain, including Palestine.
2. Jews of other nationalities, or questionable nationality.
3. Stateless Jews (2007, p.8).

The first category could be exchanged for German prisoners and were therefore 'théoriquement intouchable' (Bloch 2007, p.8). A Red Cross report written two months after the transfer of British internees to Vittel in July 1941 stated, '... les internées juives bénéficient du même traitement que les autres internées.'<sup>109</sup> This report concerns British Jews, as Americans and Jews of other nationalities had not arrived in Vittel by this point. Jews with British passports, and later those with American passports, were officially treated in the same way as other British and American internees. In a climate of such anti-Semitic persecution and hatred, British Jews in Vittel were protected from persecution and deportation because of their British nationality. Jews from categories two and three were deported to Auschwitz from Vittel. Shulamith (Shula) Przepiora was a British Jew interned in Vittel, discovered that most of her family who were outside the camp had been deported and killed.

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<sup>108</sup> ACICR, CSC, France (Frontstalags), Camp d'Internés anglais et américains de Vittel, Visité le 11 et 12 janvier 1943.

<sup>109</sup> ACICR, CSC, France (Frontstalags), Camp d'Internées civiles britanniques de Vittel (Vosges) Frontstalag 142, Visité le 4 juillet 1941.

As a Jewish person she [Shula Przepiorka] had been saved from a deadlier camp by a chance of fate. Having been born in Palestine, she was the only member of her family to have a British passport. When she was released from imprisonment in 1944 she was to discover that the only other close relative alive was her small sister, who had spent the war hiding in a cupboard and emerged permanently deformed (Say and Holland 2012, p.115).

The protection afforded to British Jews in Vittel highlights the intertwining of different identities suggested by Khalid (2011). Some identities offered more chance of survival than others did, and the combination of British and Jewish identity meant that British Jews were spared deportation and death. In Shula Przepiorka's case, her British nationality saved her when the rest of her family, apart from her little sister, had perished.

Although the British and American Jews were treated similarly to fellow internees of the same nationality, this was not the case for Jews with South American papers who arrived later in the camp. Research into national belonging suggests that national identity is often constructed against 'the other' and is 'more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion' (Rose 2003, p.8). Sources suggest that the arrival of Jews in 1943 disrupted the balance of the camp which had been so carefully established, initially by British internees, and then by American internees as well. The concerns of the British and American committees were raised with the YMCA when they visited in February 1944.

This camp remains an excellent one, as stated by both the British and American camp leaders, but, as they unanimously pointed out, their task is rendered more and more difficult by the arrival of internees from the East who, as a rule, refuse to submit to camp regulations and whose constant little intrigues have somewhat disturbed the former pleasant atmosphere of the camp. Furthermore, since their arrival black market transactions have received a fresh impetus and have brought about strained relations with the German authorities. Therefore the task of the camp leaders has certainly not been an easy one of late; in fact Mrs Corbett, the British camp leader, was only just

recovering from a nervous breakdown when being paid a visit by the Delegate of the Protecting Power.<sup>110</sup>

Jewish internees are described as disrupting the 'pleasant atmosphere' which had been carefully established over two years of internment (for British citizens) together in Vittel. The YMCA suggests that Jewish internees do not belong, they are different from the other internees, and they do not understand the code of conduct that has been established by the British and Americans. The reference to their 'constant little intrigues' suggests a lack of awareness of the horrific and inhumane treatment to which these individuals were subjected in the Warsaw ghetto. The term 'Little intrigues' also indicates selfishness or self-interestedness which is 'antithetical to the wartime spirit' established by the British in the camp (Rose 2003, p.71). Billig states, 'An ideological consciousness of nationhood [...] embraces a complex set of themes about "us", "our homeland", "nations" ("ours" and "theirs"), the "world," as well as the morality of national duty and honour' (1995, p.4). The frustration felt towards Jewish internees appears to be grounded in the fact that they did not fit with these complex themes about homeland, nationality, and the significance of duty.

In her study of Italians in Scotland during the war, Ugolini argues, 'The outbreak of war can bring into focus the often vulnerable position of ethnic minorities [...] with the unification of the majority under patriotism making the minority group even more vulnerable to attacks on nationalistic grounds' (2011, p.138). In Vittel, the British internees had unified as a majority which left the Jewish internees in a vulnerable position as a minority in the camp. The persecution to which Jewish internees had already been subjected outside the camp meant that they were desperate to obtain food or resources for their families, as internee Sofka Skipwith observed:

However much Madeleine and I stressed the need to keep quiet, invisible, unnoticed - it was to no avail [...] "Yiddisher Mommas" were eager to get hold of anything available for their families. In the confined, overwrought atmosphere of the camp this led to acute irritation, even hatred. (Skipwith 1968, p.228)

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<sup>110</sup> TNA, HO 215 68, YMCA Report to the Home Office, Received in London 23 February 1944, Gabriel Naville, p.5



The longstanding internees felt that the Polish Jews (the minority) were upsetting the balance of the camp and did not adhere to the formalities and systems which had been set up by the British and American committees in partnership with the German authorities (the majority).<sup>111</sup> 'Jews are depicted in terms that contrasted them with the "ordinary" people of Britain who were self-sacrificing, community-oriented and conscientious...[Jews] were accused of engaging in activities that demonstrated that they were selfish' (Rose 2003, p.92). There was a lack of understanding and sympathy which was reinforced by the sentiment that the behaviour of the Jews was 'unBritish or unEnglish' (Rose 2003, p.92).

For British internees, bonding around national identity had become a survival mechanism because of the advantages associated with being British in Vittel. The arrival of the Jews is said to have, 'rendered the task of the British and American committees more difficult.'<sup>112</sup> As discussed in the Performing Britishness section, the British committee sought to create unity and allow women to bond. It also promoted the British wartime values of unity and self-sacrifice. The suggestion that the Jews rendered this task more difficult indicates that the Jews were challenging these values of unity and self-sacrifice. British internees seemed aware that a good relationship had been established with the German authorities running the camp and were keen to ensure that this was maintained so that conditions remained favourable, and repatriations and exchanges with German prisoners continued. For many British internees, belonging and community did not extend beyond cultural and national boundaries, and those who do not conform to the norms of camp life were perceived as, 'selfish and self-interested [which] underscored the significance of the ethics of self-sacrifice to good citizenship and Britishness' (Rose 2003, p.27).

Some British and American women did offer help to the newly arrived Jewish internees. Their level of engagement varied from offering Polish children chocolate from their Red Cross parcels (Berg 2009, p.214), to liaising with local resistance networks to find homes for Jewish children and smuggling letters out of the camp asking for help from various organisations and governments (Skipwith 1968, p.232). A few internees were also aware that British nationality

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<sup>111</sup> TNA, HO 215 68, YMCA Report to the Home Office, Received in London 23 February 1944, Gabriel Naville, p.5

<sup>112</sup>TNA, HO 215 68, YMCA Report to the Home Office, Received in London 23 February 1944, Gabriel Naville, p.5

might protect the Polish Jews and therefore proposed arranged marriages with some of the Jewish men (Steinberg 1990, p.17). Unfortunately, this did not always work, and a Polish man who married a young, American woman was told that his newly acquired nationality was unacceptable in the eyes of the Germans and was deported a few days later in the first convoy to Auschwitz (1990, p.17).

The British internees' response to the plight of Jews in Vittel therefore varied considerably. The YMCA report and testimonies from those who were very involved in helping the Jews (Skipwith 1968; Steinberg, 1990) suggest that the main sentiment in the camp was disinterest and frustration.<sup>113</sup> However, other testimonies indicate that British internees were moved by the treatment of Jewish internees and that the suicides and deportation did influence them.<sup>114</sup> Jewish internee Mary Berg described acts of generosity, particularly towards Polish children who 'are practically buried in sweets and surrounded with much kindness' (Berg 2009, p.214). These life histories offer insights into the notion of belonging and identity and shed light on whether British internees were more likely to remain loyal to those who belonged to the same national group as they did. All those interned in Vittel were included in the category of 'enemy alien', however the Jews were aliens amongst aliens. Doubly discriminated against by both the German authorities and some of the British and American internees, they were perceived as outsiders, not belonging or fitting within the national dynamics of the camp. Some of the babies who had been born to Jewish families in the camp were hidden by British internees and hospital staff so that they would not be deported with their families (Skipwith 1968, p.235). When the camp was liberated in September 1944, American Army Magazine *Yank Weekly* referred to these infants as; 'The children of documents – of visas for Palestine, Honduras, the United States and other countries. No one knows at this moment exactly where they belong. So you can say they are the natural citizens of the Vittel Internment Camp.'<sup>115</sup> Although the camp had only just been liberated, this comment reveals the complicated and confused national boundaries which existed in Vittel, especially for Jewish internees, desperate to ensure their survival by belonging to another nation. The term, 'Citizens of the Vittel

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<sup>113</sup> TNA, HO 215 68, YMCA Report to the Home Office, Received in London 23 February 1944, Gabriel Naville, p.5

<sup>114</sup> Interview with Jeanne and Eva Phillips, ex-internees, 22 February 2016 (Paris); IWM Documents 9396, Private Papers of Sister Patricia McGauley, 1999.

<sup>115</sup> Musée du patrimoine, Vittel, *Yank Weekly*, 'The story of Germany's 'model' internment camp, November 5 1944, Vol 3, no. 21, p.2.

Internment Camp' encompasses these mixed national identities and suggests that it was more straightforward for the children to 'belong' to the internment camp, rather than 'flagging' their other identities which left them in such a vulnerable position. Two of the children who had been born inside Vittel camp returned to the site of their birth decades later and still considered themselves as 'children of Vittel.'<sup>116</sup> The next section questions how national identity was configured for British internees once they had been released from Vittel.

#### 4.6 Beyond Vittel

While internment emerges as a dominant experience for British women in Occupied France and features in several oral and written testimonies documenting their experiences, not all British women were interned during the Occupation and a number who were arrested and sent to the camp were released early from Besançon, or later from Vittel. This final section explores the importance of national identity to British women who were not interned. It asks whether identifying as British was still significant to women outside the camp and whether 'flagging of nationhood' (Billig 1995, p.8) was also present.

In January 1941, the German authorities took the decision to liberate from Besançon, all men over 65, all women over 60, all women under 60 whose husbands were over 65 or infirm, all women with children under 16 and all women under 60 who were infirm.<sup>117</sup> Following the revision of criteria for internees, 1,600 were liberated from Besançon in January 1941, leaving 2,400 internees in Caserne Vauban barracks and in the Hôpital St Jacques, Besançon.<sup>118</sup> In Vittel, once British internees reached 60 (or 65 for men) they were also released. This left older women and women with young children in a particularly vulnerable position. Those leaving the camp often felt a sense of isolation and separation from fellow internees, this was especially the case for older women who no longer belonged to the 'grand unified collective' (Rose 2003,

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<sup>116</sup> Michael Maranian and Franklin Geller were both born inside the hospital in the camp and returned to visit the Musée du Patrimoine. Interview with Madame Clement, Vittel, September 2015.

<sup>117</sup> TNA, FO 916 135, Visite au camp des internes et internées britanniques de Besançon, 28.1.41, Red Cross Report.

<sup>118</sup> TNA, FO 916 135, Visite au camp des internes et internées britanniques de Besançon, 28.1.41, Red Cross Report.

p.7) of the British community in Vittel. The following YMCA report dated 29<sup>th</sup> September 1941 highlights the specific vulnerability of senior, British citizens:

Many old people, infirm for many years, living in obscure pensions, knew nothing of the danger of their situation and were not informed as to what to do. Many of these people are now living alone, uncared for, as the young people who had them in charge are interned. All these cases have months of unpaid rent and the majority are already threatened with eviction and seizure of property, if this has not already occurred.<sup>119</sup>

The 'People's War' was an 'inclusive, democratic sentiment' (Beech, A. and Weight, M. 1998, p.8) based on the importance of collective identity and group identification (Nicholas 1998; Noakes, 1998). Women who were released from Besançon or Vittel lacked the collective identity and sense of 'we-ness' which the camps offered, and indeed championed. It is evident from letters written to the ICRC that these women were acutely aware of their separation from this community. In their correspondence, they reached out to the British authorities - the physical representation of 'home' and nationhood - emphasizing their 'Britishness' and highlighting that they still 'belonged' to the wider British community and should therefore qualify for assistance.

Can you kindly ask the British Red Cross to give to the British ex-internees once a month a parcel as we are very near starving. We are told that there are so many parcels at Vittel that they are distributed every week and are sometimes used as supper extras for internees.<sup>120</sup>

I have a husband now ill at the American Hospital, two daughters with one recently released from camp owing to ill health and in need of medical attention. We are not allowed to work and have no money whatsoever. We have four British Passports. This is really urgent.<sup>121</sup>

The sense of separation, isolation, and even desperation, is evident in these requests. As former internees and former members of the Besançon and Vittel collectives, they still wanted to identify as British and receive the benefits which this afforded them, so they sought

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<sup>119</sup> TNA, FO 916 143, A report on British subjects in Occupied France, Made by Miss Carmalt of the YMCA Staff, Paris, Received Geneva 29.9.41.

<sup>120</sup> TNA, FO 916 143, Letter from Mrs Hulton, Biarritz, July 25 1941.

<sup>121</sup> TNA, FO 916 143, Letter from R. Lyuham, Paris, 27 August 1941.

connection with the structures which would enable them to do this, in this case the British Red Cross.

The source material indicates that some of the British rituals which were performed in Vittel were also recreated outside the camp to maintain the 'collective identity of a citizenry at war' (Nicholas 1998, p.36). For Elizabeth Hales in Paris, the repeated ritual of tea drinking was maintained throughout the Occupation and she regularly connected with other British women in the capital, as evidenced in her diary written at the time:

13 January 1942 - Miss Gunn came at 4 when we had tea. They both enjoyed the marmalade and good tea. It was a happy afternoon. Miss G was matron of a British hospital in Venice for 20 years, is now in Paris awaiting events.

March 1942 - Early afternoon go over to Twinings to get tea and on to see Capt. Lees. On 17<sup>th</sup> give a tea party with Miss Perdue, Miss Howard, Miss Gowans, and Miss Gunn all nurses.

Elizabeth Hales and her husband Samuel Hales were interned in Besançon and then Vittel before being released in February 1941 having reached the age limits of 60 and 65. Although no longer part of the community in the camp, the Hales actively sought to connect with other British civilians in Paris with whom they would partake in traditional, British rituals, such as tea parties. British goods such as Twinings tea and marmalade served as reminders of home. Billig argues, 'National identity embraces all these forgotten reminders. Consequently, an identity is to be found in the embodied habits of social life' (1995, p.8). Gathering together as British people was an 'embodied habit' of the Hales' life which cemented their British identity. Elizabeth Hales mentions several tea parties in her diary of the Occupation, indicating that these were regular and important events in her life, and her interactions with other British women acted as a valuable support network which gave structure to her days.

When Fanny Twemlow was released from Vittel in December 1941, she returned to her family home in St Jean de Luz where she lived for the rest of the Occupation with her sister and her two Swiss and English friends (Lack 2011, p.112). Twemlow wrote in her diary that they were short of food and that their Spanish friends offered them additional supplies, although it was still insufficient (2011, p.113). After her internment in Vittel, Fanny Twemlow and her sisters

recreated their own international community outside the camp, at home. Although their circle of belonging was widened to include non-British people, the friendships that Fanny mentions were with other foreigners, not French citizens. This suggests that she felt an affinity and shared sense of belonging with other 'enemy aliens'. According to Purcell, 'Diaries reveal both the explicit evocations of the nation and the almost unconscious ways in which people place themselves within the nation and see their nation on an everyday basis' (2007, p.4). Twemlow also seems aware that she may have been a threat to French people as a British 'enemy alien'; she writes about a French woman who helped them, 'I did not know the woman – she was French – I did not try to find her for fear of getting her in trouble by helping the enemy!' (Lack 2011, p.114). Her diary highlights, 'how notions of who is entitled to be part of a 'national' community can shift and evolve over time' (Ugolini 2011, p.3). Although Twemlow had been a longstanding member of the local community, because of her 'external definition' as an 'enemy alien', she felt that she did not belong in the same way and associated with other foreigners, other outsiders, rather than with French people.

Tracing the lives of two former Vittel internees, Elizabeth Hales and Fanny Twemlow, illustrates that national belonging and British identity were central to those released from the camps. For the Hales, performative acts of 'Britishness' allowed her to maintain a connection to home as well as offering an opportunity to gather with other British civilians in Paris. In the case of Fanny Twemlow, although she lived with an English friend after her release, her circle of friends also included other foreign nationals, indicating that her self-definition as a British enemy alien did affect where she felt she belonged in their local French community. It appears that national belonging was not only key to British internees' experiences in Vittel, but it also significantly shaped their experiences outside the camp too. This final section on the Liberation of Vittel in September 1944 will question how this period of transition influenced former internees' external categorisation, and internal self-identification, as British.

#### 4.7 The Liberation of Vittel

Ce qui nous attendait, en tant que victimes de guerre fut, paradoxalement plus difficile à vivre que la guerre elle-même.<sup>122</sup>

That feeling remained with me for many years: the expectation that one day life would go back to pre-war normal. It is really only fairly recently that I have realised that it never will. (Skipwith 1968, p.254)

As mentioned in the preceding section, some internees were released from the camp to their homes in France or repatriated to the United Kingdom before the Liberation of France. For those remaining in the camp, their moment of liberation arrived in September 1944. On the morning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1944, internees awoke to find that all German officers had disappeared from the camp during the night, having heard advancing ‘maquis’ fighters in the region and that Leclerc’s *Deuxième Division Blindée* (Deuxième D.B.) were on the approach.<sup>123</sup> However the camp was not liberated until the 12<sup>th</sup> September, and for the ten days after the German troops left and before Leclerc’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Armoured Division arrived, the internees waited



Figure 9 - Internees watch the arrival of Allied Troops from behind the barbed wire fences in Vittel camp, p.3., Yank Weekly (British edition), 5 November 1944, unnamed collection, Musée du Patrimoine Archives.

anxiously for signs of Allied troops. Some young male internees set up an observation post in the loft of the *Grand Hotel* and watched slow moving tanks with soldiers marching beside them, but Doris Lecomte-Worthington recalls that they were too far away to distinguish ‘s’ils

<sup>122</sup> Lecomte Worthington, Doris. Diary. Unnamed collections. Musée du Patrimoine Archives, Vittel. p.117.

<sup>123</sup> Interview with Jean Michel, Vittel, 16 September 2015.

s'agissait de chars allemands ou allies.<sup>124</sup> Fighting between retreating German troops and local maquis fighters ensued in the streets of Vittel town itself, and internees describe hearing 'des bruits insolites' from within the camp but did not go outside, aware that they were in the middle of a battlefield.<sup>125</sup> The camp was officially liberated on the 12<sup>th</sup> September 1944 by General Leclerc and the Deuxième D.B.; figure 9 shows internees pressed up against the barbed wire perimeter of the camp watching the arriving troops.<sup>126</sup> General Leclerc made the following speech:

Je vous dois une visite. L'Angleterre nous a offert l'hospitalité en 1940 et nous a généreusement soutenue. L'Amérique nous a donné des armes et combat sur notre sol. Je suis heureux qu'il soit donné à un général français de vous rendre la liberté (Poinso 2004, p.15).

Leclerc's choice of words at the liberation of Vittel delineated the national frontiers which had in some senses been less explicit in the camp, despite many internees choosing to flag their British national identity. Where internees had lived with hybrid identities in the camp, Leclerc clearly separated British, American, and French nationalities. He also reaffirmed the importance of French nationalism, reminding American soldiers and civilians that America fights 'sur *notre sol*' (emphasis added), and he positioned himself as 'the French liberator,' even though the German captors had in fact fled ten days before. He flagged his own French national identity, grouping America and England as beneficiaries and supporters of the victorious French nation. This was a highly political statement intended to pave the way for France to regain her honour and position herself as a significant European power, on the side of the victorious, after the conflict. For one internee, Leclerc's speech not only marked long awaited liberation from the camp, but also signalled a freedom to practice her French nationality once again: 'Nous étions désormais en territoire français.'<sup>127</sup> After up to four years of incarceration as 'British' enemy aliens, this moment of liberation signified the beginning of freedom to flag their French nationality once again. 'Désormais', 'from now on', they were free to be French, and did not need to flag their British identity to survive. However, as Leclerc got

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<sup>124</sup> Lecomte Worthington, Doris. Diary. Unnamed collections. Musée du Patrimoine Archives, Vittel. p.108.

<sup>125</sup> Lecomte Worthington, Doris. Diary. Unnamed collections. Musée du Patrimoine Archives, Vittel. p.108-109.

<sup>126</sup> Musée du patrimoine, Vittel, Yank Weekly, 'The story of Germany's 'model' internment camp, November 5 1944, Vol 3, no. 21, p.3.

<sup>127</sup> Lecomte Worthington, Doris. Diary. Unnamed collections. Musée du Patrimoine Archives, Vittel. p.111.



into a nearby military vehicle and 'disappeared', the practicalities of liberation and repatriation ensued.<sup>128</sup>

The first organisational hurdle faced by the British and American governments and the International Red Cross Committee (ICRC) in relation to Vittel, was the question of what to do with the two thousand internees remaining in the camp.<sup>129</sup> British War Cabinet documents indicate that there was some disagreement over the most suitable destination for former internees. Since Vittel remained in a 'Combat zone,' the Sixth Army Group of the Allied Expeditionary Force was ordered to 'proceed to Vittel Internment camp and order the evacuation of all British and US internees' on the 13 October 1944.<sup>130</sup> Given that food was in short supply in Paris, it was ordered that former internees should be provided with at least one ICRC food parcel, 'which should be sufficient for three or four days.'<sup>131</sup> From the 14 September, former internees were sent in 'small batches' of about fifty people to Paris, where they were housed in hospitals in the outskirts of the city. The Delegate in France for the ICRC disagreed with this decision to evacuate, outlining the shortage of space in civilian hospitals in Paris, the lack of food, and the scarcity of transport to move ex-internees to their ultimate destination, meaning that they were transferred to another camp.<sup>132</sup> It was argued that former internees should remain in Vittel where there was sufficient food for a further three months, excellent housing facilities, medical provision, and enclosed grounds to prevent interference with military activities. Despite these concerns, the evacuation of ex-internees did continue and the Sixth Army group was tasked with the relocation of all civilians from Vittel by the 20 October 1944. Table 1 shows the nationality, ultimate destination and transfer destination of the remaining ex-internees in the camp on 17<sup>th</sup> October, based on a report from the Sixth Army Group.<sup>133</sup> According to the ICRC, on the 3 October 1944, the total number of ex- internees in

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<sup>128</sup> Lecomte Worthington, Doris. Diary. Unnamed collections. Musée du Patrimoine Archives, Vittel. p.111. 'Il ressortit, toujours souriant, nous salua encore et monta dans une voiture qui l'attendait un peu plus loin et disparut.'

<sup>129</sup> TNA WO 219 1366, Letter from Dr J. Morsier, French delegate of the ICRC, to Mr MacArthur, United States Embassy, Paris, 3 October 1944, p.1.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> TNA WO 219 1366, Letter from Dr J. Morsier, French delegate of the ICRC, to Mr MacArthur, United States Embassy, Paris, 3 October 1944, p.1.

<sup>133</sup> TNA WO 219 1366, Allied Expeditionary Force, PWX Branch, G-1 division, Report from Colonel M. Clark, 17 October 1944, para 5 &6.

Vittel was 2060, meaning that between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> October, over 1,000 former internees had already been sent to Paris, some also ‘wandered off, [with] private means of departure.’<sup>134</sup> Table 1 indicates that of the 756 British civilians in Vittel, only a very small percentage (80 individuals) wanted to return to the United Kingdom. The majority (371 individuals) wanted to remain in Paris or elsewhere in France or Europe, revealing that the ‘British’ civilians interned in Vittel, did not in fact choose to reside in Britain when they were released. This suggests that despite their performance of ‘Britishness’ in Vittel, many ex-internees still retained a sense of allegiance and belonging to France.

Table 1 - Ex-internees in Vittel on 17 October 1944

Nationality	Ultimate Destination	Immediate destination	Number
Americans	United States	Paris	39
Americans	Paris and environs	Paris	12
Americans	Elsewhere in France or Europe	Points in NW France or South of France	63
Americans	Unclassified or destitute	Temporary camp	117
<b>British</b>	<b>United Kingdom</b>	<b>Paris</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>British</b>	<b>Paris and environs</b>	<b>Paris</b>	<b>144</b>
<b>British</b>	<b>Elsewhere in France or Europe</b>	<b>Points in NW France or South of France</b>	<b>227</b>
<b>British</b>	<b>Unclassified or destitute</b>	<b>Temporary camp</b>	<b>305</b>
Other nationalities (including French, Polish, Iranian, Russian, Dominican, Nicaraguan and Egyptian)	Unknown	Unknown	247
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1034</b>

This sense of allegiance to France is reflected in the life histories of British women who were liberated from the camp. Sofka Skipwith wrote, ‘The rest of *la petite famille*, as our group called itself, was staying in France.’ (1968:240). Although Skipwith was repatriated to Britain initially,

<sup>134</sup> TNA WO 219 1366, Letter from Dr J. Morsier, French delegate of the ICRC, to Mr MacArthur, United States Embassy, Paris, 3 October 1944, p.1.

she describes feelings of reassurance when she met a Free French airman in London: 'It was very relaxing to hear French spoken again, to be with people who knew Paris, who were aware of what was going on over there' (Skipwith 1968, p.252). Language re-emerges as an important marker of belonging, on this occasion the French language served as a flag of national identity for Skipwith in London. The fact that Skipwith recalls that hearing the language spoken was 'relaxing' suggests that it conjured feelings of safety and security, both associated with feeling at home (Yuval-Davis 2006). When Skipwith returned to France in 1945, she mentioned 'the old smell of Paris' being 'unchanged' (Skipwith 1968, p.263), and dancing in *Place de la Concorde* on Bastille Day in July (1968, p.65). Skipwith's diary indicates that the Liberation represented an opportunity for women who had been interned in Vittel to practice multiple national identities once again, rather than being constrained to practice the national identity which afforded them the most protection or resources. British women were no longer required to suppress national identities which placed them in danger, or to perform those which ensured their survival. As they were released and able to travel freely between the United Kingdom and France once again, they could flag aspects of both national communities, as they desired.

Not all internees had the same sense of liberation and belonging as Skipwith once they were released from the camp. As Table 1 indicates, nearly half of the British civilians remaining in Vittel on 17 October 1944 did not have homes to which they could return. According to a report on 'Vittel Civilian Internees' from the Seine Section of the Allied Expeditionary Force, 'Many, on arriving, find their homes occupied by others.'<sup>135</sup> This tallies with the life histories of some women in this study, who found their properties either occupied or ransacked. For these British women, liberation did not necessarily mean freedom; instead, they left a camp which was well resourced to find homes devoid of possessions or uninhabitable. Sara Abelson and her family were British Jews living in Paris at the outbreak of war; her daughter described that, when the family's neighbours saw them being arrested, they assumed they were being taken to a concentration camp and so went into their house and took their belongings. 'Tous les voisins, ou ils habitaient à Vert Galant, ils étaient persuadés qu'ils ne viendront pas. Parce qu'ils ont

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<sup>135</sup> TNA WO 219 1366, Allied Expeditionary Force, PWX Branch, G-1 division, Report from Major D. Bramhall, G-5 Section, Seine Section, p.2.

pris tous dans la maison. Maman disait après, quand elle est sortie, elle voyait son ami qui avait son vélo [...] des draps, du linge, ils se sont servis.<sup>136</sup> Doris Lecomte Worthington and her mother returned to their home in the *Pas-de-Calais* to discover that their furniture and paintings had been taken and transported to Germany; any remaining possessions had been left in the garden for the neighbours to appropriate, and their house was occupied by ‘des sinistrés de Calais-Nord.’<sup>137</sup> The house was in such poor condition that it was subjected to war damages and the family were forced to sell it, as they needed immediate funds. Both Abelson and Lecomte Worthington’s accounts correspond with broader accounts of the Liberation in France which describe the acute problems of reconstruction following the conflict (Diamond 1999, p.155). For French people, ‘By comparison with the Occupation period, conditions were, if anything, worse rather than better’ (1999, p.155). For ‘British’ women, like Abelson and Lecomte Worthington, who did not have connections in Britain and had lived their entire lives in France, these challenging conditions would have been shocking and disorientating compared with their four years in Vittel. The three ‘interrelated problems of transport, energy and food’ (1999, p.155) which troubled the French nation, had not touched these women in Vittel. They had sufficient to eat, they were unable to travel (until their eventual release which was organised by the Sixth Army Group), and any resources required were organised by the German soldiers and the Vittel mayor. British internees in Vittel were deprived of their liberty, but their material needs were well met during the Occupation.

This ‘difficult Liberation’ also had an impact on ex-internees in terms of their sense of national belonging to Britain. Yuval-Davis observes that identities can shift and change, ‘They can be aimed at explaining the present and, probably above all, they function as a projection of a future trajectory’ (2006, p.202). It has been stated that ‘British’ women in Vittel, even those with little connection to Britain, signalled their nationality to achieve a sense of belonging to the country for which they had been interned, and to survive. The choice to flag their national identity constitutes what Yuval-Davis terms as ‘explaining the present.’ If, as Yuval-Davis states, identities also function as a ‘projection of a future trajectory,’ British women’s choice to invest in their British identity in Vittel would also have an impact on their post-war lives.

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<sup>136</sup> Interview with Laura Giraud, Paris, 22 February 2016.

<sup>137</sup> Lecomte Worthington, Doris. Diary. Unnamed collections. Musée du Patrimoine Archives, Vittel. p.35.

Chapter 5 will argue that the 'investment in Britishness' which women made during their internment in Vittel did continue to mark their lives more than seventy years after the war. The Liberation was a significant moment for former internees in terms of their national belonging as this 'projection of a future trajectory' was disturbed and the flagging of belonging within the camp were lost. Former internees were no longer part of the 'grand unified collective' (Rose 2003, p.7) of British citizens performing their national identity. They no longer participated in group flagging of nationhood like listening to the BBC, teatime at 4 o'clock, theatre performances, or the camp's organisational committee. When the time came for individuals to be repatriated in 'batches' of fifty, former internees describe that they were keen to remain in contact (Skipwith 1968, p.247): 'Tous les jours il y avait un ou plusieurs adieux, des adresses échangées, des promesses de se retrouver.'<sup>138</sup> Many internees had bonded during their time in the camp and desired to maintain a level of continuity by preserving friendships with other women in Vittel. In many senses, the perception of Britain which was performed in the camp was idealised and abstract. As argued in this chapter, internees rallied around positive British wartime values. This glorified projection of the United Kingdom began to fade as internees were faced with the realities of life after the camp. This was most difficult for 'British' women who lived in France and had found themselves in an advantageous position in Vittel as British citizens during the Occupation, compared with French civilians. Lecomte Worthington is an example of the 305 destitute internees who, once released from Vittel, were vulnerable and disadvantaged, seemingly no longer under the protection of the British state and forced to face the same challenges as the rest of the French population, with the added hardship of having lost their homes. For British women who were repatriated to the United Kingdom, the idealistic view of their 'home' nation was also questioned. Sofka Skipwith recalled arriving in Liverpool on 10 August 1944 to be greeted by the immigration authorities who were 'not exactly welcoming': 'Well, it's an end to being lazy and easy living. You'll be made to do some work now that you've decided to come back' (Skipwith 1968, p.247). This sharply contrasted with the imagined construct of Britain in Vittel where slogans such as 'There'll always be an England' had sustained many women during their internment (Poinsot 2004: front cover). The reality was quite different. Like their French counterparts, ex-internees

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<sup>138</sup> Lecomte Worthington, Doris. Diary. Unnamed collections. Musée du Patrimoine Archives, Vittel. p.113.

repatriated to Britain had to deal with the 'paraphernalia of civilisation' (Skipwith 1968, p.249), trying to access funds (1968, p.248), reunions with family members which were often less straightforward than anticipated (1968, p.251), and the British government also sought repayment from them for the costs incurred in their repatriation. The existence of this outstanding debt was not welcomed by one former internee who had escaped from Vittel in 1941. In a letter to one foreign office official, she stated: 'I couldn't help adding the gratuitously insulting comment that had I escaped as a member of the armed forces and not as a private citizen I would probably have been presented with an MBE and not a bill!' (Say and Holland 2012, p.243). These extracts from the life histories of ex-internees in Britain reveal the discrepancy between the internal and external frontiers of the state during the Liberation period. When interned, British women had sought to belong to the 'imagined community' of Britain through performative acts. However, these extracts reveal that the reality of belonging to the British community left some women feeling disappointed and frustrated by the British authorities. Interactions with fellow British citizens 'back home' could also be discouraging; when Sofka Skipwith tried to explain her sadness at the deportation of Jewish internees in Vittel her acquaintances in London replied, 'The Germans haven't done enough about the Jews' (Skipwith 1968, p.249). Rather than the perceived unity and solidarity of the People's War, some repatriated internees seem to have experienced isolation and disorientation. Their accounts do not reveal an immediate sense of belonging and affiliation with the British community. Existing research into the experiences of Prisoners of War after their liberation indicates, perhaps unsurprisingly, that there was a period of readjustment and adaptation as POWs assimilated back into their families and everyday life (Fishman 1991). Research into the experiences of civilian internees after their liberation has primarily focused on Japanese internees in the United States (Nagata, 1990; Ng, 2002; Hirasuna, 2013). In addition Christina Twomey's account of the Australian civilians captured and interned by the Japanese provides some insights into life after liberation (2007). Looking to Britain, Ugolini's account (2011) of Italian internment does not focus on the release of Italian internees in detail. Given that the circumstances in which civilians were interned during the Second World War varied so considerably, it is challenging to draw common threads about their experiences and there is scope to look in greater depth at the immediate post-war lives of civilian internees in Europe. Nonetheless, the same sense of disorientation, difficulties in adjusting to everyday life and strained relationships with families are present in existing research into civilian internment,

combined with varying levels of relief, and trepidation, particularly for civilians who were nationals of the defeated Axis countries. British women's accounts following their release from Vittel reveal similar conflicting emotions and suggest that life after victory, which had been long anticipated as internees, was often uncertain. In terms of national belonging, ex-internees accounts reveal that following the Liberation of France, their perceptions of Britain changed. The confidence and hope placed in the 'imagined community' of the United Kingdom was shaken, as individuals' wartime experiences had to be defended and were sometimes questioned and misunderstood. In her study of internment, Ugolini observed that, during wartime, ideas of who is entitled to belong to a national community alter and transform (2011, p.3). Ex-internees' life histories reveal that these notions did not cease after peace was declared; instead they continued to evolve and change. The next chapter evaluates the post-war experiences of former internees and argues that dilemmas of belonging continued to shape these British women's lives long after the conflict had ended.

Using the framework of national belonging, this chapter has explored the experiences of British women in Occupied France. It has focused specifically on their internment in Vittel. To return to the original research questions for this chapter, sources suggest that the internees' sense of national belonging and identity was key to their internment experience in Vittel. Some young women who spent their formative years in the camp even realised their sense of 'Britishness' during this period. Others experienced a reawakening of their British identity and some actively chose their 'Britishness' over other identities, such as being French or even Jewish. Survival was a significant motivation for choosing British identity due to the protection and security offered within the confines of the camp.

This chapter has explored the ambiguity of national identity, looking in part one at the convergence and conflict of internal and external frontiers of belonging. British women trying to reconcile these two frontiers of belonging often found them rendered particularly distinct or opposing in the specific context of war. 'Performing Britishness' suggested that repeated acts and rituals were used to signify belonging to a larger, national community and to bond disparate beings within the camp. Such 'flagging of nationhood' also substantiated the group identity to key agents, such as the French and German authorities, and could be a collective survival technique adopted by the internees. Gendered rituals of belonging emerged

particularly strongly in the activities of the British committee, paralleling the aims of British women's wartime organisations in the United Kingdom which sought to provide training for women in responsible citizenship. It was argued that the arrival of other nationalities in Vittel highlighted that national belonging was not inclusive, and notably that Eastern European Jews were ostracized, as they represented the antithesis of British wartime values. Looking beyond the camp to former internees outside Vittel has highlighted that national belonging remained key to those who had been released. It shows that separation from the camp's collective identity was difficult for several internees and, in the two examples cited, British women continued with 'performative acts' which reaffirmed their British national identity. In the final section on the Liberation of Vittel, it was argued that for many internees this was a difficult transition period during which their perceptions of Britain were challenged as they tried to resume their pre-war lives in either Britain or France.

The findings from this chapter sit within existing scholarly discussions of national identity in wartime Britain and confirm observations that this was a period in which 'Britishness' was significantly reconfigured for British civilians (Rose, 2003). It highlights the slippage between identities and how the parameters of belonging can shift during periods of conflict. The use of life history narratives links to a broader methodological discussion about the role of individual agency in the construction of national identity and how personal narratives nuance and complicate these debates (Ugolini, 2011). For British women interned in Vittel, questions of belonging endured after the war as they continued to negotiate the different frontiers of belonging. As mentioned, after the liberation, ex-internee Margaret Williams wanted to visit the country for which she had been imprisoned.<sup>139</sup> Margaret Williams had been interned for belonging to an 'unknown' nation and yet still maintained a strong sense of allegiance to Britain. This allegiance lasted beyond the war and throughout her life. Many Vittel internees articulated the same longstanding national allegiance. The next chapter, 'Shared memories of Vittel: direct and indirect generational accounts,' evaluates the intergenerational transmission of former internees' internment experiences in Vittel and questions how their memories have been integrated into popular memories of the war in Britain, if at all.

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<sup>139</sup> Interview with Margaret Williams, Paris, 17 April 2015.





## **5: Shared memories of Vittel: direct and indirect generational accounts**

The previous chapter analysed the role of national identity in British women's negotiation of the Occupation years, asserting that for several internees in Vittel, this was a period during which 'Britishness' was reconfigured. It also underscored the role of individual agency in the construction of national identity, and the importance of life history narratives in revealing British women's internal negotiation of the external frontiers of belonging. The intersection of individual's private memories with broader, national narratives is explored in this chapter which focuses on British women's lives after 1945. It questions how their wartime experiences were remembered by individuals and their families as well as by institutional communities and memory groups. Questions of belonging persisted after the war for these women as their identities continued to be shaped by their wartime experiences in France between 1939 and 1945. The continuing impact of 'Britishness' on these women's post war lives is revealed in the oral and written narratives authored by them and their family members. Just two of the written narratives in this thesis were published pre-1990 by former Vittel internees (Skipwith 1968; Hunt, 1982). The remaining accounts were authored after 2005 by second and third generations of these families. Hunt and Skipwith's autobiographies present the autobiographical narrator as heroes; Sofka Skipwith (Skipwith 1968) worked to save Eastern European Jews who were being deported from Vittel, and Antonia Hunt was an agent in the French resistance (Hunt 1982). The publication of second and third generation biographies concerning British women in Vittel from 2005 onwards suggests that there is a market for these accounts. For example, Nicholas Shakespeare's story of his aunt, who spent time in Vittel, was serialised on Radio 4 in January 2014. This chapter questions why second and third generations have 'borrowed memories' from former internees and published them in the last decade.

This chapter will mobilise these 'living histories' (Thompson 2006:x) through a close reading of four texts, one oral and three written memoirs. These texts provide scope to compare and contrast eyewitness testimonies with second and third generation narratives, as well as to analyse how the texture of memory changes in written and oral narratives. This chapter will evaluate how and why the families of British women have been instrumental in the preservation and transmission of their wartime experiences. A number of questions emerge

from this corpus and this chapter will be structured in the following way to explore how particular dimensions of the war experience has been remembered. It will firstly ask how forms of narration and stylistics change from first hand, eyewitness accounts to indirect witnessing. It will analyse the writers' motivations for the publication of intergenerational life history narratives concerning British women in wartime France. Finally, it will consider two filmic narratives about the camp in Vittel, one British and one French, and question how these intersect with common themes in the four intergenerational texts.

The four texts selected for this chapter comprise two eyewitness testimonies: the unpublished memoir of Lecomte-Worthington (2005-2010),<sup>140</sup> and an oral history interview with Jeanne and Eva Phillips (2016, interview with the author);<sup>141</sup> and two indirect generational accounts: Katherine Lack's *Frontstalag 142: The Internment Diary of an English Lady* (2010) and Nicholas Shakespeare's *Priscilla: The Hidden Life of an Englishwoman in Wartime France* (2014). Lecomte-Worthington's memoir was selected for close reading, as it is the most recent and detailed written eyewitness account uncovered during this study. It was written between 2005 and 2010 and was sent by Lecomte-Worthington to the local archives at the Musée du Patrimoine in Vittel. Lecomte-Worthington was interned in Frontstalag 142 in Besançon and Vittel. She claims that her memoir was written for her grandchildren and to provide information for a 'brochure' which was being compiled by the Musée du Patrimoine in Vittel about the internment camp in the town (Poinsot, 2004).<sup>142</sup> Jeanne and Eva Phillips were both interned in Besançon and Vittel and were contacted in 2016 and interviewed by the author in Paris as part of the fieldwork for this project. Their interview was chosen for analysis in this chapter since they were the only participants interviewed who had been interned for the duration of the war in both camps and as such their testimony provided a rich and detailed oral account of life as an internee. The two indirect generational accounts have been selected for close reading as both memoirists have similar relationships with the subjects of their biographies. They do not share a horizontal relationship; but a diagonal pathway: Shakespeare

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<sup>140</sup> Letter to Madame Clement and memoirs of Doris Lecomte-Worthington, Letter dated 23 July 2010, Unnamed collections. Musée du Patrimoine Archives, Vittel.

<sup>141</sup> Interview with Jeanne & Eva Phillips, Monday 22 February 2016 (Paris).

<sup>142</sup> See letter to Madame Clement, 23 July 2010, Unnamed collections. Musée du Patrimoine Archives, Vittel.

writes about his aunt, Priscilla Doynel, and Lack about her great aunt, Fanny Twemlow.<sup>143</sup> Neither author lived with their relative and both discovered their diaries and material corresponding to their internment after they had died. The texts share common characteristics; both mobilise other internees' memoirs and diaries; use material culture, such as photographs, sketches, or diaries, in their memoirs and undergo pilgrimages to the sites of memory mentioned by their relatives. In analysing both texts, this chapter will explore the insights they bring to the way indirect witnesses preserve and transmit British women's stories and how this intersects with existing work on multigenerational remembering. For this analysis of the intergenerational transmission of memory, Palmberger's note on generations should be kept in mind: 'Boundaries drawn between the generations are not clear-cut and age alone is not always decisive. Consequently the generations should not be considered as homogeneous cohorts, but rather as trends based on generational identification' (2016, p.10).

This chapter will use a number of analytical frameworks including approaches to composure, work on intergenerational remembering and content analysis to interrogate the four transcribed texts. It will draw on recent research in the field of Holocaust memory and generational thinking. This is the dominant model for understanding how direct witnesses transmit memories of the Second World War to family members. It will evaluate how effective the application of oral history, composure, and intergenerational memory methods are for the analysis of life history narratives. In terms of structure, the chapter will first introduce the analytical concepts to be applied to the source material. It will then focus on the direct witness narratives, the interview with Jeanne and Eva Phillips and the Doris Lecomte-Worthington memoir, and will compare the form of narration and stylistics of these memories, and then the motivation of those involved in the creation of the narratives. The second section of the chapter appraises texts created by indirect witnesses. Both direct and indirect witness sections reveal common themes in the texts which structure the analysis. Thirdly, this chapter brings together the analyses of eyewitness and indirect accounts by asking what these four intergenerational texts tell us about how forms of narration and stylistics change from first hand, eyewitness accounts to indirect witnessing. The final part of the chapter compares two filmic

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<sup>143</sup> Priscilla is referred to as 'Priscilla Doynel' in this chapter because this was her married name between 1938 and 1946, she was born Priscilla Mais, and later became Priscilla Thompson when she married again in 1948. She remained Priscilla Thompson until her death in 1982 (Shakespeare, 2014:xviii).

narratives about Vittel and explores how familial memories of British women in wartime France relate to British popular memory - a discussion that is continued in the thesis conclusion.

### 5.1 Methodological considerations

As outlined in chapter 2, oral and written life history narratives have long been used as a medium of remembering and recording the everyday experiences of war. The increased levels of civilian involvement from the First to the Second World War meant that everyone had a story to tell: 'In World War I they fought amongst themselves out there, but in World War II, we all were involved' (Portelli 1997, p.7). As Cole and Knowles note in their study of life history research: 'In as much as it is humanly possible, life history inquiry is about gaining insights into the broader human condition by coming to know and understand the experiences of other humans... It is about comprehending the complexities of a person's day-to-day decision making and the ultimate consequences that play out in the life so that insights into the broader, collective experience may be achieved' (2001, p.11). Using individual, personal histories to gain insights into broader, collective experience has been a successful approach adopted in several histories of France during the Second World War (Diamond, 2008; Dodd 2016; Gildea, 2015; Kedward, 1993). As chapter 2 outlines, the written memoir is considered to reveal new perspectives which may not be available in archival material. However, it has been argued that the oral history interview permits the interviewer to request further detail, rather than inferring meaning from the written text (Thompson 2000), and as a co-creation of the interviewee and interviewer it provides a unique and untold story. These distinctions are significant for this chapter as the first section on direct witness narratives compares these two modes of communication. The aim of these comparisons is to evaluate and build upon what we currently understand about an oral history approach and the use of written testimonial sources. Since this chapter also analyses the narrative form and stylistics in these modes of communication, it is important to bear in mind the methodological differences between the two types of texts. Content analysis provides a valuable tool to identify common themes from the written accounts and the interview transcripts. As Shannon & Hsieh (2005) advise, in interrogating these texts, the use of preconceived thematic categories was avoided, and instead relevant themes were identified following a close reading of the data. This form of

analysis works well with open ended questioning in interviews (Hsieh and Shannon 2005, p.1279), an approach which was used for the interview cited in this chapter. Passerini, the oral historian, favours content analysis and argues that it, 'probes the selections, teasing out repressed elements, and silences by reading symbols and metaphors, looking for contradictions and ruptures in narratives, listening for denials and displacements, asking questions about feeling.' The themes identified using content analysis are cited in the two sections on generational thinking.

## 5.2 Direct and indirect witnessing

Various institutions and media, including war museums, television series, internet sites, biographies and other publications have borne witness to war since the beginning of the memory boom, articulated by Winter as a 'steadily increasing recognition of the need to acknowledge and account for the victims of war' (Winter 2006, p.15). Witness testimony, in different forms, has been present in certain historiographical traditions since the end of the war, for example, Mass Observation was used by historians such as Angus Calder (1991) and Juliet Gardiner (2005) to demonstrate that 'the "story" of the Second World War in Britain is one of over 48 million people' (Gardiner 2005, p.689). The five hundred individuals who volunteered to the Mass Observation Organisation to record their wartime experiences in diaries is an early example of direct witnessing at the time of conflict, and their personal accounts have been mobilised by historians in subsequent decades (Mass Observation 2015). Annette Wieviorka asserts that we are now in the 'era of the witness' (Wieviorka 2006, p.386), an approach which foregrounds the survivors and the victims, 'people who were there, people who have seen war at close range, people whose memories are part of the historical record' (Winter 2006, p.7). This era began in the late twentieth century with the emergence of Holocaust survivor accounts which played a 'paradigmatic role' therein (Wieviorka 2006, p.386). Witnesses have become important on a legal level, providing evidence to support prosecutions for war crimes and the violation of human rights. The concept of 'moral witnessing' has also emerged; individuals who testify about genocide or terrorism and who, according to Winter, assume a 'semi sacred role' (2006, p.49) as they denounce acts of absolute evil. Along with the importance of witness' testimony from the 1970s onwards, came

the need to understand the witnesses, to help them find solace and deal with their traumatic memories (Wieviorka 2006; Winter, 2006). The therapeutic benefits to sharing life histories have been outlined by Joanna Bornat in her work on reminiscence and oral history (2001). Bornat argues that the processes of oral history and reminiscence and life review share similarities, the former focusing on the content of memory, and the latter on self-awareness and self-reflection (2001, p.223). 'Both oral history and reminiscence play a key role in legitimating the telling of personal stories' (Bornat 2001, p.226), and Thompson suggests that the oral history interview could be considered a therapeutic 'confessional' (2006, pp.182–3). The importance of eyewitness testimonies has been presented both in terms of their contribution to the historical record and as a therapeutic tool for those who are testifying. This dual aspect of eyewitness testimony will be considered in the analysis of oral and written narratives from former British internees in wartime France. However, as the first generation disappears, the centrality of testimony in memory work has moved beyond eyewitness accounts to second and third generation witnessing, which is also pertinent to two of the texts to be examined in this chapter.

Although the concept of intergenerational memory has been adopted by scholars outside Holocaust studies (Weigel, 2002; Suleiman 1993), from the 1970s the study of Holocaust has strongly influenced the field of memory studies. According to Hirsch and Spitzer, 'the Holocaust has in many ways shaped the discourse on collective, social and cultural memory, serving as both touchstone and paradigm' (2009, p.151). For this reason, work on generational thinking and the Holocaust are the starting point for this analysis and offer a useful theoretical framework for the analysis of indirect familial accounts of British women in wartime France. Evidently, there are aspects of Holocaust memory which cannot be applied to British women's memories of the conflict, for example the very specific traumatic memories associated with deportation, imprisonment and loss of relatives in extermination camps. However, whilst bearing this in mind, the vast body of Holocaust literature from third generation, indirect witnesses offers insights about how memories are re-presented and remembered within families, including forms of narration, stylistics and the intention behind these representations, which can be applied to the intergenerational texts in this chapter. Marianne Hirsch's term 'postmemory' describes, 'the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to

them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right' (2008, p.103) . Hirsch contends that this passing of memory from one generation to the next evokes, 'Not only a personal/familial/generational sense of ownership and protectiveness but also an evolving theoretical discussion about the workings of trauma, memory, and intergenerational acts of transfer, a discussion actively taking place in numerous contexts outside of Holocaust studies' (2008, p.104).

This chapter references the themes of generational ownership and intergenerational transfer as it analyses two life history narratives created by familial, indirect witnesses. According to Hirsch, second-generation witnesses' lives are strongly influenced by the narratives which preceded their birth (2008, p.107). These indirect experiences have overshadowed the lives of some of the second generation, who live with the aftereffects of trauma and some of whom feel a need to protect and ensure their parents well-being (Karpf 1997). The character and texture of third generation memories are analysed at length by Victoria Aarons (Aarons 2016, 2017) who asserts that this generation begin their investigation of family memories with 'questions, gaps, openings and uncertainties' (Aarons and Berger 2017, p.10). Palmberger posits that 'Narratives of the past that are passed on from older to younger generations, and are then scrutinised and contextualised by the latter' (2016, p.8). The composition of indirect accounts is a 'patchwork, weaving together strands of stories...[they] gather knowledge piecemeal, from vague references, indirect stories, conversations overheard, oblique observations, and from documents, abstract 'histories'' (Aarons and Berger 2017, pp.5–6). Various narratives emerge from this generation; memoirs, novels, short stories, and historical accounts. In their 'supreme duty towards memory' (Wiesel, 1986), the third generation weave together family histories with public representations. These stories become more tenuous as the witnesses become more temporally distanced from the past (Aarons and Berger 2017, p.8). Some representations are even 'otherworldly' in their appearance and composition (2017, p.4). As Ewa Stąnczyk posits, 'At the aesthetic level we see figurative and allegorical representation, as well as an application of different stylistics, from realism to fantasy' (2018, p.5). Which of these narrative features, if any, are adopted by Lack and Shakespeare in their published accounts? Do their biographies reveal knowledge pieced together from 'patchwork' references; indirect stories, conversations, documents, and oblique observations? Do their memory journeys begin with questions, gaps and uncertainties?



The final part of this chapter raises the question of how familial memories of British women in wartime France intersect with what has been represented in British popular memory. In her work on culture and composure, Penny Summerfield considers one of the challenges to using life histories as source material is the impact of cultural influences on individual memories. 'Discourses of, especially, popular culture inform personal and locally told life stories, in that narrators draw on generalised, public versions of the aspects of the lives that they are talking about to construct their own particular, personal accounts' (Summerfield 2004, p.67). Summerfield argues that this influence *from* popular culture *to* individual memories, must also work in reverse, creating a 'cultural circuit' whereby some personal and local stories make their way into public discourse, and therefore popular culture (2004, p.68). The term 'popular culture' includes the mass media, museums, film, photography, music, education and broadcasting. In his article on 'Sites of Remembering', Kidron argues that there is a 'personalisation' of national memory (2015, p.51), where families' personal memories interact with public, master narratives. This theory of the cultural circuit and the personalisation of national memories will be applied to the four familial accounts chosen in this chapter. It will question the extent to which these accounts influence, and are influenced by, British popular culture. As outlined in chapter 1, popular national narratives about the Second World War in Britain centre around 'the big facts' about the war (Connelly 2004, p.7), displayed in key historical moments such as Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain, the Blitz, D-day and VE day (Rose 2003, p.1). These events are emblematic of the characteristics of British wartime identity that we seek to remember, such as heroism, resilience, fearlessness, stoicism, courage and collective participation. Since this thesis seeks to draw attention to 'the other' British women in France whose experiences remain an orphan story, excluded from these popular retellings, this chapter questions whether the four familial accounts analysed conform to the dominant narrative of heroism and fearlessness, or point to an alternative wartime experience?

The legacy of the Second World War in Britain is still potent; indeed Noakes and Pattinson contend that 'few historical events have resonated as fully in modern British culture' (2014, p. 2). The familial accounts analysed in this chapter are part of a national, cultural context in which this global conflict still has a strong and deep-rooted presence. This is evidenced by the plethora of imaginative writing associated with wartime events, including fiction, children's

literature, poetry, comics, and novels. Cultural artefacts also emblemise popular slogans associated with British memories of the war, the gift shop at the Imperial War Museum on site and online, has a 'Second World War' section selling wartime recipes, posters and prints. There are objects with well-known slogans and quotations such as 'Victory is in the Kitchen' and 'Never Give in.' The visual landscape of memory, films, photographs, and television programmes, all illustrate an appetite for the Second World War. War documentaries remain popular with the public, with digital channels *Yesterday*, *Quest* and *BBC Four* showing and repeating them regularly. Hollywood continues to produce historical dramas about the conflict which respond an appetite for war stories in Britain and beyond. Since 2000, films have foregrounded European memories of the conflict in *The Pianist* (Polanski 2003), *Black Book* (Verhoeven 2007), *Atonement* (Wright 2008), *Inglourious Bastards* (Tarantino and Roth 2009), *Son of Saul* (Nemes 2016), and *Dunkirk* (Nolan 2017), as well as *Stalingrad* (Bondarchuk 2014) and *The Wind Rises* (Miyazaki 2014) which represent the War in the East and the Far East respectively. According to Eley, this diverse visual landscape shows that, 'the prompting of memory may be not so much conscious and deliberate as *instinctive, visceral and sensory*' (Eley, 2014: xvii). Family memory occupies an important position in the British memory landscape, shown in biographies, autobiographies, material objects inherited from family members (medals, photographs, diaries, letters), as well as online projects like the *BBC People's War* which received 47,000 written contributions and 15,000 images in less than three years (In Noakes and Pattinson 2014, p.47). Significant anniversary years also offer opportunities to commemorate and remember, 2004 and 2005 were significant milestones signifying sixty years since the end of the conflict. These were marked with a joint national day of commemoration for VE Day and VJ Day, services in Westminster Abbey, and a 'Reflections on World War Two Commemoration Show' including a speech by the Queen, popular wartime songs, and actors playing key figures such as Winston Churchill. In the wake of the London bombings in 2005, in her speech the Queen invoked 'the example of resilience, humour, and sustained courage' shown during the conflict' (Tweedie and Davies 2015). The sixtieth anniversary of material objects like the desert boot was also commemorated; inspired by the footwear of Montgomery's 8<sup>th</sup> Army in North Africa, *Clarks* the shoe manufacturer released limited edition pairs of the footwear in 2009 (*The Telegraph*, 2009). Whilst the dominance of a white, male British memory of the Second World War is being questioned in the academic sphere (Pattinson et al., 2014; Visram, 2002; Schaffer, 2010; Bourne, 2010, Kushner, 2012),

multicultural memories of the conflict in British culture are less prominent 2004 (Noakes and Pattinson 2014; Ugolini, 2011; Ward, 2004). Memories of the Second World War are also increasingly prominent at a global level, moving away from national models of remembrance to both regional, and transnational memories of the conflict (Finney 2017). As De Cesari and Rigney state, 'National frames are no longer the self-evident ones they used to be in daily life and identity formation... The national has [also] ceased to be the inevitable or prominent scale for the study of collective remembrance' (2014, p.2). The transition from national remembrance, to local and transnational memories of the Second World War, is relevant to this research since its subjects were positioned in between national borders during the war, as are their memories over seventy years later. The final part of this chapter questions how these popular memories of the Second World War in Britain interact with the direct and indirect generational accounts featured in this chapter. This first section looks at the two eyewitness accounts, Lecomte-Worthington's diary and the Phillips' interview, to analyse the character and texture of memory in British women's eyewitness accounts and questions whether there are common threads, or clear differences, in their modes of communication.

### 5.3 Generational thinking: Direct witness narratives

The two direct witness narratives selected for discussion here are an oral history interview and a written memoir. The oral history interview with Jeanne and Eva Phillips took place in their home in Paris in 2016 (see full transcription in Appendix B). The interview lasted for one hour and 35 minutes. We started speaking in English but then the interviewees switched to French after five minutes and the remainder of the interview was mostly conducted in French apart from a few sentences or phrases when the interviewees chose to speak English. They were interviewed as part of this PhD project and were identified as potential interviewees through the Musée du Patrimoine in Vittel which had organised a 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion for former internees in 2004, to which the sisters were invited. Jeanne Phillips was 92 at the time of interviewing and Eva was 89. Their mother was French; their father was a British citizen although he had been born in France. They were two of three sisters; Irène, the eldest, Jeanne and Eva. Their father worked as an engineer in a car company, but when war broke out in September 1939, he was recalled to England to serve as a commander in the British Navy, but

the rest of the family remained in France. The mother and two eldest daughters stayed with extended family in Normandy from the end of 1939 (exact date unspecified) until the Germans arrived in May 1940, and Eva was at a boarding school in the Vendée. The mother and eldest daughters left Normandy under German bombing in May 1940 and, as outlined in chapter 3, were caught in the exodus towards Paris, walking for four days and eventually finding a train which took them to the capital where they stayed with relatives. From there, due to the impending arrival of the Germans, they decided to travel to the Vendée where they again stayed with relatives and where they remained after the Germans occupied the region from June 1940. Jeanne Phillips recalled that her mother did not want to get their relatives 'in trouble' for housing 'enemy aliens', and so the family registered as British at the local Commandant's office in line with the requirements of the Occupier, as outlined in chapter 4.<sup>144</sup> They were rounded up in December 1940 at the Kommandatur in Vendée along with fourteen other British citizens; Eva was taken from her school (age 14) by a German police officer. The family was then sent by train to La Roche-sur-Yon where they were housed in a requisitioned school for three days and nights before being sent to Besançon by train. There were already some British civilians in the Caserne Vauban when they arrived. Eva remained in the camp for some weeks (she does not specify how long exactly) and was then released from the camp as she was under sixteen, along with her mother, who was also released to care for her, and they returned to Paris. The two elder sisters remained in Besançon and were then transferred to Vittel in May 1941. The Nazis should have returned to round up Eva Phillips and her mother after Eva Phillips' sixteenth birthday but they appeared to have forgotten about them, even though their mother followed protocol and went to the Commissariat in the *Septième* in Paris 6 days-a-week to register. The interned sisters deliberately denounced their mother and younger sister so that they could join them in Vittel and all be repatriated to England after the Liberation as a family. As a result, Eva and her mother were sent to Vittel in late 1942, and finally, in June 1944, after the Deuxième D.B. liberated the camp, the whole family travelled to Lisbon by train, where they were then repatriated to Britain.<sup>145</sup> On their arrival in England, they were first held in a camp in Cottingham, Yorkshire, and then billeted in a shared house in

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<sup>144</sup> Interview with Jeanne and Eva Phillips, Paris, 22 February 2016.

<sup>145</sup> The exact date of repatriation is unclear, the sisters remember that it was after D-day and they were told that there were members of the resistance on the lines, they were also machine gunned by the English. These details would suggest they were travelling during the liberation(s) of France.

Bridlington. Jeanne Phillips worked in the village as a dressmaker for a shop selling school uniforms; Irène was secretary to a solicitor's firm and Eva joined the ATS. Their sister, Irène, met her future husband in Bridlington. He was a member of the Free French Aviation posted nearby in Filey. The couple returned to France after the war and married. The two sisters and their mother remained in the UK for a few years. Eva Phillips worked as a secretary for the matron in Bridlington hospital and she recalled that her first pay cheque after the war was siphoned by the British government to pay for the costs of her repatriation. The Phillips and their mother then returned to Paris, where they all lived, and the two sisters worked in the city.

The second eyewitness text is a personal account written by Doris Lecomte-Worthington. An 83-page unpublished memoir, it is handwritten, in French, and it was sent to the Musée du Patrimoine on the 23 July 2010. The cover letter indicates that at least some of it was written before this date.<sup>146</sup> The first half of the memoir is structured chronologically, and it then picks up on themes in the section on Vittel. It is divided into four chapters ('étapes'); its structure is analysed in the section on motive and memory later in this chapter. Lecomte-Worthington was born in Calais on the 19 February 1922; her father was English but had lived his entire life in France until his death in 1936. Her mother was French and considered a British national according to the British government following her marriage to Frank Worthington in 1917. Lecomte-Worthington also had a sister, Elsie, who was born in 1919. Elsie was, 'majeure en 1940...et considérée comme française selon la loi allemande.'<sup>147</sup> Lecomte-Worthington was a minor in 1940 and judged to possess her parents' nationality (British) according to German law, as outlined in chapter 3. There was some discrepancy on the part of the Germans in terms of who was regarded as British, and therefore interned, and who was exempt. The three Phillips sisters had a British father and French mother (born in France), but were all deemed to be British, whereas Lecomte-Worthington and her sister had different nationalities according to German law. Lecomte-Worthington's mother was arrested in July 1940 and held in the prison in Lille with other 'anglaises par mariage' (p.33); she was released after two weeks without explanation. From September 1940, the family remained in Calais but had to register

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<sup>146</sup> The author writes in her cover letter to Madame Clement: 'J'ai écrit ces dernières années tout le récit de la guerre'. Letter to Madame Clement, 23 July 2010, Unnamed collections. Musée du Patrimoine Archives, Vittel.

<sup>147</sup> Letter to Madame Clement, p.2. 23 July 2010, Unnamed collections. Musée du Patrimoine Archives, Vittel.

at the local Commandant's office. On the 15 February 1941, Lecomte-Worthington and her mother were visited at their home in Calais by two French police officers who confiscated their identity cards, gave them thirty minutes to pack a blanket and something to eat, before taking them to the town hall. Following their arrest in February 1941, Lecomte-Worthington and her mother spent their first night in a room in the town hall, before being interned for a week in the Caserne de Saint Omer with other British civilians from the Pas de Calais (p.38). After two long days on a train during which they were forced to drink the water from the steam train's reserve supply, they arrived in Troyes where they remained for 'quelques jours' (p.43). Lecomte-Worthington and her mother were then transferred to Besançon (date unknown) and subsequently to Vittel with the other Besançon internees in May 1941. They were 'freed' in September 1944 when Leclerc and the 'Deuxième Division Blindé' liberated the camp (p.111), but had to wait until 14 October 1944 to be repatriated to Paris (p.113). They were held in a large room with other 'rapatriées', and then met by Lecomte-Worthington's sister who came to collect them. During their internment their house was occupied by Germans who, their neighbours told them, emptied its contents, including several paintings, and left the house bare with the key in the door (p.34); the deserted house was then occupied by 'sinistrés' who squatted there.<sup>148</sup> After the Liberation of France, the house was considered an 'indemnisation de dommages de guerre' (p.34), the family were not allowed to repair it and so were forced to sell. Lecomte-Worthington describes that they had to 'réapprendre à vivre' after their liberation as they had very few possessions (p.117).

Although the three eyewitnesses, Jeanne Phillips, Eva Phillips and Doris Lecomte-Worthington, were interned at different points during the war, their experiences have common threads: all of them had British fathers and French mothers which gave them British nationality in the eyes of the Germans. Yet all three eyewitnesses considered themselves French citizens and spoke French as their first language. They were all interned in Besançon, and then Vittel. The Phillips were interned as a family and then repatriated to England before the camp was liberated, whilst Lecomte-Worthington was interned with her mother, and they were then sent to Paris following the camp's liberation in September 1944. Their experiences as 'British civilians' in wartime France share some common characteristics, but how do their memories of the conflict

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<sup>148</sup> See letter to Madame Clement, 23 July 2010, Unnamed collections. Musée du Patrimoine Archives, Vittel.

compare more than sixty years later? How does the mode of communication, written or oral, affect the transmission of their memories? To explore this, the next section focuses on three themes that emerge from within the two eyewitness texts; first the use of bilingualism, second the dominance of a collective subject identity amongst the internees, third the role of humour.

It was argued in the previous chapter that the use of the French language predominantly amongst the 'British' internees in Vittel nuances our understanding of national identity. French and English are used interchangeably in both the written and oral survivor texts, even though both survivors lived in France for most of their lives; in Lecomte-Worthington's case for her entire life. The theme of nationality features throughout Lecomte-Worthington's memoir and she describes the internees as having a 'pluri-nationalité' (p.93). Lecomte-Worthington first introduces English words or phrases in her third chapter (she uses the term 'troisième étape') entitled 'Besançon (Doubs): Caserne Vauban' (p.44). This is the moment when Lecomte-Worthington describes first meeting the other 'British' internees, and the point at which she needs to distinguish between the different pluri-nationalities in the camp; she chooses to use the English language to do this. There are eight English phrases or words used throughout the 83-page memoir, six of these refer to either language or British identity: 'British' (p.49), 'french-speaking' (p.85), 'English speaking people' (p.97), 'French speaking' (p.97), and 'to be or not to be britannique' (p.101). The last phrase combines English and French, and encapsulates the dilemma of belonging which Lecomte-Worthington articulates with a Shakespearian quote ('To be or not to be') and the French, 'britannique.' She answers this question on the following page and the closing sentence of the chapter: 'J'ai choisi d'être française toute ma vie et je le serai ad vitam eternam' (p.102). Again, Lecomte-Worthington combines two languages in her sentence structure, on this occasion selecting the Latin phrase 'ad vitam aeternam' meaning 'to eternal life.' Her choice of Latin could be to give distance and add a sense of finality and conclusion to her dilemma of belonging through using a 'dead language.' Her knowledge of Latin also offers insights into Lecomte-Worthington's background, its study often being associated with the elite and upper classes. She chooses the Latin phrase to communicate that she will always be French, for evermore, implying that even after this life, her French national identity will endure. One might also argue that by cementing her French nationality with this Latin phrase, Lecomte-Worthington is also pledging allegiance to French national memories of the war and choosing to identify with the French, rather than

British, memory landscape. Aarons and Berger argue, 'For the survivor, the past exists in the immediacy of the present, since it's a lived past, whose memories are an ineradicable part of the ongoing texture of the survivors' lives' (2017, p.29). For Lecomte-Worthington, the dilemma of belonging, which she experienced during her internment, has not receded post-war; her memories of these events are still viewed through the lens of national identity and belonging, and continue to impact on her life.

The Phillips also used English during the oral history interview, it is less evident whether this was an intentional, stylistic choice to demonstrate the slippage between national identities, or because I, the interviewer, am English. The interview began in English, although when the two sisters wanted to confer or confirm a detail then they spoke in French. The first French word used was 'l'exode' (Appendix B, p.1), Eva struggled to find the English word to describe this specific, French, historical phenomenon and although prompted with the English, 'The exodus?' (p.229), she chose to reuse the French term in the next sentence, before switching back to English:

Interviewer: Oui. The exodus?

Eva Phillips: L'exode. We eventually got to a town where there was a train that...we took and we got to Paris to my uncle and aunt's...

It could be that certain memories of the war are such a cornerstone of French national identity that they can only be expressed using the French language. The word 'l'exode' may represent a memory which strongly corresponds to Eva Phillips' French, national identity, and therefore which she can only fully express using the French language. English words were used when Jeanne and Eva Phillips remembered the camp in Vittel, specifically the musicals in the camp which featured British songs ('Cockles and Mussels,' p.237) and British instruments ('les bagpipes,' p.237). These are memories that correspond to Eva and Jeanne Phillips' British national identity, which was reinforced in the Vittel camp. In his study of language and the Holocaust, Rosen's observations about language, trauma and recollection provide useful insights for this case study. Rosen argues that, 'vocabulary and pronunciation serve as organic artefacts of what happened in the camps, provocatively carrying with them the memory of that experience from the time during the war to the time after' (2005, p.5). As the Phillips



recollect vocabulary associated with their experiences in the camp, such as 'Cockles and Mussels' or 'les bagpipes', their vocabulary is an organic artefact, carrying the specific memory of being a French woman, 'learning' a British identity. The Phillips had been raised by parents born in France, their British nationality inherited from a paternal grandparent, therefore British language and songs would have been an entry point into British culture. Seventy years on, the songs and British phrases still carry the memory of the 'British apprenticeship' which they lived in the camp.

Psychologists in the area of cultural studies have investigated the concept of bilingual, autobiographical memory, focusing on fluent, bilingual individuals who learn language through socialization in a particular culture (Schrauf 2000). Although bilingual eyewitness memory has received virtually no academic attention (Heredia and Altarriba 2013), some insights from work on bilingual memory can be helpfully applied to this case study. Schrauf argues, 'The bilingual individual, in speaking one or the other of her languages, activates a 'language-specific self' that acts as a filter through which memories are both encoded and retrieved' (2000:388). For the 'consecutive bilingual,' 'who learns first one language through socialization in the "mother culture" and subsequently a second language through socialization in a "second culture"' (2000:387), the memories attached to these cultures are indexed by language (2000:388). It is likely that the Phillips and Lecomte-Worthington were raised in a French speaking home, although their fathers had British citizenship, both of their parents were born in France and French would be their 'mother culture.' The second language, English, may well have been fully learnt in the 'second culture' of the Besançon and Vittel camps. The interview and memoir both indicate that when the women use a particular language, this accesses a 'language specific self' through which memories are retrieved (Schrauf, 2000:387). This is significant for memories of Vittel as the internees were being exposed to the English language and culture, some for the first time. As well as being important for accessing memories, the two texts suggest that for the authors to fully represent their experiences of internment, they have to use the language which they were speaking when they lived it because they are communicating a specifically British phenomenon. Conversely, Eva consciously switches back to French when she is describing 'l'exode' because this is a memory which can only be fully represented and remembered using the French language. Schrauf's research (2000) contributes to the fields of

experimental psychology and psychoanalytic therapy, and the concept of bilingual memory has not yet been applied to studies of history, and specifically work on oral history.

The second theme which emerges in the character and texture of the two eyewitness texts is the dominance of a communal subject identity, emphasised by both language choice, the use of 'nous' and 'on,' and the repetition of the same group memories in both accounts. Portelli states, 'Autobiographical discourse, whether the narrator takes the initiative of writing, or merely responds to an interviewer's question, is always about the construction and expression of one's own subjectivity' (Portelli, 1997, p. 80). The eyewitnesses both construct and express their subject identity as part of the internee community. The first way that this is achieved is by using 'nous' and 'on.' Lecomte-Worthington consistently uses 'nous' in her memoir, rather than 'je,' suggesting that she is articulating the communal memories of the internees, rather than solely her own, or indeed articulating the communal memories of the internees *as* her own. She justifies her intentional use of the plural pronoun in her memoir:

Je dis toujours "nous", et non "je", lorsque je décris la vie de tous les jours, parce que cela traduit exactement le genre de vie qui se crée dans ces circonstances. Nous étions une communauté et non des individus. Celui qui a voulu résister à cela a vite perdu sa santé physique et morale (p.76).

Lecomte-Worthington believes that belonging to 'the group' of internees was so significant that it kept the internees in good mental and physical health. She perceives choosing to belong to the group as a wise decision to facilitate survival. She argues that it would be wrong to remember internment from the perspective of an individual; they were a community and if someone wanted to be separate from that group identity, they had to 'resist' to do so. Jeanne Phillips also made statements about how 'the group' managed their internment experience, repeating the word 'on';

On était organisé...on était très organisé. Ce qu'on ne pouvait pas acheter dans le camp, on trouvait, on échangeait avec l'extérieur, on avait les cigarettes, on servait des cigarettes, alors...on payait en cigarettes, alors de temps on temps on avait un peu de viande ... (Appendix B, p.233)

Using 'on' and 'nous,' both women articulate that there was only one collective, Franco-British, internment experience in Vittel. From Jeanne Phillips' observations we might read, 'We were all organised, we could all gain access to what we needed by exchanging goods, and we all had the resources to barter.' Composure is a useful framework in helping us understand why both eyewitnesses choose this subjective identity of 'we' rather than 'I.' The concept of composure refers to the process of constructing subjectivities in life-story telling and the endeavour to draw a sense of 'composure', being calm and in control, by representing themselves as the subject of their story (Summerfield 2004, p.69). By composing their individual memories as the internee's communal memories of internment, the eyewitnesses can achieve a sense of composure. They can find solace in the fact that everyone lived the same internment experience, and are able to manage any troubling aspects of internment by positioning themselves as part of a group. Their life histories communicate that this is what most internees experienced, however we know from the testimonies of Jewish internees analysed in Chapter 3 that this was not the case and that these individuals had a very different experience of internment. Even within the British internees there were women who suffered from anxiety and who did not integrate with the group. Rosemary Say remembered, 'One woman would continually recite Shakespeare, another reverted to childhood speaking in a baby's voice. Battered by life in late middle age, they found our prison a comfort rather than a challenge' (Say and Holland 2012, p.160). This confirms that, of course, there was not only one, generic internment experience but that everyone responded in different ways. During the oral history interview, Jeanne Phillips also framed her experiences from the subjective identity of a young, teenage woman. Jeanne Phillips reminded me of their young age during the interview in moments when I asked about certain events which may have been more difficult to recollect, for example whether women in the camp collaborated with the Nazis

Jeanne Phillips: (Pauses)...Il y avait certainement des...mais...en fait...il y avait beaucoup de choses dont on ne parlait jamais. Eh?

Interviewer: Ah...

Jeanne Phillips: C'est vrai. Et nous, enfin, on était les plus jeunes. Eh?

Interviewer: Mmm.

Jeanne Phillips: Alors, ce qui était très important...Pour nous, on jouait au tennis. On s'occupait de l'hôpital quand même (Appendix B, p.242).

Jeanne Phillips paused more than usual in this dialogue, waiting for me to acknowledge what she said; looking for understanding that some things were too difficult to speak about, and that because of their youth, they were unaware of lots of the happenings in the camp. Jones argues that memories which do not fit, 'may be repressed or reconfigured so that they are easier to live with' (2004, p.2). Framing her memories from the subjective identity of a young 'carefree' woman, preoccupied only with playing tennis and helping in the hospital enabled Jeanne Phillips to find a sense of composure with her wartime experiences. Oral historians have suggested that the construction of subjective identities emerges as a result of a life story being narrated to an audience in an interview and that the social recognition given by the audience influences the story which is presented (Summerfield 2004, p.69). However, the eyewitness memoir reveals that this subject identity can also be intentionally constructed for the reader in a written life history. Lecomte-Worthington is explicit about her intention to write about the collective internment experience, rather than her individual memories. This reveals that the 'communal identity' for British internees was particularly important as Lecomte-Worthington and Jeanne Phillips both chose to refer to the internee community when transmitting their experiences more than sixty years later. Both individuals used the collective identity of the group as a method of self-defence, to distance themselves from the more troubling memories in the camp. By articulating their memories as 'our experience,' rather than simply 'my experience,' they could draw strength from the united experience of the camp and manage difficult memories by remembering that they all acted, or responded, in the same manner.

In 'Dis/composing the subject' (2000) Summerfield has argued against the therapeutic benefits which we understand to be derived from the oral history 'confessional,' suggesting that, 'the practice of feminist oral history is particularly likely to produce discomposure' (2000, p.104). Analysing the two internee eyewitness accounts permits us to build on Summerfield's argument. Although both accounts aim to achieve composure using the plural, personal pronouns 'nous' and 'on,' this is not entirely accomplished and both accounts revealed a disequilibrium when referring to the deportation of Jewish internees, particularly the loss of a young girl. Despite composing a subjective identity as a young, carefree girl who was unaware

of the more sinister aspects to camp life, Jeanne Phillips does remember the deportation of a young Jewish girl. The same memory is recounted in both eyewitness accounts and they use the same phrase to describe the girl's appearance; 'tout bouclés' (p.86 and Appendix B, p.X). Lecomte-Worthington calls the girl 'notre rayon de soleil' (p.89) and recalls that she was adopted by the internees and they taught her English and French. Lecomte-Worthington's selection of the word 'bouclés' is also prophetic of the life journey, imprisonment, and deportation of the young girl. The French word's dual meaning of 'curls' and 'tied up or imprisoned' is significant, suggesting that the author, perhaps subconsciously, recognises that the Jewish girl is trapped, restricted, and bound by her Jewish nationality which will ultimately lead to her untimely death. Her deportation is termed 'affreux' (p.245) by Jeanne Phillips, and Lecomte-Worthington recalls with regret that, 'la vie et l'intelligence hors du commun s'éteignit dans une chambre de gaz quelque part en Allemagne ou en Pologne' (p.89). The discomposure, or 'difficulty in sustaining a narrative' (Summerfield, 2004, p. 70), is more evident in the oral history than the written narrative. The interviewee pauses at length and was in clear discomfort when talking about the little girl. Here the oral history interview offers more insights into discomposure as the interviewer can draw on additional cues such as tone and speed of delivery as well as non-verbal cues like body language, pauses, eye contact, and facial expressions. These cues are not evident in the written memoir where analysing discomposure is more problematic. The written life history differs from the oral history as it maintains the subject identity of the 'communal internee' when remembering the little girl: 'notre rayon de soleil' (p.89). As well as the communal identity of 'the internee', this is a communal memory with which multiple internees can associate. Lecomte-Worthington expresses a sense of ownership over the Jewish girl; she was 'ours,' a part of our community, we might even understand from this that she was 'our responsibility.' Achieving a sense of composure about this memory is not straightforward for either narrator. Whereas the interviewee pauses and uses fewer words than usual, Lecomte-Worthington is unable to describe the process of deportation herself and chooses to cite a paragraph from a Treblinka deportee's eyewitness account (p.89), saying 'L'écriture n'est rien à côté du fait d'avoir été témoin de la tragédie' (p.89). One method to overcome discomposure in written narratives may be to remove oneself from the memory entirely and to adopt another's instead. By using the 'borrowed' memory, Lecomte-Worthington articulates that her own memory of this part of history is inadequate and it is necessary to draw on another eyewitness account to achieve

composure. The two narratives suggest that it was more problematic for the oral history interviewee to achieve a sense of composure than it was for the author of the written narrative. Lecomte-Worthington could draw on other eyewitness accounts to achieve a sense of composure about the deportation of the Jewish girl, whereas Jeanne Phillips did not have this option and was left with a sense of discomposure which manifested in a long silence during the interview, before the interviewer continued. Jeanne Phillips' interview revealed how 'memory speaks from today' (Passerini 1996, p.23), Phillips reinterpreted the past to maintain a subject identity of a young, carefree internee, but this identity was constructed on contradictions, as Passerini observed in her oral history interviews (1996, p.22). Using content analysis to trace the memory of the Jewish girl in Phillips' interview revealed both the identity conflict in her storytelling and the contrasts in her memories.

The third common theme which emerges in the texture and character of the eyewitness accounts is the use of humour, which was present in both accounts but was more frequent in the oral history interview. In Karen Horn's study of Australian POWs, she argues that, 'Humour was a universal tool that boosted morale, showed defiance, created unity and to an extent helped POWs accept powerlessness' (2011, p.552). Although the experience of these civilian internees was distinct from the POWs' captivity, there are common threads of deprived liberty, monotony, communal living, disease, death, and deportation which allow us to draw comparisons between the two groups. Horn observes three uses of humour for POWs, the first was as a device to create a bond between groups, and a division between others, for example between captor and captive (2011, p.540); secondly, humour functioned as an anti-depressant, allowing POWs to 'deal with the humiliation or anger of being captured' (2011, p.540); and thirdly, humour allowed the POWs to 'appear as soldiers fighting for a cause and not as helpless captives waiting for liberation' (2011, p.541). In interviews sixty-five years after the war, POWs continued to use humour as a coping mechanism (2011, p.545). They overemphasised humour as a means of distancing themselves from the negative aspects of their wartime experience, and reconstructed their earlier POW identities showing defiance through humour, in the face of adversity (2011, p.545). Humour being used as a coping mechanism was evident in the oral history interview with the Phillips. Half way through the interview, while her sister was describing something else, Jeanne Phillips stated, 'Alors, il faut apprendre à passer sous les barbelés! Vous savez comment ?' I replied that I didn't know how

to crawl under a barbed wire fence, Phillips continued; 'Jamais sur le ventre. Toujours sur le dos. Comme ça [mimes wriggling under fence].' I then asked how Phillips knew this and she told a story of crawling under a ring of barbed wire fences in the camp to collect some dandelion leaves in between the perimeter fences to 'faire une bonne salade!' (Appendix B, p.240). It was evident that Phillips enjoyed telling this story and it had the feel of a well-rehearsed tale, she seemed to appreciate that it might be shocking to me that an elderly woman would know how to crawl under barbed wire. She sought to create proximity with me, the interviewer, and to construct a story which appealed to her audience. We laughed several times during the interview. As with the POWs in Horn's study, Phillips used humour as a way of bringing distance between herself and her captors. Telling this story framed Phillips as a daring young woman, unafraid of potential reprisals, who would take risks just to get ingredients for a salad. It also represented her as a captive who was still fighting, who could act independently from her captors and who broke the rules. Instead of reinforcing her identity as a powerless internee, this story gave her control and challenged the hierarchy in the camps which should place her as subordinate to her captors. She re-presents the characteristics of resilience, bravery, and defiance which allow her to achieve a sense of composure with her past, and place her in control, as the protagonist in her memory of internment. Composing the narrative in this way, with herself as the protagonist, gives the interviewee a sense of control, the ability to manage the memory, and control any troubling memories by framing them as humorous anecdotes. Telling this anecdote also allows Phillips to become visible as she 'performs' the character of the young woman, even miming crawling under the barbed wire. Abrams argues that for older people, the oral history interview is a, 'means by which they can become visible and attract attention to themselves. At a time of life when invisibility is an all-too-common experience' (2010, p.142). In this case, the opportunity which an oral history interview offers for performance to an audience is a unique means of allowing interviewees to achieve a sense of composure, and it permits Phillips to become visible again as she re-presents her younger self.

The use of humour in the memoir is presented in a different manner and does not frame Lecomte-Worthington as a resilient, powerful protagonist as in Jeanne Phillips' anecdote. Lecomte-Worthington instead uses humour to conceal humiliation and to distance herself from the reality of what she experienced as an internee. She begins her story stating, 'Il faut

en rire plutôt qu'en pleurer si l'on peut' (p.44) and continues by recounting how the Germans were forced to stop the convoy of internees on the way to Besançon to allow them to go to the toilet (p.44). They had been travelling all day without stopping and there were many elderly British women in the convoy. Lecomte-Worthington and her mother did not get off the wagon ('Nous ne voulions pas participer à ce spectacle' p.44), and watched as the older women tried to maintain their balance and relieve themselves while the Germans watched and laughed. Some of the women fell over and were forced to resume their journey with soiled, damp clothes (p.45). This is not, in fact, a particularly humorous story; instead, it communicates neglect, humiliation, and helplessness to the reader. As well as using humour to distance herself from the humiliation and sadness which the memory conveys, Lecomte-Worthington's choice of words also give a surreal quality to the story. She uses symbols and metaphors including; 'la cérémonie', 'le tableau', 'participer', and 'ce spectacle', which suggest that what she observed was a performance, imagined or unbelievable. If we consider Lecomte-Worthington's use of theatrical language as a 'language of representation' (Hirsch and Spitzer 2009; Passerini, 1996), there are two points which she represents. Firstly, that what was happening to her and her fellow internees was unimaginable and totally uncharacteristic of their lives before the outbreak of war. She suggests that it was like a fictional event; something which she would have seen performed, but never experienced. Secondly, considering the event as a performance or ceremony, distances Lecomte-Worthington from the memory. She can observe what is happening to the other women, but can choose not to participate. She is watching scenes unfold in front of her but is separate from them, in the same way as an audience member would watch a play. Humour and the use of theatrical terms are combined as a coping mechanism to provide distance between Lecomte-Worthington and her memories of internment. Through her writing, Lecomte-Worthington constructs a humorous *mise-en-scène* in which she observes but does not partake.

The self-selecting process of life histories which allows participants to foreground humorous memories, in turn permits them to suppress memories which do not allow them to achieve a sense of composure. Interviewee Jeanne Phillips was aware that humorous anecdotes were the first to come to mind and that her recollections had changed over time:



Jeanne Phillips: On se souvient que des choses drôles...Parce que, d'abord les souvenirs sont transformés un peu. Eh? Ce n'est jamais très exacte. [...] On occulte toutes les choses qui sont moches. Qui sont vraiment pénibles (p.240).<sup>149</sup>

This extract shows that Jeanne Phillips is aware that her storytelling has evolved, she is conscious that her memories have transformed over time, and that she consciously conceals and obscures the ugly and difficult memories. Aaron and Berger suggest, 'Even survivor memory is, at times, imperfect, mediated by time, intervening, restorative events, as well as the powers of sublimation and *the defences of forgetting and deflection*' (Aarons and Berger 2017, p.30, emphasis added). The themes of remembering and forgetting are common in both texts, whether explicit and conscious as the quotation above indicates, or whether manifested in frustrations at forgetting details, names or places. As mentioned above, in her memoir, Lecomte-Worthington chooses to remember the 'funny stories' reasoning that you have to laugh otherwise you would cry (p.44). In both texts, memories are evidently ordered with humorous, 'easier' anecdotes nearer the beginning, and the more troubling memories emerging later. This reveals the correlation between ordering narrative and ordering memories. Both texts raise the topic of the Jewish deportees later in their life histories; it is on page 86 of 117 in the memoir, and 57 minutes in to the 1-hour 35-minute interview, even though the question about Jewish internees was posed earlier in the interview. In her analysis of Holocaust survivor accounts, Aarons has argued that, 'The work of memory, in the case of the traumatised survivor, resists sequential coherence... [and]...There were no organising principles or structures upon which to draw in contextualising and producing such memories' (2017:50). The two eyewitness texts in this study suggest that this statement cannot be transferred to all survivor accounts. These eyewitnesses do organise their memories; they admit to prioritising humorous incidents, obscuring painful memories, and they consciously represent the memories of the group as their own. There is a clear narrative to the telling of their stories. The importance of structure in these two life histories is analysed in the following section on motivation and memory in eyewitness narratives.

In her written memoir, Lecomte-Worthington cites a clear objective for recording her memories of the Second World War; she wanted to leave something for her grandchildren so

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<sup>149</sup> Interview with Jeanne and Eva Phillips, Paris, 22 February 2016.

that they would know what happened to their grandmother during her life.<sup>150</sup> These recollections were sent to the Musée du Patrimoine to contribute to a second edition of their 'brochure' about the internment camp in Vittel. Lecomte-Worthington wrote in her letter to the museum's curator that she tried to 'faire un tri' to subtract certain personal anecdotes but found this difficult, and therefore authorised the museum to extract whatever was useful from her memoir.<sup>151</sup> After reading the first edition of the museum's brochure, Lecomte-Worthington articulated that her memoir included 'quelques mises au point sur des informations que je conteste,' and she allowed herself 'quelques impressions personnelles qui parfois contredisent certaines affirmations rencontrées dans divers documents.'<sup>152</sup> Lecomte-Worthington therefore embodies the status which Winter has attributed to the category of the 'moral witnesses', she is a 'truth teller' (2006, p.240). Winter observes that witnesses never testify in a vacuum, but speak to many different narratives in which they 'assert the authority of direct experience...They expose 'untruth' or truth hijacked for a host of purposes' (2006, p.243). Lecomte-Worthington clearly exposes that one of her motives in writing her memoir is to set the record straight, to speak to the existing narrative about British internees in Vittel which the museum has composed and to contribute her memories so that a 'true' account can be presented. The 'burden of testimony' (Aarons and Berger 2017, p.43) is important to Lecomte-Worthington. In her memoir she recalls the pain she felt when she was reunited with a former internee who had dementia and, unlike Lecomte-Worthington, could not remember their internment experience (p.92). She writes: 'Elle ne me reconnaît pas. Je lui nommai tous les amis, elle ne se souvenait de rien ni de personne. Vittel n'existait pas, le Grand Hôtel non plus' (p.92). Lecomte-Worthington writes that she thought she would pass out with disappointment, surprise and despondency (p.92), and she is devastated that her friend does not remember. She later articulates: 'Sans mémoire on est déjà mort puis que l'on ignore même ce que fut la vie...De l'être au néant' (p.92). Memory is what keeps us alive, Lecomte-Worthington argues, and without it we move from being into nothingness, a reference to Sartre's 'L'Être et le Néant' (1943). Being faced with someone who shared the same experience but cannot share in the same memories reveals the importance which Lecomte-Worthington places on the duty of memory. Forgetting, and what she describes as 'le vide' (p.92), are perceived as the ultimate

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<sup>150</sup> Letter to Madame Clement, p.2. 23 July 2010, Unnamed collections. Musée du Patrimoine Archives, Vittel.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

tragedy, likened only to death. Remembering is the only way to remain alive, and Lecomte-Worthington considers a significant part of her identity as a survivor to be the ability to testify about what happened to her. Margalit argues that eyewitnesses have a 'thick identity' (2002, p.182) based upon 'thick relations [which] are 'anchored in a shared past or moored in shared memory' (2002:7). Memory is the cement which holds these 'thick relations' together (2002:8) and so for Lecomte-Worthington, her encounter with Miss Dixon who does not remember, shows what happens when the 'memory cement' is lost, and there is nothing to hold the relationships together any more.

The moral witness also carries a burden to speak for their communities, those with whom they shared their past, 'an ethical community that is endangered by an evil force' (Margalit, 2002:182). In her memoir, Lecomte-Worthington remembers on behalf of her fellow 'Britishers' who were 'endangered,' albeit in a very different way to Holocaust victims, by the Nazis. The witness occupies a unique position as they are inside the story which they are remembering, unlike reporters or historians (Winter 2006, p.241). This unique positioning offers specific insights as witnesses 'embody memories' and they are 'part of the archive' (2006, p.271). Nonetheless, because they occupy such a unique position inside the story, we must bear in mind that their witnessing is subjective, not positivist, it is a construct. This guards us against 'accepting their own claims at face value' (2006, p.270), whilst acknowledging the distinctiveness of their memories. Lecomte-Worthington's written memoir illustrates this distinctive subjectivity and sets the written account apart from the oral history interview. Lecomte-Worthington can easily maintain autonomy over her text, as she is the only author, even though she is speaking as a witness for her 'community' of internees. She organises the memoir into '4 étapes' which correspond to the four locations of her internment: Saint Omer, Troyes, Besançon and Vittel. The *4e étape* contains fourteen sections with different headings including: Le Parc (p.59), Visite d'Elsie (p.73), Trois Noël's (p.77), Les Juifs (p.86), Française? (p.100), Septembre 1944 (p.108). Lecomte-Worthington can control and prioritise the narrative, and she focuses on themes which she considers important to remember; for example her French nationality or the fate of the Jewish internees. Although some of her thematic chapters are pertinent to the British internee community - *Trois Noël's* or *Septembre 1944* - others relate only to herself, for example the visit of her sister, Elsie. She is free to include personal anecdotes, and whilst some of her themes correspond to 'nous, les internées'

(p.76), their pertinence to the American, or especially Jewish internees, is limited. By organising her memories in this way, Lecomte-Worthington maintains control of the narrative and can achieve a sense of composure with her past. As Passerini articulates, 'one method of self-defence is to periodise' (1996, p.126). Lecomte-Worthington can protect herself from troubling memories by prioritising and periodising her memories. By carefully structuring her memoir, she can then access more painful memories like the deportation of the Jews from Vittel, but has the autonomy to pause her narrative, to stop writing, at will, and then to resume recounting the memory later. The oral history interview did not afford the Phillips this opportunity; I (the interviewer) structured the interview with my questions and although the participants were allowed some autonomy in choosing how they answered, or did not answer the questions, their control over the narrative was limited in comparison to the written life history. Lecomte-Worthington could concentrate her memories on 'Les Juifs' in one chapter of the same name: she opens the chapter with the arrival of 200 Jews in 'Vittel (p.86) and concludes it by reflecting on how such 'richesse humaine' can be destroyed by man's hatred (p.89). By reflecting and writing her memory of the Jewish deportations, Lecomte-Worthington orders and structures her memories and brings them to a conclusion as she reflects on man's inhumanity to man. The Phillips are not able to do this in the interview. Although I prompt their memory of the Jewish internees with a question, Phillips' speech is drawn out as she pauses, as different memories come to her mind of couples who slit their wrists, and mothers who threw themselves and their children out of the window (p.7). Her responses are cyclical and she concludes each 'set' of memories with the phrase, 'On les a vu partir' (p.245) which is repeated three times during her monologue. Phillips was reflective at this point during the interview, she did not maintain eye contact, the humour and sense of performance which was evident earlier in the interview had gone, and the phrase 'on les a vu partir' communicated the helplessness she felt in watching the deportations. Phillips cannot order, 'contain' or conclude these painful memories in the same way that Lecomte-Worthington can in her written memoir. Phillips may not have chosen to remember the deportations had the question not been posed in the interview. At the beginning of this chapter, oral history interviewing was praised for its unique contribution to the historical record and as a therapeutic tool for those who are testifying. However, analysing this interview reveals that there may be shortcomings to considering oral history interviews as 'therapeutic confessionals' which permit participants to achieve composure (Bornat 2001; Thompson, 2000). A close reading of these two eyewitness

texts has illustrated that Lecomte-Worthington may have been able to achieve a greater level of composure as she could maintain control of the narrative and because she had initiated the 'devoir de mémoire'. This ties in with Robinson's research into 'Recomposing Trauma In Memoir' in which she argues that written narratives permit the 'composure of self through the building of a life history narrative as a cathartic act' (2011, p.570), and Thompson's work on 'Using Personal Testimony in War History' (2006). The autonomous written narrative is contrasted with the 'shared autonomy' of the Phillips' oral history interview and the fact that the interviewer, rather than the eyewitness, was evoking the memories could be considered a hindrance to the participant achieving a sense of composure. Bornat comments that oral historians consider older people as *the source* of evidence, whereas reminiscence considers them as *the evidence*. She argues that oral historians need to value the 'person who is' as much as 'the person who was' (2001, p.238). Evidently there are lessons to be learned from reminiscence about how we as researchers consider our 'living sources,' as well as questions about how we might enable them to achieve a sense of composure with the more troubling memories we awaken in our interviewing.

#### 5.4 Generational thinking: indirect witnessing and family memory

This second section of generational thinking appraises two published accounts by family members of British women who were in wartime France. It continues to analyse the forms of narration, stylistics and motivation of these two indirect witness texts, comparing the account by Katherine Lack (2011) of her Great Aunt Fanny Twemlow's wartime life, with Nicholas Shakespeare's biography of his Aunt, Priscilla Doynel (2014). Lack is an academic with a background in medieval history and historical research techniques, and her research practice informs the written account of her Great Aunt's life (Lack, 2017). Lack refers to the biography of her Great Aunt as a 'book on civilian internment diaries from the Second World War' (Lack, 2017), broadening the scope of the publication beyond her relative's experiences to other testimonies of internment. As well as Fanny Twemlow's diary, Lack references eleven written accounts from former internees which are sourced from private collections, personal correspondence, and local and national archival holdings (Lack 2011, pp.121–2). The book is 123 pages long, written in English and contains 16 pages of photographs, drawings, and letters,

and the text throughout the book is punctuated with Twemlow's sketches which were drawn in the camp. Fanny Twemlow was born in India in 1881 into a comfortable middle-class family, her father was in the military and when he retired in 1893 on permanent sick leave, the family moved to St Jean de Luz in South West France because the milder climate was beneficial for her father's health (Lack 2011, p.15). They were part of a thriving English and American community ['the French were not so friendly' (Lack 2011, p.15)], and she and her sister taught English and painting, took lessons in Spanish, and nursed in a local hospice during the First World War (2011, p.17). At the outbreak of 'the second' war in 1939, like many French people, Fanny Twemlow did not foresee the German occupation and felt 'so far away' in her 'corner of France' (2011, p.18), she did not consider leaving the country. Fanny Twemlow and her sister were interned in Besançon from early December 1940; her sister spent six weeks in the local hospital in Besancon, and then was released as she was sixty-one (2011, p.94) and Fanny Twemlow was later released from Vittel in December 1941, aged sixty (2011, p.87). The sisters returned to their home in St Jean de Luz where they remained for the rest of the war. Unlike other British, 'enemy aliens' living on the coast, they were not relocated by the Germans to the unoccupied zone due to their older sister's ill health. They survived the war but had far fewer supplies than the British civilians who remained interned for the duration of the conflict and therefore survival was a struggle for them (2011, pp.114–5).

The second indirect generational account is written by Nicholas Shakespeare, a British novelist and biographer, who has written fourteen novels, both fiction and non-fiction, worked as a journalist for BBC Television, and as *The Times* arts editor. His most recent novel *Six Minutes in May: How Churchill Unexpectedly Became Prime Minister* (Shakespeare 2017) was selected as 2017 Book of the Year in *The Guardian*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Observer* and *The Economist*. Shakespeare's biography of his aunt, *Priscilla: The Hidden Life of an Englishwoman in Wartime France* was first published in 2013. After discovering a box of his aunt's belongings, Shakespeare 'began investigating the rumours that she had escaped a prisoner-of-war camp and fought for the Resistance...' (Shakespeare, 2014, outside back cover). The author supplemented the material objects belonging to his aunt with interviews, archival material from France, Britain and America, published and unpublished memoirs, newspaper archives, and references numerous works on Occupied France. His account is 431 pages long and is divided into five parts which are loosely chronological, following Priscilla Doynel's wartime

trajectory, but punctuated with the author's own reflections. Priscilla Mais was born in England and educated in Paris where she met and married Viscount Robert Doynel in December 1938. The Doynels were staying with friends in Dinard when war was declared in September 1939; they promptly returned to the Doynel's chateau in Boisgrimot and Robert Doynel was mobilised and sent to a unit near Rouen. Priscilla Doynel chose to ignore the decree in August 1940 requiring British women to report to their local police station, and her husband's family, concerned that they would be reported for housing an illegal alien, sent her back to Paris (2014, p. 156). In December 1940, Doynel was arrested in Paris and sent to Caserne Vauban in Besançon; she managed to obtain early release from the camp in February 1941 by faking her own pregnancy (2014, p.203). Doynel remained in Paris for the rest of the Occupation, she had numerous liaisons with different men in the capital, including Otto Graebener, a Nazi official (2014, p.294) who, Shakespeare contends, obtained Doynel's release from interrogation by the Gestapo in 1943. Doynel remained in Paris until October 1944 when she returned to England, first to stay with family in Oxford and Bath, and then settling in London. She divorced Robert Donat in 1946 and married Raymond Thompson in 1948; she lived with Thompson in Sussex by the Sea where she remained until her death in 1982. Shakespeare's published biography is compared with Lack's account of Fanny Twemlow in this next section; it focuses on three common themes which emerge from a close reading of the two indirect witness texts. First is the importance of 'sites of memory' (Nora 1989), both figurative and physical; second, the use of material culture, and third, the importance of a 'big picture' narrative.

In her *Autobiography of a Generation*, Passerini analyses the struggle between students and staff over Palazzo Campana, a university building in Turin, during the 1968 demonstrations (1996, p. 69). The physical space of Palazzo Campana became the 'seat of a privileged communicative space' (1996, p.69) for the students, which was contested by the university staff who did not accept their exclusion from the building. In the same way that students related the importance of the physical space as a communicative space to Passerini, Shakespeare and Lack's indirect generational accounts also highlight the interaction between physical and figurative spaces of communication, and the importance of occupying a physical 'memory space' before finding a figurative, and subsequently literary space to communicate their relatives' memories of the war. The memories of Priscilla Doynel and Fanny Twemlow existed first in the figurative space of their respective families; Lack's starting point for her

Great Aunt's biography was a wartime diary (2011, p.9) read after Fanny Twemlow's death; for Shakespeare it was 'a cardboard box filled with photographs, letters, diaries and manuscripts' (2014, p.22) given to him by his cousin, Priscilla Doynel's granddaughter. Hirsch terms the family space as a 'privileged site of memorial transmission' (2009, p.110) and Shakespeare and Lack begin their memory journeys by speaking to relatives about Priscilla Doynel and Fanny Twemlow. After reading their relatives' direct accounts, the indirect witnesses turned to their family members to fill in the gaps. Shakespeare's parents gave him 'some basic facts' (2014, p.12) about his aunt, he read her father's memoirs (2014, p.18), interviewed her children, her god-daughter, neighbour, (2014, p.19), and a former employee on her husband's farm (2014, p.20). Although to a lesser extent than Shakespeare, Lack also turned to family interviews, including audio recordings made by Twemlow's great nephew (2011, p.9). Both indirect witnesses draw on 'niches of intimacy where the survivor family performs...as co-producer of their familial and communal legacy' (Kidron 2015, p.66). These 'niches of intimacy' only go so far in contributing additional fragments of memory to the narrative, and the next step for both indirect witnesses was to journey to the physical space in France where Doynel and Shakespeare were interned.

Sites of memory in Besançon and Vittel are significant for both indirect witnesses for three reasons; first the indirect witnesses validate their relatives' memories through the memory sites which confirm the content of the memoirs; second, they discover additional testimonies from other eyewitnesses which provide additional 'memory fragments' to add to their family stories; and third, they access a discursive and communicative space at the site of memory for their own indirect generational accounts. Shakespeare's visit to Caserne Vauban in Besançon, the barracks where Priscilla Doynel was held, is recorded in his account:

The officer re-padlocked the cast-iron gates behind us. The cold air smelled of dead leaves. We stood facing a potholed tarmac quadrangle surrounded by buildings dating back to the eighteenth century. Bâtiment B lay on the far side. I knew where to go, thanks to Jimmy Fox who had emailed : 'With a magnifier on faded paper and written in pencil, I suddenly found the name DOYNEL and the number of her room. (Shakespeare 2014, p.184)



Shakespeare retraced his Aunt's steps as he returned to Caserne Vauban, paying attention to sights and smells, 'recognising' the building in which Doynel lived thanks to his, and others', research efforts. Aarons and Berger term these pilgrimages 'individuated quests... [where] the desire for detailed knowledge takes the form of literally retracing the steps of those who lived through or succumbed to the massacres' (2017, p.18). Shakespeare's account is individuated here; it is a personal 'quest narrative' (Aarons and Berger 2017, p.12), in which he journeys to the place of internment to piece together fragments of Doynel's past. The motivation to 'return to the scene of the crime' (2017, p.12) is also evident in Lack's indirect account, complimented by a careful attention to certain details, exemplified by the following extract about internees' Red Cross parcels:

The archives of the Vittel Red Cross reveal that each of their parcels contained between sixteen and twenty items (always including tea and soap), from the following basic list of two dozen: 2 ounces of tea, two small tins of sugar, one tablet of soap. ½ lb margarine... [she lists another twenty items]...One parcel per internee, delivered every week on a Friday (Lack 2011, pp.13–4).

Aarons and Berger argue, 'The third-generation quest is a search for specifics, for the particulars of experience' (2017, p.19), motivated by a need to 'fill the empty spaces of time and distance' (2017, p.15). Whereas the extract from Shakespeare's biography exemplifies a part of his quest which does relate directly to his Aunt (he finds the bedroom in which she lived in Besancon), Lack's list of Red Cross items is not specific to her Great Aunt; she is only able to infer Twemlow's experience of rationing, based on archival sources relating to *all* internees. According to Aarons, Lack's desire for detail characterises third generation accounts; combing through documents which give 'the logistical outline of events,' but do not contain the individual stories that 'the third-generation sojourners really want to know' (2017, p.17). Lack can represent what all internees were given by the Red Cross, and the weekly day of distribution, but she cannot offer specific details about what Twemlow preferred in her parcel, what she swapped with other internees, or whether she received parcels from family or friends. The memory has been pushed to its limits and, to quote Mendelsohn, 'There is so much that will always be impossible to know' (2008, p.502). Lack can fill some of the 'empty spaces of time and distance' (Aarons and Berger 2017, p.19) by extracting archival information from sources in Vittel, but some specifics are 'impossible to know' and Lack is unable to

represent the individual story of her relative about the Red Cross parcels because she did not live it. The details, 'those lives and deaths belonged to them [the eyewitnesses who had lived them]' (Mendelsohn, 2006:502), and even in revisiting the site of memory, and piecing together fragments of memory from other sources, the third generation still faces the 'incompleteness of narrative representation' (Aarons and Berger 2017, p.19).

Even though indirect witnesses grapple with an incomplete narrative representation of their relatives' life histories, the physical spaces in Vittel and Besançon did, to some extent, offer Lack and Shakespeare a communicative space to discuss and disseminate their relatives' experiences of internment. In addition to discussing the history of Caserne Vauban with residents in Besançon (2014, p.192), Shakespeare was interviewed for the regional newspaper *L'Est Républicain*, in which the article 'was given a prominent display' (2014, p.194). The physical space in Besançon permitted Shakespeare a literary space from which to discuss his aunt's life story and appeal to readers for information about the camp. Unfortunately, his appeal for information yielded no responses, highlighting that even though Shakespeare's presence at the memory site gave him space to appeal for information, his invitation to discuss the memory of the camp was not accepted and he was unable to transition from an appeal, to a conversation. In Vittel, Lack could find a communicative space for her indirect generational account which was more of a reciprocal dialogue than Shakespeare's one-way appeal in Besançon. After contacting Lack about this project, she wrote: 'And then go to Vittel if you possibly can. There is a small museum there, set up and run by a lady whose husband was an English teacher in the town and acts as her interpreter. They were extremely kind and helpful, and again gave me information.'<sup>153</sup> Lack accessed additional eyewitness accounts, photographs, and archival documents from the local museum's archives. The memory site in Vittel is located within the 'Parc Thermal' which was where the internment camp was situated. The Musée du Patrimoine et du Thermalisme in Vittel is a museum and archival holding within the park. The museum has a permanent exhibition on the evolution of Vittel during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which focuses on different themes including its history as a spa town, tourism and the period during the Occupation when the hotels and park were

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<sup>153</sup> Email to the author from Katherine Lack, 6 April 2015, Email subject: Re: PhD project – Foreign women in Occupied France.

turned into an internment camp. The museum's website states that the purpose of the archives, 'est de rechercher et d'archiver tout document concernant Vittel dans tous les domaines (eau, commerces, guerres, personnalités, rues, architecture, pubs, etc.) Les archives sont à la disposition de tous : curistes, Vittellois, chercheurs.' (Musée du Patrimoine, 2017). As well as being referenced in the museum's exhibition, the history of Vittel as an internment and transit camp is also indicated in two memorial plaques at the site of the camp (see figures 10 and 11). From an interview with the museum's curator it was clear that Vittel was an important site of *remembering* for British women and their families: 'Il y a bien quatre ou cinq personnes par an qui s'intéresse au camp. Ça c'est sûr, anglais, ou bien juif...c'est quand même les deux catégories.'<sup>154</sup>

Some British women were interned in Vittel for three years or more, between May 1941 and October or November 1944, depending when they were repatriated or returned to homes in France. Internees remained at Besançon for a maximum of five months before being transferred to Vittel or released due to sickness or old age. At Caserne Vauban in Besançon there is no mention that the barracks housed up to four thousand British internees between December 1940 and May 1941, and the site is being redeveloped into an Eco quarter with 800 dwellings and 600m<sup>2</sup> of office and business space (*Ma Commune* 2016). At the *Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation de Besançon* in the town's



Figure 10 - Plaque at the entrance to the Parc Thermale, Vittel, on Villa Sainte Mairie. Photograph by author.



Figure 11 - Plaque on the Hotel de la Providence, Vittel, Photograph by author.

<sup>154</sup> Interview with Madame Clement, Vittel, 14 September 2015.

Citadel, there is a plaque in one of the buildings at the end of the museum tour which commemorates the British internees held in Caserne Vauban (see figure 12).<sup>155</sup> Aside from the plaque situated in an adjacent room at the Citadel, there is no mention of the British internees in the museum and no context is given to the plaque about either the internees' identities or the conditions of their internment. The fieldwork trips for this project confirmed what Shakespeare observed in Besançon, that the British internees were not part of the town's memory of the Occupation (Shakespeare 2014, p.192). Visiting the physical spaces of internment does offer Lack and Shakespeare a figurative space to communicate their relatives' experiences, as Passerini observed with the students who occupied the Palazzo Campana in 1968. Perhaps because British women were interned in Vittel for longer, the memory site is more valuable to Lack as a communicative space than the Caserne Vauban in Besançon where the women interned in the town for only five months do not form part of local memories of the war. This is further exemplified by the positioning of the memorial plaque, which is apart from the museum, on the floor rather than on the wall, not at the actual site of internment because it is being redeveloped and regenerated. Parallels can be drawn between the plaque and the memory it represents, perhaps British women in Besançon are an awkward and slightly inconvenient part of Besançon's heritage, best left 'in another room', set apart from more established memories of the war which are represented in the town's Museum of Deportation and Resistance.

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<sup>155</sup> Although the plaque states that British women were interned until 30 April 1941, Red Cross archives indicate that some internees remained into May 1941 before being transferred to Vittel.

The second common theme which emerged from the indirect generational accounts was the use of material culture by the memoirists. Both Shakespeare and Lack's written accounts of their relative's internment began with the discovery of objects after their deaths, what Mendelsohn terms 'orphaned objects' which, 'give voice to loss but also, paradoxically to durability and to a kind of staying power of memory' (2006:38). Lack expected Fanny Twemlow's diary to be, 'an account of rationing and minor privation among the affluent expatriate community in France' (Lack 2011, p.9), and was surprised when it detailed her internment in Besançon and Vittel (2011, p.9). Shakespeare was prompted by his aunt's death in 1982 to discover what happened to Priscilla Doynel in France during the war (2014, p.13). He contacted his cousin who gave him, 'a cardboard box filled with photographs, letters, diaries and manuscripts' (2014, p.22). Both Fanny Twemlow and Priscilla Doynel had reservations about discussing their wartime lives. Twemlow 'did not want the difficulties she had faced to be exaggerated in any way' (Lack 2011, p.9), and Doynel chose 'to bury herself in silence...part of a normal *omertà*' (Shakespeare, 2014, p. 19). Ryan observes a similar pattern in her interviews with American, female survivors of the Second World War who 'dodge' their wartime contributions, articulating that they 'didn't do anything important' (2009, p.27). The importance of material culture and 'orphaned objects', both possessions of the authors' relatives and artefacts from other survivors, is analysed in this section. The family archive is a starting point for both memoirists, where objects are discovered which offer narrative



Figure 12 – Plaque at the Musée de la Résistance et Déportation in Besançon. Photograph by author.

possibilities, 'are surrogates for, and take the shape of memory' (Aarons and Berger 2017, p.84). Material objects are used by Lack and Shakespeare as scaffolding, upon which their ancestor's lives are erected. Lack uses different material objects as landmarks throughout the biography, supplementing the gaps between these markers with her own research. The central object is Fanny Twemlow's diary, which Lack quotes at length throughout the biography. This diary was 'treasured...for many years' (Lack 2011, p.7) by Twemlow's daughter, who passed it on to Lack and granted her permission to publish it. Twemlow's diary features in six of the nine chapters in the biography, and constitutes most of chapters four and five about internment in Besançon. As well as a diary, Twemlow also made numerous sketches, initially rough drawings in black and white on scraps of paper, and later more detailed illustrations in colour using a drawing pad and pencils she obtained (Lack 2011, p.38). After Twemlow's release she made a copy of the diary, including some of the sketches, which was bound and covered with scenes from the camp (2011, p.38). Figure 13 shows a page taken from chapter four in Lack's biography (2011, p.47), with extracts from Twemlow's diary and a sketch 'View from my bed' in Caserne Vauban, Besançon.



Figure 13 – Lack, 2010, p.47, extract from Twemlow's diary and sketch 'View from my bed.'

Hirsch proposes that objects are significant for indirect witnesses as they, 'authenticate the past; they trigger memories, and connect them indexically to a particular place and time' (2012, p.186). Lack uses material objects to sequentially arrange the memories in her biography; Twemlow's diary, divided into dated entries, provides structure for the memoir, and the photographs corresponding to the content are placed alongside the written text, as in figure 13. In the sketch in figure 13, we see a drawing of the French army overcoat which is mentioned in the diary entry for '1941 Jan. 8<sup>th</sup>' (Lack 2011, pp.45–7), the internees' clothes are hanging along the wall behind them illustrating the problem Twemlow describes of cleaning things with little soap, and the stove at the edge of the sketch also corresponds to Twemlow's diary entry for 'Jan. 10<sup>th</sup>' about the problems with smoke spilling from faulty stoves. Lack combines Twemlow's sketches to authenticate the contents of her diary, but their function is more than just evidential as they provide for the memorialist, and the reader, a 'mnemonic focal point' (Aarons and Berger 2017, p.225). The objects assist Lack's process of reconstructing the past, they are 'sites of entry and discovery' (2017, p.225) into Twemlow's life and the lives of those interned with her. Twemlow's sketches and diary are testimonial objects which provide Lack with a vivid window into daily life in the camp, termed by Hirsch as 'vehicles of imaginative historical transmission' (2012:178). Considering familial objects as vehicles of memorial or historical transmission is a useful concept for both indirect witnesses, however the orphaned objects of survivors play a different role in Shakespeare's representation of Priscilla Doynel's wartime life. Whilst Lack structures her Great Aunt's biography around her diary, representing the text, unedited, throughout, Shakespeare takes Priscilla Doynel's orphaned objects as a starting point in creating a biography about his aunt. Doynel's objects spark more questions, gaps and uncertainties, common for indirect witnesses (Aarons and Berger 2017, p.10). Shakespeare articulates:

What could be in these photographs, letters and manuscripts which Priscilla had concealed beneath the television set? [...] There were other photos, no less sensational. A chateau. A beach [...] But who was this swimmer? And this other young man on a ski slope, lying back on the snow and embracing Priscilla...? And the leather-helmeted racing driver gripping the wheel of a Delahaye? [...] The anonymity, I could not help feeling, was deliberate. (Shakespeare, 2014, pp. 25–6).

Although the objects Shakespeare discovers provide, 'more or less everything that someone seeking to unravel Priscilla's enigma could hope for' (Shakespeare, 2014, p. 27), the images' 'impenetrable façade' (Hirsch 1997) elicit even more questions about Doynel's past. The photographs of Priscilla Doynel illustrate the tension between the presence and absence of the dead (Kidron 2012, p.14). The photographs resurrect an illusion of the survivor, the image functioning as a vehicle which transmits their memory, often in vivid form, yet the photograph also highlights the gap between the past and the present (Kidron 2012, p.14). The visual image of his aunt, both painted and photographed, is significant for Shakespeare, he mentions his 'favourite image of his aunt...a portrait of her as a young woman that hung on the wall' (2014, p.9), but the image also represents absence for Shakespeare. In the chapter entitled 'The Padded Chest' (2014), Shakespeare repeats words and phrases which reference the memory gap highlighted by the discovery of her orphaned objects: 'She never spoke about it, and one would never ask her' (p.11), 'Priscilla's mystique' (p.14), 'choice to bury herself in silence' (p.19), 'what Priscilla omitted to say' (p.19), 'kept in the dark' (p.21), 'the Dark Years' (p.23), 'not completed' (p.28). These quotations highlight the paradox in which Priscilla is both absent and present in the material objects she leaves behind. The photographs of her with different suitors, or of men on their own, both resurrect her life as a young woman during the war, and highlight her absence aside from the photograph. As Kidron succinctly summarises, 'The dead remain forever liminal – both magically present in photos and painfully absent beyond their frames' (2012, p.14). Whereas Lack can weave a narrative more easily out of material fragments inherited from Fanny Twemlow, particularly the detailed diary that structures much of the biography, Doynel's orphaned objects are the starting point for a narrative which unfolds from the discovered object and to which Shakespeare must then respond with his own research. The additional research undertaken by both memoirists is the focus of the final theme corresponding to the two indirect generational accounts; the importance of a 'big picture' narrative.

According to Palmberger, 'Individuals' narratives are never solely personal memories but are always related to a wider social framework and to the prevailing official histories' (2016, p.7). Lack and Shakespeare choose to include the overarching historical narrative, or the 'big picture,' in their biographies, as well as the individuated narratives of their relatives. Both memoirists draw on other survivors' narratives, both written and oral, to supplement their



relatives' accounts. Lack uses Fanny Twemlow's memoir as a 'site of entry' (2011, p.225) into the historical reality of civilian internment. By researching her relative's life history, she encounters others' stories which weave through Twemlow's (Lack 2011, p.10). Lack relies on these additional written accounts to supplement her aunt's diary, as well as material culture including photographs and sketches to ground her remembering. With the aim of a fuller historical record, Lack researches other survivor accounts from British women interned with her relative:

For more insights, I had to look for other accounts of the internment camps, and I was fortunate to find several such memoirs; some deposited in archives in Britain and in France, and others handed down to the internees' relations and friends (Lack 2011, p.10).

According to Aarons and Berger, when memory becomes history, it also ceases to become intrinsic to the teller, it becomes apart from them and, 'can only be made accessible through an imaginative refocusing' (2017, p.42). Lack imaginatively refocuses her narrative from a publication of her great aunt's diary, to a 'big picture narrative' about what happened to the group of women interned in France during the Second World War; she wants to tell *their* story. Lack's motivation to inform others about the history of British women's internment is achieved by the inclusion of other narrative voices to 'fill the gaps' in the memory of internment, which are omitted in Fanny Twemlow's diary. Lack extends the chronology of her book beyond the end date of Twemlow's internment, so that she can include a short chapter entitled 'What was Vittel?' (Lack 2011, p.116) documenting the fate of the Jewish internees sent to the camp. The Jews were sent to the camp in 1943 and Fanny Twemlow was released in December 1941, therefore the contents of the chapter are informed by Lack's archival research and the written testimony of one internee who was still in the camp when the Jews arrived. She also supplements the chapter on 'L'hôpital St Jacques' (where her mother, Kathleen Twemlow, was a patient for six weeks), with archival information about a resistance network headed by one of the hospital's sisters who was deported to Ravensbrück where she later died (Lack 2011, pp.94–6). Lack's 'supreme duty towards memory' (Wiesel 1986) compels her to include significant historical events which are associated with her 's' internment but which Twemlow does not directly experience. This imperative to remember causes Lack to 'compile whatever resources [she] has at hand...in an attempt to create a narrative out of the fragments of

memories related' (Aarons and Berger 2017, p.207). Lack dedicates her book to 'the memory of all those who were interned in the camps in Besançon and Vittel' and pledges to donate a proportion of the book's proceeds to the International Red Cross (2011, p.6). By giving prominence to all former internees and committing to contribute to the Red Cross who supported the internees, Lack demonstrates what Hirsch has termed an 'individual responsibility...towards a persistent and traumatic past' (2008, p.113).

There are similarities between Lack and Shakespeare's approaches in terms of their commitment to include the overarching historical narrative in their biographies. Shakespeare also draws on additional eyewitness testimony to supplement Doynel's account, notably conducting three interviews with former internees: 'I also went to see three women who were imprisoned with her [Doynel]...These three women, all widows living on their own, were among the last articulate witnesses who could help me to comprehend Priscilla's experience' (Shakespeare, 2014, pp. 180–1). Whereas Lack seeks to inform the reader about a 'big picture' account of civilian internment experience using additional testimonies which at times extend beyond the chronology of Twemlow's own internment, Shakespeare states that his aim of interviewing ex-internees is to understand his aunt. He sought out one witness because 'it was possible that she had shared Priscilla's room in the camp' (2014, p.181). Priscilla is released before the transfer of internees from Besançon to Vittel and the camp in Vittel is mentioned only twice in passing by Shakespeare (2014, p.211, 335). Unlike Lack he does not include the eyewitness testimony about Vittel in his book, despite the fact that at least two of the three women he interviewed were interned there (Shakespeare, 2014, pp. 180–1). 'Besançon' is a chapter of 32 pages in a 425-page novel, and despite questioning the absence of British women's internment in Occupied France in the biography (Shakespeare, 2014, p. 18, 179), Shakespeare does not demonstrate the same 'burden of testimony' (Aarons and Berger 2017, p.43) to 'the internees' that is shown by Lack. Although he does not focus on the 'big picture' of civilian internment, Shakespeare does situate his aunt's individual story within the overarching historical narrative of the French Occupation; there is a chapter entitled 'French resistance' (2014, p.162), and another called 'Tondue' (2014, p.334) which discusses the head shaving of women accused of collaboration with the German occupiers. Doynel did not have her head shaved although, according to Shakespeare, she was afraid of denunciation due to her friendship with a German businessman in Paris who had 'powerful links with the Abwehr'

(2014, p. 306). In trying to piece together the nature of Priscilla Doynel's relationship with Otto Graebener, the German businessman, Shakespeare relies on his imagination:

I imagine Graebener transferring Priscilla from one arm to another so that he can give the Heil Hitler salute. I see men coming in, shaking hands with him, greeting Priscilla who sits there in the navy dress that he has bought her - feeling what? Shame, fear, sickness? I see women at other tables, the clandestine bend of their necks, their glances of envy or commiseration. (Shakespeare, 2014, p. 308).

What Aarons and Berger term 'the dread of the unrestrained imagination' (2017, p. 10) manifests for Shakespeare in questions, repetition and ultimately more unanswered questions. It is significant that Shakespeare expresses frustrated remembrance when discussing the topic of collaboration, still acknowledged to be an aspect which divides memories of the Occupation in France (Wieviorka 2012). As an indirect witness, Shakespeare struggles most with the limits of his knowledge and his dependence on imagination when connected to a subject which is problematic in French national memory, as well as complex for his aunt. Although writing about the Holocaust, Weissman observes that transmitting traumatic memories makes demands on the imagination (2004, p.20), and psychologists have commented that subsequent generations 'cannot comment on that [traumatic] experience, so much as demonstrate, exhibit and continue itself' (Auerhahn and Laub 1998, p.40). Despite the specificity of memories related to the Holocaust, these observations are useful for this case study as they suggest that problematic or painful memories are difficult for subsequent generations to comment on; instead they must be exhibited and demonstrated. Shakespeare creates the landscape for Doynel's individual narrative by consulting historical documents and existing research on Occupied France (Berlière 2009; Diamond, 1999; Gildea, 2002; Kedward, 1985). He then uses his imagination to compensate for the gap between knowing and not knowing, and to demonstrate and exhibit what Doynel may have experienced. Both Lack and Shakespeare demonstrate a commitment to the 'big picture' and represent a macro narrative in which their relatives' micro narratives fit. Their motivations for doing this differ; Lack is driven by a commitment to understand and inform others about the collective experiences of British internees in Besançon and Vittel and to create a fuller historical record, whereas Shakespeare draws on other witness accounts and research to discover more about his aunt who he perceived as an enigma.

### 5.5 Comparing direct and indirect generational accounts

What can the study of these four inter-generational texts tell us about how forms of narration and stylistics change from first hand, eyewitness accounts to indirect witnessing? In terms of the texture and character of the eyewitness life histories, common themes were revealed in both texts. Both used bilingualism as a tool to distinguish between the different kinds of 'British' women in the camp and to fully represent their experiences of internment. They had to retrieve memories using a 'language specific self' because this allowed them to fully communicate a specifically British or French, phenomenon. There is scope to research how bilingualism affects the memories of civilian internees as they re-present their wartime experiences. Analysis of these survivor accounts has shown how language intersects with national identity in post-war accounts and that certain historical phenomena, like *l'exode*, can only be fully remembered and communicated in a certain language. A communal subjective identity also emerged strongly in both eyewitness accounts which allowed the survivors to achieve a sense of composure by remembering one, unified, internment experience and by managing any troubling aspects of internment, such as the deportation of Jewish internees, by positioning themselves as part of a group. Humour was used in both survivor accounts but in two different ways; in the interview, Phillips told funny stories which framed her as a plucky, defiant, rebel in the face of adversity, whereas Lecomte-Worthington used humour as a coping mechanism to distance herself from the humiliation of her wartime experience. Lack and Shakespeare also touched on the collective identity of 'the internees,' including written and oral accounts from women who were interned with their relatives. The motivation for this was not achieving composure, as with the eyewitness accounts, but using additional memory fragments to create a 'big picture' narrative which encompassed their relative's experiences. Common themes in the indirect witness memoirs revealed the importance of spaces, both literal and figurative, in validating memories and offering the memoirists a 'privileged communicative space' (Passerini 1996, p.69) to share their family memories. Both indirect witnesses included 'orphaned objects' in their memoirs. These are used as 'surrogates' for memory (Aarons and Berger 2017, p.84) and were employed by both authors as 'sites of entry and discovery' (2017, p.225) into their relatives and other internees' memories. Finally, both

indirect witnesses reference 'big picture' narratives in their texts; Lack provides an overview of British internees in Besançon and Vittel using eyewitness accounts and Shakespeare situates his biography within the overarching historical narrative of the French Occupation.

In addition to revealing differences between indirect and direct witness texts in the forms of narration and aesthetics of memory, this analysis has highlighted common characteristics in the modes of communication used, particularly evident in the three written accounts. Lack and Lecomte-Worthington's written accounts were motivated by a need to tell the truth and to represent accurately what happened to *all* internees held in Besançon and Vittel. The eyewitness account sought to 'set the record straight' and Lack's account used her relative's wartime diary as a starting point to comment more broadly on these women's internment experience. The narrative models looked for other 'memory fragments' to piece together a 'complete' account of what happened and did not leave gaps and omissions which were present in the oral history interview. Lack and Shakespeare depended on multiple sources to achieve a full account and Lecomte-Worthington quoted another survivor's testimony in her memoir. The three written life histories seemed to allow their authors to achieve a greater sense of composure than the oral history interview. As Thompson also observed, personal, written testimonies are 'composed' to 'provide a relatively comfortable sense of [their] experience, which offers a sense of "composure"' (Thompson, 2006, p.4). Although we must bear in mind that Lack and Shakespeare were indirect witnesses and therefore less immediately proximate than the Phillips and Lecomte-Worthington who directly witnessed the event. Nonetheless, writing their life histories allowed Lecomte-Worthington, Shakespeare and Lack full autonomy over their narratives, they could prioritise whichever memories they preferred; research answers to any questions which arose; structure their memories as they pleased, bring more troubling memories to a helpful conclusion using other's testimonies or taking time to process difficult recollections. This luxury of time was not afforded to the oral history interviewees who had to recall difficult memories during the interview and may not have had the opportunity to fully process them before moving onto another question posed by the researcher. In sum, in this study, the written life histories seemed to offer participants a greater sense of composure than the oral history interviews. The time taken to reflect, the independent process of writing memories, the control over the narrative, and freedom to self-select and prioritise memories, all point to the benefits of written life histories in achieving a sense of composure. As will be

considered in the conclusion, this suggests that there is scope for further research comparing the concept of composure in written testimony, explored to date by Thompson (2015), Dawson (1994), Roper (2000), and Robinson (2011), with composure in oral histories, analysed by Summerfield (2004), and Pattinson (2011).

### 5.6 Filmic representations of Vittel

In addition to the written and oral narratives, two filmic narratives have also been created about the camp in Vittel; a British fictional comedy made in 1944 and a French documentary (2007) focusing on Jewish internees in the camp. This final section compares the narrative and focus of the two films and explores how they intersect with the four intergenerational texts studied in this chapter. The resilience and humour invoked in Jeanne Phillips' interview is evident in the British comedy war film about Vittel internees, *Two Thousand Women* (Lauder 1944), released in 1944 in Britain and 1951 in America. The film was made by Gainsborough studios, directed by British director and scriptwriter Frank Launder and starred Phyllis Calvert, Flora Robson and Patricia Roc, three of Britain's leading actresses in the 1940s (Bergan 2006). An article in the *Picture Post* on 4 December 1943 about the making of the film described it as follows:

What's it like to be in an enemy internment camp? A film being made by the Gainsborough studios attempts to answer this question on the screen [...] Three British airmen who bale out and are smuggled away from the Germans by the imprisoned women provide the story. There is a background of romance and intrigue. The internee who is really a Nazi spy, the two tough spinsters who 'keep the flag waving'; the pretty young show girl who had an intrigue with a German then regrets it...<sup>156</sup>

Figure 14 shows a photograph of a 'big crowd scene,' in which some of the actors were former internees.<sup>157</sup> The film was reportedly based on stories from former internees who had escaped the camp and two of the characters are named Rosemary and Frida, perhaps after Rosemary

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<sup>156</sup> Heal, Jeanne. 'Women from German Camps Act their Story.' *Picture Post* [London]. 4 December 1943. *Picture Post Historical Archive. The British Library*.

<sup>157</sup> Heal, Jeanne. 'Women from German Camps Act their Story.' *Picture Post* [London]. 4 December 1943. *Picture Post Historical Archive. The British Library*.p.18.

Say and Frida Stewart who escaped from Vittel in November 1941 and whose story was published in the British press. *Two Thousand Women* recreates several of the situations recounted in the two eyewitness accounts; the roundup of women, transfer from Besançon, arrival in the camp, activities organised by the internees including art classes, concerts, a choir, orchestra, and the importance of tea at 4 o'clock. Tensions between internees from different social backgrounds are portrayed as humorous as the women tease each other. There are moments of slapstick comedy when the internees attempt to hide the RAF airmen from the Germans, and apart from 'Mrs King' considered a collaborator, most of the internees are portrayed as resisters who are united against their German captors. There is no mention of the Jewish internees who were held in the Hôtel de la Providence in Vittel from 1943 onwards, although it is possible that the internees who escaped were no longer in the camp when the Eastern European Jews arrived. The film highlights that even before the end of the war, the camp in Vittel was being framed in British propaganda as a hub of action and resistance. The British media wanted to portray internees in Vittel as loyal to the British fighting forces, suggesting that they were so devoted to the war effort that they would even rescue and shelter an Allied airman inside a German internment camp. Skipwith questioned this highly exaggerated representation in her autobiography:

McTurk had worked in it [the film] as an extra and told us that when she walked onto the set on the first day and saw a lot of huddled figures sitting about knitting or simply waiting, she thought that the producer had really caught the atmosphere. Then suddenly a whistle blew, the figures threw off their coats and galvanized into improbable action. (Skipwith 1968, p.279)

The reality that British internees in Vittel were often inactive, waiting for the end of the war to arrive, did not fit with the heroic narrative which needed to be promoted, both during and after the conflict. The conclusion will argue that this narrative echoes the 'Blitz spirit' promoted during and after the conflict in Britain which, as observed by Noakes and Pattinson, encouraged dutiful British citizens to maintain 'a sense of community spirit, tenacity and stoicism in trying circumstances' (2014, p.10).

A filmic documentary representation of Frontstalag 142 in Vittel was also created in France many decades later in 2007 with a very different focus to the British wartime comedy.

*Passeports pour Vittel* was directed by Joëlle Novic, coproduced with *France 3* and *Lorraine Champagne-Ardenne* and supported by the *Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah*. The film traces Novic's family history; her father, uncle and grandparents were interned in Vittel. Her grandparents were Jewish, born in Palestine and were sent to the camp in exchange for German civilians interned in Palestine by the British. The first 8 minutes of the 53-minute film focus on the British internees in Vittel. There are two 'talking head' interviews with former internees who detail their arrest, internment in Besançon and transfer to Vittel. The remainder of the film focuses on the experiences of Jewish internees, their internment in Drancy, the transfer to Vittel of those with connections to Latin American countries hoping to be exchanged with German civilians, internment in Vittel, and subsequent deportation and murder in Auschwitz. Any mention of British internees thereafter focuses on the contributions of the few British women, namely Skipwith and Steinberg, who tried in vain to save the Jewish internees from deportation. Throughout the film, talking head interviews with Novic's family are punctuated with archival footage of the camp in Drancy, still shots of graffiti and messages from prisoners and audio narration of extracts from the diary of Jewish poet and Vittel internee Yitzhak Katzenelson. Katzenelson and his son were deported from Vittel to Auschwitz in August 1944 where they were killed. As will be explored in the conclusion, this filmic narrative corresponds with the overarching memory of the camp in Vittel in France which focuses on its role as a transit camp in the deportation of Jews; the presence of British women has largely been overlooked until now. The fact that the French filmic representation of Vittel focuses on Jewish deportations from France to Auschwitz is perhaps unsurprising given the prominence of the Holocaust in French national memory. In the 2000s, when the film was created 'The Holocaust [had] been the subject of extensive academic research, and an almost daily source of controversy in the French media for nearly two decades' (Wolf 2004, p.2). France was preoccupied with how to reconcile national culpability in the persecution and deportation of Jews under Vichy as well as what Wolf terms the, 'long history' of Jews in Modern France (2004, p.2).

It is evident that these two films about Vittel were created in totally dissimilar contexts and therefore offer very different perspectives on the camp. The British comedy casts British women as protagonists, united against their captors despite their social differences. The British Film Institute commented that, 'The film has had a healthy afterlife in feminist film studies. In



particular it has been praised for portraying a genuinely independent female point of view – something highly unusual for the time’ (Brooke 2003). The wartime comedy not only resonates with British Home Front propaganda which encouraged women to remain calm, confident, and stoic, despite their husband’s absence, it also reflects the independence and sense of emancipation experienced by some British women during the conflict. The French documentary presents a far more bleak and tragic narrative of the camp. The resilience, stoicism, and ‘pluck’ in *Two Thousand Women* do not feature at all. Instead of the British protagonists, the documentary, supported by the *Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah*, retells the story of the Jewish victims and the hopelessness of their situation. These filmic narratives raise the question of where the memory of British women now sits in relation to this more recent memory of Vittel as a transit camp and antechamber to Auschwitz.<sup>158</sup> The memory of British women in Vittel does not fit with either of the national narratives in France or Britain, echoing the observation that the national may no longer be a preminent frame for understanding the experiences of British women overseas during the Second World War (De Cesari and Rigney 2014, p.2). The need for a transnational narrative which makes room for these women’s’ experiences is evident and is further analysed in the conclusion to this thesis.

This chapter has focused on shared memories of Vittel internment camp, analysing two eyewitness narratives, two indirect generational accounts and two filmic representations. It evaluated how forms of narration, style and themes differed between these representations of life in the camp. It stated that there were similarities between the two eyewitness accounts and the two familial representations. The Phillips’ oral history interview and Lecomte-Worthington’s memoir both used their French or British ‘language specific self’ to retrieve memories about particular events in the camp corresponding to each nation and both managed troubling memories in similar ways, either through humour or framing their memories from a group perspective using ‘on’ and ‘nous.’ Shakespeare and Lack’s biographies, of their aunt and great aunt respectively, also shared similar characteristics which are common in familial re-tellings of wartime accounts. Both supplemented their family stories with objects to comment on ‘the Vittel experience’ beyond their relative’s individual experience. Drawing

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<sup>158</sup> A conference on Vittel’s link with Auschwitz death camp was held in June 2017, ‘Le camp de Vittel et sa relation à Auschwitz.’ It was organised by the town of Vittel in conjunction with the ‘Fondation Auschwitz Bruxelles,’ and other Jewish organisations. More information can be found in the conclusion.

on a wider narrative of the war featured in both accounts, as did visiting the physical sites of memory. The latter offered a figurative space to transmit their family memories. The two filmic representations reflect the national contexts at the time they were created; the British propaganda film echoes the national narrative of pluck and courage promoted immediately following the conflict, whereas the French film resonates with the cosmopolitan memory in France associated with memories of the Holocaust (Levy and Sznajder 2002). The thesis conclusion will explore how the life history narratives in this study fit with popular national memories of Vittel and suggest that the lack of an appropriate cultural narrative for British women and their families has meant that their stories have been overshadowed and even forgotten.

## Conclusion

This study has focused on the experiences of British women in France between 1939 and 1944. It has highlighted the internment of British women in Vittel as a key experience of this community which emerged strongly from their own life history narratives and official records of this period. This thesis posits that national identity and notions of 'Britishness' were integral to British women's negotiation of the war years and that questions of national identity and belonging have continued to influence whether their memories have persisted at a national and transnational level. This study has revealed that over 4,000 British expatriates refused, or were unable, to leave France after the German invasion in May 1940, preferring to remain. Their sense of belonging and affinity with France was radically disrupted as the new Occupier labelled them 'enemy aliens' and ordered their internment. Our current understandings of British women in Occupied France are largely influenced by the brave contributions of female SOE agents in the 'F Section', yet these do not adequately represent the experiences of this community of British women overseas during wartime, most of whom were interned for the duration of the conflict in Vittel where they waited for the war to end. Their internment was marked by their sense of 'Britishness,' a national identity which they prioritized, and even performed, over other identities since it placed them in an advantageous position compared with other French or Jewish civilians. This study has highlighted the slippage between the individual's self-identification with a certain identity and the external classification of the same. It has shown that these women would often juggle multiple identities, privileging the one which offered the best chance of survival to surface. This dilemma of belonging and the constrictions of a singular national identity, rather than a bi- or trans- national identity, has stifled the memory of these women, meaning that their story is an orphan one that has largely not been included in French or British national memories of the war.

Chapter 3 analysed the impact of Britain's transition from France's ally to her enemy between September 1939 and December 1940 on British women's 'internal and external frontiers of belonging.' It evaluated the strength of ties to France as a 'host' space for British women and revealed that, before the German invasion in May 1940, British women felt safe to express their British national identity. They often assumed dual identities, some travelling regularly

across the channel and following official advice from British consulates and embassies that they were secure in France. The German invasion in May 1940 represented a turning point as many women joined the exodus and tried to escape. Their accounts share common characteristics with French civilians caught up in these mass movements; British women who made it to the coast recalled crowds of 'Britishers' at ports trying to secure passage on 'the last boat home.' In contrast to the exodus remembered by French civilians, British women's flight extended beyond the signing of the armistice and some journeys back to Britain continued into 1941. Surprisingly, most British women living in France in August 1940 chose to remain there despite strong recommendations from the British government to return.<sup>159</sup> Letters and memoirs reveal that, perhaps understandably, women with the deepest sense of belonging to France were the most likely to remain. British women's categorization as 'enemy alien' in September 1940 marked the beginning of their separation and exclusion. Their life histories illustrate the slippage between this external categorization and their internal self-definition as British women who had previously experienced freedom to belong in France and to express their national identity. British women who had 'belonged' in France for decades were ostracized and vilified in Nazi and Vichy propaganda and were often isolated or rejected by French civilians who risked imprisonment for sheltering them. The period between September and December 1940 represented the first time that British women experienced a 'conflict in belonging', meaning that instead of self-identifying as British and French, for example, they were forced to flag one national identity over the other. This sense of conflicted identity perpetuated throughout the war.

Chapter 4 evaluated the continued impact of national identity and belonging on British women's lives during the Occupation, focusing on British internees in Vittel and Besançon. It concluded that many British women discovered or reawakened their sense of Britishness whilst interned in Vittel and some actively chose to perform their Britishness over other national identities, such as being Jewish or French, to survive. It argued that repeated acts and rituals were used to signify belonging to a larger national community, particularly gendered rituals of

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<sup>159</sup> TNA FO 916 132, Repatriation of British subjects in France, 'Extract from Despatch No.100 dated January 17, 1941 from the American Consulate at Marseille.' 'Of the possibly 4000 British subjects in unoccupied France in August, at the most a few hundred have accepted opportunities to them for repatriation and the rest have apparently been content to remain.' p.2.

belonging. These paralleled the aims of British women's wartime organisations such as the Women's Institute, training women in 'responsible citizenship.' However, this performance of national identity was not open or inclusive and non-British Jewish internees were ostracized by some as they were perceived to represent the antithesis of British wartime values. Whilst all internees were considered 'enemy aliens,' the Jewish internees were doubly discriminated against by the German authorities and some British internees. Chapter 4 also posits that, once released, some internees found life outside the camp more challenging than life inside it. These women continued with performative acts which reaffirmed their British identity outside the camp. When the war was over, some former Vittel internees experienced a 'difficult liberation', realizing that the idealized view of the British nation popularized in the camp did little to sustain them once released. Many were left destitute, their homes either ransacked or occupied by others.

Finally, chapter 5 questioned how memories are re-presented and remembered within families, including forms of narration, stylistics and the intention behind these representations. The two eyewitnesses accounts from former internees shared similarities in the way that they remembered their internment; bilingualism was employed as a tool to distinguish between different kinds of 'Britishness' in the camp and to retrieve memories associated with France or Britain which could only be fully communicated in either French or English. Both women re-presented their memories from the perspective of the group, rather than the individual. This allowed the survivors to achieve a sense of composure thereby managing any painful recollections of internment. Both used humour, but in different ways; for Phillips it was important to present a subjective identity of a young, carefree internee and for Lecomte-Worthington, humour was used as a coping mechanism to manage challenging memories. The two indirect witnesses also chose to represent their family memories in similar modes, using additional memory materials to create a 'big picture' narrative, returning to sites of memory to validate and provide a communicative space for their familial accounts. This included 'orphaned objects' in their family memoirs as vehicles of memorial and historical transmission.

This study has interrogated the life history narratives of British women and their families to question current understandings and stereotypes of British women's experience of the Second World War in France. It has analysed the importance of national identity and inquired as to

how such women's experiences have been remembered. The life history narratives include oral history interviews with the author, written accounts, letters, biographies and autobiographies. These were triangulated with archival documents to add 'range and depth' (Fielding and Fielding 1986, p.33). Life history narratives were chosen for their value in highlighting the 'unknown majority' (Thompson 2000, p.24) of British women as internees in Occupied France whose experiences have been overshadowed by the better-known minority of female secret agents deployed in France by the British government. Examining life history narratives has revealed how the British women in this study interpreted the world around them and their personal negotiation of events to bring 'new and untapped perspectives' to light about life as a British woman in France during and after the war (Maynes et al., 2008:8). Life history narratives were particularly useful in revealing distinctions between external and internal frontiers of national belonging, a framework applied throughout this thesis. Interviews, (auto)biographies, diaries and letters all offered specific insights into how British women negotiated the shifting frontiers of belonging during the war and proved that governmental definitions of national identity and citizenship did not allow for the nuance of hybrid national identities experienced by British women during this time. The expression of these hybrid identities was evident in the life history narratives which uncovered the importance of language in British women's performative identities and how they remembered their wartime lives. Oral history interviews and written memoirs showed that at different points during the war women were considered by others to be British based on their command of the English language (chapter 3) or considered by some to be French because of their knowledge of French (chapter 4). Former internees also used language in memoirs to distinguish between internees or to represent memories associated with a specific national context. The concept of 'bilingual memory' and the 'language specific self' through which memories are retrieved (Schrauf, 2000:387), as identified in chapter 5, has not yet been applied to studies of history and oral history. The findings drawn from two survivor texts in chapter 5 suggest that this would be a worthwhile area for future research.

This thesis has also sought to contribute to methodological debates on how individuals compile narratives about their past and how they create narratives which allow them to achieve a sense of composure. When combined with the notion of composure, life history narratives were particularly fruitful in this study. This thesis has drawn on narratives, oral and written, some

individually authored, others a co-creation between interviewer and subject, to construct an account of life as a British woman in wartime France. The second aspect of composure, achieving psychic equilibrium, has also been a frame of reference throughout this project. Whilst primarily associated with oral history, as Barclay and Richardson state 'Autobiographical writing is in both senses composed, memoirs, diaries and letters are constructed narratives in which...narrators perform a range of rhetorical acts in the process of producing an understanding of "the meaning of a life"' (2016, p.350). This study argues that British women created subject identities in composed accounts to achieve a sense of equanimity with the past; for Jeanne Phillips representing herself as a young, carefree, teenager who was unaware of fellow internees deported to Auschwitz; for Eva Phillips to be repatriated to Britain despite never having visited her 'home' country. As well as shaping subjectivities, this study showed that some individuals borrowed memories from other wartime accounts, pointing to the recollections of others when their own were too troubling. This analysis has also elicited questions about composure which until now has been understood as a binary concept, with individuals either managing to achieve a sense of composure or discomposure with their past. This study suggests a more nuanced approach to composure which positions individuals on a spectrum of composure, at times achieving a sense of composure and at others tending towards discomposure. This is a more apt framework for the analysis of oral history interviews, as in Chapter 5, when individuals achieve some composure but are also troubled with questions about what they do not know or have forgotten. This is surely a more nuanced picture of how individuals come to terms with their memories and those of others. It is a gradual process in which both composure and discomposure are present, where steps can be taken to increase the level of composure, such as writing down one's memories or reading other wartime accounts which might 'fill in the gaps' in the individual's recollection of the past.

This study also elicits questions about how we, as historians, consider participants in oral history interviews. We can learn lessons from practitioners in reminiscence life review and begin to view older people as 'living sources' and so value the 'person who is' as much as 'the person who was' (Bornat 2001, p.238). Secondly, we have an ethical responsibility to consider how our oral history interviewing affects the participants in our study and we may need to offer more support than an email address at the bottom of the information form to which participants can address any queries. Further support may look like the formal arrangement of

a follow-up interview in which participants can discuss the initial interview; share concerns and ask any questions. Offering the participants the chance to read any material to be published, as in this study, invites them into the process of co-creating knowledge. Thirdly, researchers could create forums, physical or virtual, in which survivors and family members can share their stories, fill in the memory gaps and research their own or their families' histories. This increases the opportunities for participants to achieve a sense of composure by validating and encouraging them to share their memories. Diamond's article on 'Digital stories of escape from France' (2017), posits that, 'Digital platforms offer innovative potential for displaying and preserving written and visual testimony' (2017: 59).

This thesis also responds to questions of memory, testimony, and transmission. It reveals that the families of British internees have played a significant role in the transmission of their experiences. These survivor families perform the role of 'co-producer' of their familial legacy (Kidron 2015, p.66), yet it seems that the accounts which are produced have not yet been integrated into widely-circulating popular memories of the war in Britain. Historians using composure theory argue that narrators complement their own personal memories with popular, public narratives corresponding to their wartime experiences (Dawson 1994; Pattinson, 2011; Summerfield, 2004). Popular, public narratives concerning British women in France are dominated by the experiences of SOE agents whose contributions have been foregrounded by Pattinson (2007), biographers of former agents (Escott, 2012; Helm, 2006; Seymour-Jones, 2014; Masson, 2005) and in British museum exhibitions on a national and local level. British internees in Besançon numbered 3,900, including children under 16 and men over 65. A report from the War Prisoners Aid section of the YMCA in September 1941, estimated the number of British civilians in France as 10,000, including civilian internees.<sup>160</sup> Although it is difficult to discern exactly how many British women feature in these statistics, the number of British civilian women in France during this period was clearly well into the thousands, whether interned in camps or living independently under surveillance. British civilians in Occupied France evidently outnumbered the 39 female agents in SOE's F Section, yet their experiences are not visible at a national level.

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<sup>160</sup> TNA FO 916 143. A report on British subjects in Occupied France. Made by Miss Carmalt of the YMCA staff Paris. 29.9.1941.



Press coverage of Vittel internment camp has been selective in its reporting, choosing memories which mask the individual hardship and suffering of the inmates. Coverage of Vittel internees in the British press has been minimal. Only one article about Vittel published in *The Mail on Sunday* in January 2000 was discovered which focused on internees’ resilience, their ability to ‘keep calm and carry on’, and their sense of humour. The headline read, ‘Having a wonderful time...we’re prisoners of the Nazis’ (see figure 14).<sup>161</sup>

The central colour photograph is one of the Vittel variety performances with the women in costume. Set alongside the swastika, this paradox of fun and laughter taking place in a Nazi camp portrays internees as resourceful and resilient. It echoes ‘the Blitz spirit’, which conveys ‘a sense of community spirit, tenacity and stoicism in trying circumstances’ (Noakes and Pattinson, 2014, p. 10). The article portrays British women as in control; they are protagonists, rather than victims. The women featured are young, carefree and independent. The article mentions ‘the relaxed attitude in the camp,’ and ‘that for some women the lack of men was no hardship – they turned to each other for physical comfort.’ This last phrase suggests a level



Figure 14 – ‘Having a wonderful time...we’re prisoners of the Nazis’, in *The Mail on Sunday*, 16 January 2000, unnamed collection, Sonia Gumuchian Archives.

<sup>161</sup> McQueen, Anna, Reporter. ‘Having a wonderful time we’re prisoners of the Nazis.’ *The Mail on Sunday*. 16 January 2000. Unnamed collection. Sonia Gumuchian archives.

of sensationalism in the article around same-sex relations. The piece does not focus on older women who found the camp experience more challenging. The narrative is about rallying together in the face of adversity. A third of the article covers the arrival and later deportation of the Jews who were interned in Vittel and mentions Sofka Skipwith and Madeleine White, two internees who worked to save the Jewish internees by smuggling letters to the British Embassy and the Home Office (Skipwith 1968, p.226). This memory of Vittel ties in with the SOE narrative concerning British women; they may not have been spies, but they are still resilient survivors who rose to the occasion in the face of adversity. Other memories of Vittel which do not correspond to this heroic or stoic narrative are masked in the article by more dominant memories, such as the attempt to delay or prevent the deportation of Jewish internees.

Yet this 'Blitz spirit' narrative is not widely reflected in the four familial texts analysed in Chapter 5. In fact, it is only in Jeanne Phillips' interview that we see an element of the humour, resilience and stoicism which is referred to in the newspaper article. Phillips' anecdote about wriggling under the fence to find some salad leaves represents the resourcefulness and resilience which characterise the British wartime ethos (Noakes and Pattinson 2014). Her testimony reinforces the paradox communicated in the article that, although British women were incarcerated, they were far from being victims. Shakespeare's account of the experience of his aunt Priscilla Doynel (2014) also features aspects of resilience and resourcefulness. It demonstrates the challenges faced by British women who were trying to survive in a hostile environment and indicates that the specific circumstances of the Occupation meant that British women were faced with complex decisions to stay safe.<sup>162</sup> Priscilla Doynel's life history reveals that the binary view of British women in France as either victims or protagonists does not adequately reflect their experiences. Shakespeare's account was serialised on Radio 4's *Book of the Week* in January 2014, and reviews of the book were featured in *The Daily Telegraph* (Wood 2013), *The New York Times* (Shapiro 2013), *The Economist* (2013), *The Independent* (Bell 2013), *The Boston Globe* (Price 2014) and an interview with the author in *The Guardian* (Lethbridge 2013). *Priscilla* (2014) is ranked highly in the category of 'historical

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<sup>162</sup> For example, Doynel faked her own pregnancy in order to escape from Besançon internment camp (Shakespeare 2014, p.204).

biographies in France' on *Amazon UK*.<sup>163</sup> Shakespeare's profile as an established journalist and writer gave him privileged access to publicity outlets and book sales indicate that his account has been popular and that there is a public appetite for these stories. Despite this interest, why then has the memory of British women in occupied France been overlooked in popular memories of the war?

The first reason is that British women's wartime experiences in France are insufficiently heroic. Daase argues, 'Collective memories of nations, for the most part, relate to events of either glory or victimhood' (2010, p.19) and the binary nature of national, collective memory is useful in our analysis of remembering British women in France. One of the problems with these women's experiences is that many do not fit easily in the categories of 'glory' or 'victimhood'; their wartime lives were nuanced and their choices were complicated. It is difficult to compose a narrative which places the women in this study as either victorious or tragically defeated; most simply survived. As Daase observes, it is important to 'depict the national self as triumphantly victorious or tragically defeated hero respectively – but nevertheless as hero' (2010, p.19). The reality that British internees in Vittel were often inactive, waiting for the end of the war to arrive (like most French civilians), did not fit with the heroic narrative which needed to be promoted, both during and after the conflict. The second explanation for the nonappearance of British women in wartime France is that, as a group, these women sit in-between different national narratives, not fully British, not fully French, some of them interned in a German camp, on French soil. Their memory sits between national borders and therefore national collective memories. Aside from Vittel, a local memory site in France, national memories which correspond to these women's experiences in France between 1939 and 1945 have been largely overlooked in both countries. We return to the slippery nature of national belonging which continues to affect these women's lives even after most of them have died. The third reason, which corresponds to the internment camp in Vittel, is the dominance of the memory of the Holocaust and the deportation of Eastern European Jewish internees from Vittel to Auschwitz. In France, the camp at Vittel has been largely remembered for its role as a transit camp in the deportation of Jews and the presence of British women has been

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<sup>163</sup> The publication was ranked number 352 in Historical biographies in France on *Amazon UK* on 4 February 2018, see: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Priscilla-Hidden-Englishwoman-Wartime-France/dp/1846554837>.

overlooked until now. This has also been the primary focus of existing research into the history of the camp (Rutkowski, 1981; Soussen, 1995; Steinberg, 1990; Bloch 2007), the documentary 'Passports pour Vittel' (Novic, 2007) and a conference, 'Le camp de Vittel et sa relation à Auschwitz' held in June 2017 and organised by the town of Vittel in conjunction with the 'Fondation Auschwitz Bruxelles' and other Jewish organisations.<sup>164</sup> The conference programme can be found in Appendix C and included presentations from three Jewish historians and authors: Didier Dumarque, Marybonne Braunschweig, and Serge Klarsfeld. The 'Journal du Camp de Vittel' written by Yitzhak Katzenelson, a Jewish teacher, poet and dramatist who was interned in Vittel and deported to Auschwitz where he was murdered in 1944, has also recently been translated into French and published (Katzenelson, 2016). Hirsch and Spitzer describe the Holocaust as 'a touchstone for the study of twentieth-century memory' (2009, p.151). Levy and Sznajder argue that the Holocaust is becoming less 'a terrible aspect of a particular era' and instead 'a timeless and deterritorialised measuring stick for good and evil' (2002, p.95). We can hypothesize that British women's internment experiences have been overlooked because, when compared with the experiences of Jewish internees, they are less harrowing, less 'evil' as Levy and Sznajder suggest. In her interview, Laura Giraud referred to this sense of comparison when talking about her mother, a British Jew who was spared from deportation due to her British nationality: 'D'ailleurs ma mère se ne remit pas. Et pourtant, ce n'était pas un camp de concentration...mais...mais ça a changé toute sa vie.' This quotation illustrates how the Holocaust is both touchstone and measuring stick in Giraud's memory; she compares her mother's experiences with those of other Jews who were sent to concentration camps. Her subtext might be read as follows, 'I know it wasn't as horrific as what happened in the concentration camps, but it always marked her life' or 'I know she was lucky to be alive, but she did still suffer.' The influence of the Holocaust in how we remember is exemplified in this extract. Giraud wants to acknowledge how much her mother's life was changed by her wartime experiences but cannot do so without referencing the experiences of other Jews which were far more devastating. Tony Judt argues, 'Memory is inherently contentious and partisan: one man's acknowledgement is another man's omission' (2005, p.829). It can be argued that acknowledging the treatment of Holocaust victims interned in Vittel, on both a local and

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<sup>164</sup> The conference organisers were: Ville de Vittel, bibliothèque médiathèque de Vittel, Musée du Patrimoine Vittel, Fondation Auschwitz Bruxelles, Les Fils et Filles des Déportées Juifs de France militants de la mémoire, Cercle d'étude de la déportation et de la Shoah – Amicale d'Auschwitz. <http://journals.openedition.org/alsace/596>

individual level, has led to an omission of British women's wartime experience in the same camps. How can the experiences of British women in Vittel be remembered when what they experienced cannot be compared, and is therefore overshadowed by, the experiences of Eastern European Jews who were deported from Vittel to Auschwitz?

In conclusion then how might we reconcile the recent familial accounts of British women in wartime France with what has been foregrounded in British popular memories of the war? The fact that the memory of British women in Vittel sits between national borders and national memories problematises how we remember their experiences. The site of the camp in France is a significant *lieu de mémoire* for former internees and their families. The Musée de Patrimoine in Vittel organised a reunion for former internees on the sixtieth anniversary of the camp's liberation in 2004 and the museum's archives have been consulted by family members looking to discover more about their relatives' experiences there (Lack 2011; Say and Holland, 2012; Shakespeare, 2014). An article on the former internees and their return to the camp in 2004 was published in the local newspaper *Vosges Matin* and the caption under their photograph read '*Des anciens internés sont venus témoigner de la vie au camp, pendant 3 ans.*'<sup>165</sup> The invitation to return to Vittel as a site of remembering and to share their memories of internment authenticated the survivors' voices. During an interview, Laura Giraud showed



Figure 15 - Former internees at reunion for 60th anniversary of the camp's liberation, unnamed collection, Musée du Patrimoine.

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<sup>165</sup> *Vosges Matin*, '*Des anciens internés sont venus témoigner de la vie au camp, pendant 3 ans.*' 13 September 2004. Unnamed collection, Musée du Patrimoine.

me a photograph of the internees at the reunion which her mother had kept (see figure 15) and recalled that returning to the camp for the sixtieth anniversary had been significant for her parents: 'Ils ont été reçu, ils ont été honorés par la mairie, par...vous voyez, il y a quelque chose d'important à Vittel. [...] C'était leur vie.'<sup>166</sup> The curator of the museum recalled that other former internees and family members had heard about the anniversary conference and the survivors visiting Vittel and this led them to come to Vittel to discover more and share their own stories.<sup>167</sup>

For the 'orphan story' of British women in wartime France to be adopted into popular memories of the war in Britain, local sites of memory, such as Vittel, which embrace individual family narratives are key in validating and informing representations of British women's experiences. There is scope for further research into the relationship between landscape and memory in Vittel and how the survivors 'authenticate the place through their testimony and the place authenticates the survivors voice' (Cole 2013, p.112). The relationship between the memory site, Vittel, and familial memories of British women interned there has been pivotal in cultivating second and third generation representations of British women interned in France during the war. The active relationship between the Vittel museum and the families of former internees also reveals the central importance of telling their story as a transnational history. It demonstrates the need to investigate the operation of memory at different levels – local, regional and transnational (Finney 2017). This study also echoes recent work on memory studies which contend that 'the national has ceased to be the inevitable or preeminent scale for the study of collective remembrance' (De Chesari and Rigney 2014: 2). The publication of biographies of British women in Vittel in the late 2000s suggests that the public are interested in these women's experiences and there may be scope to broaden consideration of the media of transmission beyond 'texts of memory' into visual representations of these women's experiences such as film, television, or photography. As discussed, the history of Vittel has already been represented in filmic form, in a documentary focusing on Jewish internees (*Passeports pour Vittel*, 2007) and much earlier in *Two Thousand Women*, a comedy (1943).

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<sup>166</sup> Interview with Laura Giraud, Paris, 23 February 2016.

<sup>167</sup> Interview with Mme Clement, Vittel, 14 September 2015.

These visual representations further emphasise the need for a transnational approach. It is interesting that the British make a comedy about Vittel and the French focus on the tragic fate of Jewish internees. The experiences of British women are an orphan story that sits between the two countries, an experience claimed by neither national memory context. Only in the late 2000s has an increasingly transnational milieu made space for the memories of British women in Vittel to emerge, preserved and promoted by their families in biographical form. Sakai argues that intergenerational memory works as, 'an important medium through which a big story of national historical level becomes an essential constituent of the small story of an individual at a personal level' (2009, p.12). This study suggests that the small story of an individual is equally necessary in informing and personalising national memory so that it reflects individual memories at a broader level. It is hoped that the descendants of British women in France during the war will continue to transmit their family stories so that these testimonies can be remembered, rather than orphaned.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Letter to former internees

Ayshka Sené

Angleterre

Chère Madame [REDACTED],

Madame [REDACTED] au Musée du Patrimoine et du Thermalisme à Vittel m'a donné votre adresse.

Je suis une étudiante anglaise à l'université de Cardiff au Pays de Galles et je fais des recherches sur les femmes britanniques pendant la deuxième guerre mondiale. Pour faire ses recherches, j'ai reçu une bourse du gouvernement anglais ('The Arts and Humanities Research Council'). Je m'intéresse en particulier aux femmes qui étaient internées en France pendant la guerre, dans les camps d'internement, comme à Vittel.

Pour ce travail j'essaye de ramasser les témoignages des femmes qui étaient en France pendant cette période. J'ai déjà parlé avec quelques femmes qui étaient internes à Vittel, mais je vous écris parce que j'aimerais savoir si vous seriez disposées à me parler ?

Je prépare une visite en France pour la première semaine de novembre, du 1 au 5 novembre, et si vous êtes disponibles peut-être je pourrais venir vous visiter ?

Je suis désolée mais je n'ai pas un numéro de téléphone pour vous contacter, peut-être vous pouvez m'appeler si vous êtes d'accord pour l'interview ou si vous voulez plus de renseignements sur le projet ? Mon numéro est [REDACTED] ou mon adresse mail, [REDACTED]

Je vous remercie d'avoir pris le temps de lire cette lettre et j'espère avoir bientôt le plaisir de parler avec vous.

Je vous prie d'agréer, Monsieur et Madame, l'expression de mes salutations distinguées.

Ayshka Sené

PhD Student

AHRC studentship

South, West & Wales Doctoral Training Partnership

Cardiff School of Modern Languages, Cardiff University, 66A Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AS

My profile: <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/modern-languages/profile/ayshka-sene/>

Formulaire de consentement – Entrevue ‘histoire orale’

Ayshka m’expliquer le but de cette étude (recherches sur les femmes britanniques à Vittel), ma participation, et elle m’a informé de façon satisfaisante sur la nature et les raisons de ma participation au projet.

Je comprends que ma participation au projet comprend un entrevue ‘histoire orale’ sur mon histoire de vie ou l’histoire de vie de mes parents, y compris mes/leurs expériences pendant la deuxième guerre mondiale.

Je comprends que ma participation à ce projet de recherche est tout à fait volontaire et que je reste libre, à tout moment, de mettre fin à ma participation sans avoir à motiver ma décision ni à subir de préjudice de quelque nature que ce soit.

Je comprends que je peux poser des questions à tout moment.

Je comprends que le contenu de mon entrevue sera partagé avec les directeurs de thèse de Ayshka, et peut être utilisé dans les publications suivantes.

Je comprends que j’ai la possibilité de lire des versions provisoires de toute publication contenant l’information de l’entrevue, j’ai également la possibilité de poser les questions et demander des changements avant de publication.

Je comprends que aucune publication ne renfermera d’information permettant de m’identifier.

Je comprends que tous les renseignements recueillis au cours du projet de recherche demeureront strictement confidentiels dans les limites prévues par la loi.

Je, \_\_\_\_\_ (nom en caractères d'imprimerie), déclare avoir lu et/ou compris le présent formulaire. Je comprends la nature et le motif de ma participation au projet. Par la présente, j’accepte librement de participer au projet avec Ayshka Sené, School of Modern Languages, Université de Cardiff, sous la supervision de Professor Hanna Diamond et Professor Claire Gorrara.

Signature de la participante ou du participant :

Date:

Ayshka Sené email : [seneal@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:seneal@cardiff.ac.uk)  
numéro de téléphone: 

Professor Hanna Diamond email: [DiamondH@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:DiamondH@cardiff.ac.uk)  
Professor Claire Gorrara email: [gorrara@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:gorrara@cardiff.ac.uk)

Table 2 - Life histories used in each chapter

<b>Chapter</b>	<b>Life histories</b>	<b>Source (date of creation)</b>	<b>Short biography</b>
3	Claude and Germaine Serocold	Written account (1942)	Lived in France, Claude Serocold escaped, Germaine Serocold was interned in Vittel.
	Elizabeth Hales	Written account (1939-1944)	Former internee Besançon and Vittel.
	Fanny Twemlow	Biography by great niece, Lack (2011)	Former internee Besançon and Vittel.
	Daphne Wall	Memoir	Lived in France, escaped during exodus in summer 1940.
	Nora Fisher	Interview (2016)	Lived in France, escaped during exodus in summer 1940.
	Ted Fisher	Interview (2016)	Lived in France, escaped during exodus in summer 1940.
	Sara Abelson	Interview with her daughter (2016)	Former internee Besançon and Vittel.
	Rosemary Say	Co-created biography (Say & Holland, 2012)	Former internee Besançon and Vittel.
	Priscilla Doynel	Biography by nephew, Shakespeare (2014)	Former internee Besançon.
	Sofka Skipwith	Autobiography (1968)	Former internee Besançon and Vittel.
	Antonia Hunt	Autobiography (1982)	Former internee Besançon.
	Pearl Witherington	Biography (Seymour-Jones, 2013)	Lived in France, escaped during exodus in summer 1940, SOE agent.
	Gertrude Trewhella	Diary (written 1939-1942) published by her granddaughter (201??)	Former internee Besançon and Vittel.
	Alexander Werth	Published diary	Was living in France, escaped during exodus in summer 1940.
Cecily Mackworth	Biography (1987)	Was living in France, escaped in 1941.	
4	Sara Abelson	Interview (2016)	Former internee Besançon and Vittel.
	Sofka Skipwith	Interview with her daughter (2016)	Former internee Besançon and Vittel.
	Eva Phillips	Interview (2016)	Former internee Besançon and Vittel.

	Jeanne Phillips	Interview (2016)	Former internee Besançon and Vittel.
	Antonia Hunt	Autobiography (1982)	Former internee Besançon.
	Rosemary Say	Biography	Former internee Besançon and Vittel.
	Sister Patricia McGauley	Memoirs/archival	Former internee Besançon and Vittel.
	Fanny Twemlow	Biography by great niece, Lack (2011)	Former internee Besançon and Vittel.
	Margaret Williams	Interview (2015)	Former internee Besançon and Vittel.
	Madeleine Steinberg	Article in <i>Le Monde Juif</i> (Steinberg, 1990)	Former internee Besançon and Vittel.
	Doris Lecomte-Worthington	Memoir (2005-2010)	Former internee Besançon and Vittel.
	Mary Berg	Diary (Berg, 2009)	Former internee Vittel, transferred from Warsaw ghetto, repatriated to USA.
5	Doris Lecomte-Worthington	Memoir (2005-2010)	<b>Core text (see ch.5)</b>
	Eva Phillips	Interview (2016)	<b>Core text (see ch.5)</b>
	Jeanne Phillips	Interview (2016)	<b>Core text (see ch.5)</b>
	Fanny Twemlow	Biography by great niece, Lack (2011)	<b>Core text (see ch.5)</b>
	Priscilla Doynel	Biography by nephew, Shakespeare (2014)	<b>Core text (see ch.5)</b>
	Rosemary Say	Co-created biography (Say & Holland, 2012)	Former internee Besançon and Vittel.

## Appendix B

### Interview Transcript: Eva and Jeanne Phillips

**Interviewees:** Eva and Jeanne Phillips

**Interviewer:** Ayshka Sené

**Date and Time:** 22/2/2016, 14.00

**Location:** Interviewee's home, Paris, France

**Duration:** 95 minutes

**(Start of interview)**

E: As I was saying, my mother was French, and my father was British, was English because his father was English, and his mother was French. Both our grandmothers were second cousins.

A: Really? Wow. Ok.

E: So that's why my father lived in France. When war broke out my father was recalled in the navy, he was a commander in the navy, so he went back England to serve, and we stayed in France. And when the...

J: Tu sais que j'entends rien.

E: She doesn't hear. (louder) We stayed in France while Daddy...

J: En ce moment j'entends absolument rien. I'm all fuzzy...I can't hear a thing. Ça ne fait rien. Tu...tu...(laughs)

E: So, we stayed in France my father was in England and when the Germans came in we were, it's complicated. My sister, my mother and sisters...

J: De quoi parles tu?

E: Le début de la guerre?

J: Huh?

E: (Louder) Le début de la guerre?

J: On était à Vendée?

E: Non. Avant. Avant que les allemands arrivent.

J: Au Bois de Cises (ph)

E: Au bois de Cises (ph). They were on the coast in Normandy...

A: On holiday?

E: On holiday. We stopped for the whole winter...

J: The whole year

E: The whole winter after the beginning of the war. And then the Germans came in, so we went away from the coast...we left the coast under bombing by Germans. Er... La..L'exode.

A: Oui. The exodus.

E: (3.49) L'exode. We eventually got to a town where there was a train that...we took, and we got to Paris to my uncle and aunt's in French, my mother's sister and husband.

J: We walked for part of the journey coming down for the exode.

E: Yes, 4 days.

A: Were there lots of people with you?

E: Not very much because...

J: Then we found a train. Eventually we found a train (laughs)

A: Wow. Quite an adventure.

E: In Paris, my uncle decided it would be a better solution for us to go to Vendee...

A: Ok

E: And that's where we remained at the beginning of the war. And then when the Germans came in to France, we were living with some cousins of my uncle in Vendée. And my mother decided that as we didn't live on our own, but we lived with people, we didn't want to put them in trouble, so they were, my mother and sisters were... On était enregistré (5.36) comme British à la kommandantur de l'endroit. Et moi j'étais en pension, dans une pension religieuse à Fontenay, et moi aussi.

A: Wow. Et vous avez quel âge? Et une allemande venait me cherchait à Fontenay, et maman et mes sœurs de leur côté avaient été ramassé par les Allemands aussi. Et on s'est retrouvée à la Roche d'Orion.

A: Wow. C'est intéressant. Donc vous étiez combien en total?

E: Il y avait mes 2 sœurs, ma mère et puis moi de l'autre cote.

AL Et pourquoi vous étiez toute seule?

E: Parce que j'étais en pension.

A: Ah d'accord, j'ai compris.

E: So, one day I was called to go to Mother Fidelis, who was a German nun, and she dealt with the Germans, because the Germans occupied part of the school. And I said, why do I have to go to her, I have nothing to do with her? She taught music and German.

A: Right.

E: And she said, I went to her office and she said, you are going to go with this nice gentleman, and that was the German gendarme. So, I crossed the town on foot with the German next to me. And I thought people must think I'm a...

A: Resistant?

E: Resistante ou collaboratrice. I was 14.

A: 14. It's young.

E: We were gathered at the Kommandantur in Vendée. And then my mother arrived. She had been brought in a bus. And she couldn't... (unheard)

J: Tu l'as dit à propos maison ou on était à Vendée chez des cousins?

E: Non, j'en ai parlé rapidement...And then we were brought by train. We remained three days in, à la Roche...On est resté 3 jours, trois nuits, et (louder to O) à la du Rion on est resté 3 jours?

J: Oui

E: Et c'était une école qui avait été réquisitionné par les allemands. Et alors je me souviens d'une chose, on était plusieurs, il y avait plusieurs personnes qui sont arrivés...

A: Tous les anglais?

E: Tous les Anglais. On couchait par terre. Et alors moi j'ai vu une gendarme une soirée, qui est venu et qui avait vraiment une tête de mort. (Laughs)

J: (laughs) Mais surtout il dormait sur la table. Et alors comme il y avait des bougies qui éclairait c'était comme un mort.

A: (laughs)

E: j'ai vu ce gendarme et il avait vraiment une tête de mort. Les vides avec des...

A: Oh wow, oui je comprends...Et vous avez eu peur?

E: Je n'ai pas eu peur mais j'ai trouvé qu'il avait...Et au bout de trois jours, il y a des gens qui ne sont pas restées. Il y avait une femme qui était là, qui passait son temps à se plaindre.

J: Et le...the travel...

E: Alors on était parti au train, jusqu'à Besançon...

A: Donc vous étiez à Besançon. D'accord.

E: On est arrivé le soir à Besançon, moi j'ai cru qu'on était dans une ville, en fait c'était une caserne avec des grands bâtiments, et on est resté là pendant plusieurs mois.

J: Mais on a eu de la ch...we were lucky to be the...d'arriver après les autres. There was a first lot and they had the worst of the...because they had to pick up the tins, empty tins from the rubbish and wash them, to have, pour avoir des récipients...

A: Ah...containers?

J: To...to have containers to go and fetch the soup.

A: So, when did you arrive? Do you remember?

E: December. It was in December.

J: It was a little. Nous c'était un peu organisé après...

E: Oui, déjà un peu...

J: I can't speak English!

A; Non, mais ça-va. On peut parler en français. Ça ne me....désolée! Vous êtes habitués du français...

J: When we arrived it was a bit organised already, ah? Un peu? Ce n'était pas mal.

E: C'était juste après le départ des...il y avait eu des...

J: Des prisonniers?

J&E: Des prisonniers français.

E: Oui, qui avait occupé ce...cette caserne. Just avant le départ.

J: So it was in a terrible state when...

E: When the first lot got there.

A: And your mother was with you.

E: Yes.

A: She was able to come.

E: And then...it was fairly organised, for the children there was...il y avait...

J: We received parcels.... Red Cross parcels. Ca...That saved us.

A: Did it? It was important? So, did you have classes?

E: Yes.

A: Because you'd still be young enough to...

E: Yes, because there were lots of sisters, lots of nuns who were gathered and some of them were teachers. And, there was also...

J: Hmm?

E: Il y avait aussi des prisonniers de guerre...

A: Des français?

E: Des français.

J: Des médecins. Les prisonniers sur parole.

A: Vous avez parlé avec eux? Vous avez...

E: Il y avait un qui donnait des leçons de maths. C'était un, ce n'était pas un médecin, c'était un infirmier...(to Jeanne) qui donnait des leçons de maths? J'avais une copine, j'avais fait une copine, Doris, elle était, alors on faisait le tour du...c'est affreux je n'ai plus les mots, ni en français, ni en anglais.



A: Aw...ne vous inquiétez pas.

E: On faisait le tour du rond. Our bashing ground. En marchant. Et on allait voir il y avait encore des chevaux à Besançon, il y avait encore des chevaux, (loudly, to Jeanne) On est allé voir des chevaux. Deux superbes chevaux.

A; Ça c'était dans la caserne?

E: Dans la caserne, oui. Il y avait aussi un officier allemand qui avait une petite jument (?) noire, qui était une merveille et alors il faisait aussi des tours de temps en temps, et nous on regardait.

J: On n'imagine pas ce qu'on a vécu à ce moment-là. Maintenant, on ne pourrait pas supporter maintenant.

E: Oh je ne sais pas.

J: Les punaises! (Both laugh) Épouvantable.

E: Vraiment épouvantable. Il y avait une femme dans notre...

J: Et alors on mettait des 'tins' avec du pétrole au pied des lits, et bien elles allaient sur le Platform comme ça, et elles se laissaient tomber. Il n'y avait rien à faire eh?

A: Mmm. Il y avait des traitements pour ça? Vous pouvez aller à l'hôpital ou quelque chose?

J: Épouvantable.

E: Il y avait une femme dans note dortoir, la femme comment elle s'appelait? Elle avait des plaques horribles.

J: Alors il y avait les bonnes choses, par exemple, on avait du pain gris, qu'on coupait fin et il y avait, on avait une poêle avec un tuillot, chaud, bien sûr c'était, et alors on mettait le pain grille là-dessus, on nous donnait une espèce de graisse, de porc, et on mettait ça là-dessus, et on trouvait ça bon! (laughs)

A: (laughs) Et vous avez perdu des poids.

J: Non, on n'a pas eu faim...les premiers ont eu.

E: il y avait une cantine ou on pouvait aller chercher des...eux ils ont eu, les gens, les premiers gens,

J: Et puis ils ont commencé à faire des soupes dans les...dans des choses en cuivre, copper, qui n'était pas bien lave et les gens était malade, empoisonné, malade.

A : C'était seulement des femmes, ou il y avait des hommes aussi ?

E : il y avait des hommes.

J : Il y avait surtout les garçons. Jusqu'à, fin des enfants, jusqu'à 16 ans, des jeunes gens.

E : Fin, moi je suis parti du camp parce que j'avais moins de 15 ans. Ma mère a été libère en même temps que moi. Et nous sommes rentres à paris, mais mes deux sœurs, Jeanne et ma sœur Irène, qui est mort il y a 2 ans...

A : (pointing to photo on mantlepiece) C'est Irène là-bas ? Au centre ?

E : Oui c'est elle, elle était jeune.

A ; Aw, elle est belle.... Donc vous êtes reste dans le camp ?

E : Elles sont reste au camp, et ensuite elles ont été amenées à Vittel.

J : Après on était à Vittel. Alors tout à fait diffèrent. On avait des draps et des vrais lits, et des draps.

E : C'est dans les hôtels, des beaux hôtels.

J : On était organisé...on était très organisé. Ce qu'on ne pouvait pas acheter dans le camp, on trouvait, on échangeait avec l'extérieur, on avait les cigarettes, on servait des cigarettes, alors...on payait en cigarettes, alors de temps on temps on avait un peu de viande, ou un peu de chose...

A : Et c'était les Vittelois qui... ?

J : Oui, à travers les barbelés.

A ; Et le commandant du camp ?

J : Oh...il fermait un peu les yeux...

A : Oui, il n'était pas trop strict alors, le commandant?

J : Il y avait des organisations, des filières.

E : Comment il s'appelait le commandant du camp ?

J : je ne sais pas. Je me souviens de Servé.

A : Ce n'était pas Landhauser ?

E : Oui quelque chose comme ça. Landhauser ?

A : Landhauser ? Et Servé, j'ai entendu parle ...il était qui ?

J : Serve (growls and makes a face)

A ; Mais il n ; était pas gestapo ? C'était quelque chose ?

J : Non ce n'était pas gestapo.

A : C'était les allemands, l'armée...?

J : Mais...bon...ne fois je suis allée avec un pain, il y avait des grottes de souris dessus. Alors je suis allée, mais Serve il s'est mis des grottes dans les mains, et il y avait des fourrages, il me dit, « un jour vous mangerait l'herbe sur le chemin. » (She laughs)

A : Wow. Pas très gentil alors... Vous avez dit, il y avait des filières ? C'est quoi ?

J : Des moyens, des gens qui rentrait, qui sortait.

E ; Il y avait des gens qui sortait dans l'extérieur qui venait travailler dans le camp.

J : Oui qui travaillait, alors on arrivait comme ça...

E : Ils annonçaient les nouvelles aussi.

A : Ah...

J : Et puis il y avait des gens qui se promenaient avec un morceau de radio, un morceau de radio comme ça. Et le soir, tous les radios étaient mises ensemble. Et on écoutait la radio. Ce n'était pas nous, mais il y en avait qui faisait ça. On avait...on allait à la cuisine, il y avait une cuisine en bas, et là, on arrivait à avoir toutes les nouvelles.

A : Wow. C'était les femmes qui étaient internes qui ont fait ça avec la radio.

J : Oui les femmes, et après il y avait des hommes aussi...Après les hommes sont venus. Les maris sont emmenés nous rejoindre, ce qui ont été à...comment ça s'appelait...

E : A Drancy ?

J : A Fresnes.

A ; A Fresnes d'accord. Alors il y avait les familles ensemble après ? Et vous avez rentrés aussi ?

E : Alors moi je suis allée avec maman uniquement, quand les filles nous avaient inscrites pour 'repatriation' en Angleterre. Et ma mère et moi, nous faisons partir, elles nous avaient inscrites. Alors nous avons reçu un jour, un télégramme en Allemand...

J : On les a dénoncées exprès. Comme ça elles ont rejoint le camp...

E : Pour pouvoir...

J : Elles alors comme ça on a été rapatriées ensemble.

A : Alors si vous n'étiez pas au camp, vous ne pouviez pas être rapatriés ?

E : Je ne sais pas...

J : Mais ils avaient oublié.

E : Ils avaient oublié, oui.

A ; Ah c'est intéressant.

E : Ma mère allait tous les jours au commissariat pour signer. Au commissariat du septième, et elle allait tous les jours, elle avait toujours sa promenade pour aller signer, tous les jours sauf le dimanche.

A : Elle a travaillé votre mère?

E : non, elle ne travaillait pas.

A : D'accord. Et votre père, qu'est ce qu'il a fait ? Avant de la guerre ? Il travaillait comme ?

E : Il était ingénieur, dans une société de voitures.

J : Ils savaient beaucoup de choses. Par exemple, un fois on a été interrogée, parce que on est allée avec Irène, parce que en fait on est françaises, on a été ramassé mais on n'a jamais dû être ramasser. Mais c'est parce que mon père était anglais. Mais alors on l'a dit, on l'a expliqué, 'mon père est né, par hasard, en France, deuxième génération née en France, Française de fis, on ne peut même pas, on n'ait même pas le droit d'option, on est française. Et alors on a expliqué ça, mais personne ne connaît cette loi, ah ? Personne ne...

E : Ils ne voulaient pas.

J : Alors, c'est un officier et il a dit, "Vous êtes mieux ici." En dehors. Alors il dit, votre père. J'ai dit, "il est parti un jour, je ne sais pas, on l'a jamais revu." Il a dit, 'ha,' il est officier de marine, et il est en Angleterre, et il combat." Alors ils savaient tout uh? Alors il disait, avec un père qui est dans l'armée, dans la marine anglaise, alors vous allez immédiatement travailler en Allemagne si vous sortez.

E: C'était n'importe quoi.

J: S'il a dit ça. Vous êtes mieux quoi.

A; C'était Servé qui a dit ça?

J: On a été sauvé par la Croix Rouge.

A; Oui, et vous avez eu de quoi à manger aussi? Des colis?

E; Oui il y avait, tous les anglais...

J ; On était que les anglais, et après ça, quand les américains sont rentrés. Et là il y a les américains qui sont arrivés.

A ; Il y avait des femmes très riches dans le camp ? Il y avait les femmes... ?

J ; On ne peut pas dire que ça, les femmes qui sont venus c'était des femmes qui avaient l'habitude de voyager. Qui était 'open minded.' Ce n'était pas du tout les...Il y avait de tout, il y avait surtout les artistes, les intellectuelles même. Mais...il y avait de tout évidemment, mais ça n'a jamais, on a pas eu de conflits.

A : Non...ils s'entendaient bien ensemble?

J : Pas plus qu'il aurait dans une société normale. Je ne crois pas.

A : Il y avait les danseurs aussi ? Les danseuses ?

E : Les danseuses oui.

J : Oui il y avait, oui pas mal d'artistes.

E : D'ailleurs ils ont fait des...des présentations de différentes sortes. Il y a eu...

J: Fin il y avait des musiciens, oui des...il y a eu des présentations. Il y a eu de chorale. La mère d'une amie elle était chef de cœur, très bonne pianiste, très bonne musicienne.

A : Et vous avez participé aussi ?

J : tous les soirs on allait chanter, répéter.

A : Tous les soirs ? Wow.

J : Ça a été vraiment, ça c'était formidable ça.

E : Il y a eu des pièces de théâtre aussi.

J : Huh ?

E : Les pièces de théâtre.

J : Oui ça, oui, on fait de pièce de théâtres, on a fait des musicales. (laughs)

A : Il y avait les allemands présents ?

J : Ils viennent voir les spectacles. Oui. (laughs) Alors il y en avait une, c'était un numéro, c'était vraiment un...une artiste, une fille de la balle. C'était...on l'appelait cockles and mussels, parce qu'elle chantait une chanson cockles and mussels. Mais, elle s'appelait Betty...fin...bref...je ne me souviens pas. Fin, c'était un numéro. Et quand elle était sur scène elle ne se privait pas d'envoyer les vins ( ?) aux Allemands huh ? Alors quand on entendait un truc, elle disait 'Big ben', on entendait, quelqu'un faisait une cloche ou quelque chose, elle faisait 'big ben.' Et elle chantait avec, elle avait un bagpipe, elle était habillée en 'Scot', en écossais, on alors en irlandais, parce que cockles and mussels c'est irlandais je crois, huh ? Beh oui, moi je ne peux plus...I can't sing any more...non mais c'est vrai, c'est affreux. Parce que ça...

E: (sings) There was a fishmonger, I'm sure there's no wonder....father and mother before...She wheeled a wheelbarrow and (laughs)

J : (also sings) Crying cockles and mussels alive alive o.  
Both laugh

E : Et quand nous sommes arrivées au Lisbonne, après...Après on allait vers la France, l'Espagne, Portugal...Et nous avons été accueilli par...

J : Hmm ?

E : (lounder) A Lisbonne. Quand nous sommes arrivées à Lisbonne ?

J : On avait 15 jours de train. On se lavait, quand le train s'arrêtait, on se précipitait en dehors, et s'il y avait une pluie ou un truc on se lavait comme on pouvait, bon...

A : Donc le train est parti de Vittel ? Jusqu'à Lisbonne ?

E : Oui, jusqu'à Lisbonne.

J : Oui, 15 jours pour arriver jusqu'à la frontière espagnole. Et alors, on traverse la frontière espagnole, et qu'est ce qu'on voit ? On ...des tables avec de la....avec des nappes blanches damassé....(inhales dramatically)...

A : Wow.

J : Et nous, quand on était à Lisbonne, l'Ambassade anglaise était là, qui attendait, et alors on nous a donné des petits sacs en cahot de choux, et dedans une brosse à dents, un morceau de savon (laughs) la dentifrice, (laughs)

A Qui vous a donné ça ? L'ambassade ?

E : L'ambassade oui.

J : Et alors on a été échangés contre des Allemands qui venaient de l'Afrique du Sud.

E : Qui avaient été ramassés en Afrique du Sud.

J : Des pars dessus supers, des valises magnifiques, et nous...des trucs en cartons avec des ficelles.

E : Et donc on est arrivées sur le bateau, on a trouvé des morceaux de savon !

J : (cries out with delight)

E : des vrais savons.

E ; C'était le drottingholm qui avait amenés les Allemands de l'Afrique du Sud.

A ; Ah d'accord. Et vous n'avez pas eu du savon dans le camp ?

J : On avait des espèces de savon qui était...

E : C'était ignoble.

J : Mais on avait, si on avait du savon dans les colis. Il y avait certains colis avec du...les colis de la croix rouge.

A : D'accord. Ok.

J : Des 'tins' de beurre...il y avait des pruneaux, des raisins secs, de la viande, du 'corned beef', des haricots...

E : La poudre d'œuf

J : Beans in tomato sauce (laughs). C'était drôlement bon.

A : Il y avait les personnes qui sont évadées du camp ?

J : Oui. On a une amie qui s'est évadée. Et...

E : Nina. Elle s'appelle Rowena, quel était son nom de famille ?

J : Hmm ?

E : (loudly) Nina ?

J : Nash. Elle descendait du...c'était un architecte, un des plus grands architectes.

A : Elle était anglaise ? Elle était née en Angleterre ?

E : Elle était une moitié française aussi. Comme nous. Sa mère était française.

A : D'accord.

J : Et alors ma sœur, (to E) c'est toi ? Oui c'était Irène ? Qui avait les vêtements ? Her clothes...

E : Ah oui. Nina, moi j'ai voyagé avec son mari qui était française, qui allait la voir, et moi je suis allée voir mes sœurs, on a voyagé ensemble, et il a passé la nuit fabriquer les cartes d'identité fausses, parce qu'il avait l'intention de la faire sortir. Et alors, on m'a dit, 'tu viens derrière à côté de l'hôpital', parce que moi j'étais libre de faire ça le soir, 'et on te donnera des vêtements pour Nina, pour qu'elle ne part pas sans rien.' Et alors...il fallait attendre que les sentinelles se passaient, et alors je suis allée j'avais un manteau de pluie sur les épaules comme ça et alors elles ont fait tomber de la fenêtre un carton...

J : (makes loud banging noise)

E : Et ça a fait un potin du diable.

A : (laughs)

E : (laughing) j'ai ramassé ça et je suis parti

A ; (laughs) wow. Oh là là.

E ; Et alors ça s'est passé et je suis resté deux ou trois jours, on voyait les personnes pendant 2 jours, et puis après. Mais...comment elle s'appelait...Jean Brasseur...il est resté un jour de plus. Et alors sa femme est sortie sous les barbelés.

J : Alors il faut apprendre comment passer sous les barbelés, vous savez comment ?

A : Non ?

J : (loudly) Jamais sur le ventre, toujours sur le dos. Comme ça. (mimes wriggling under fence).

A : Pourquoi ?

J : Parce qu'autrement sur le dos, on se fait accrocher par les barbelés, tandis que...si on est sur le...en fait ce n'est pas facile, mais on arrive eh ?

A : Et vous l'avez fait ?

J : Oui. J'ai fait, pas pour évader, mais il y avait...un premier truc...ce n'était pas très très épée(?) les barbelés. Il y avait une plus importante, alors la première, moi je suis passé facilement, et ça c'était parce qu'il y avait les pissenlits, tu sais qu'est-ce que c'est des pissenlits ?

A : non.

J : Comment est-ce que c'est en anglais ? De la salade sauvage ?



A : Ah ok.

J : Ça fait des fleurs jaunes ?

A : Oui. Je vois ce que c'est.

J : Des grosses fleurs jaunes

A : Oui, oui je connais.

J : Magnifiques ! Entre les barbelés. Moi, je vais faire une bonne salade ! Et alors, j'attendais, et malheureusement il y a un allemand, qui est arrivé comme ça, alors après il y avait une troisième rangée de barbelés qui était sur le truc.

A : (laughs) Ah c'est super !

J : Mais moi j'avais ma salade.

A : (laughs)

J : On se souviens que des choses bonnes. Parce que d'abord les souvenirs sont transformés un peu, eh ? They are changing. Ce n'est jamais très exacte.

E : Dandelion !

A : Pardon ?

E : Dandelion !

A : Ah ! Et vous pouvez les manger ?!

J : Les feuilles !

A : Ah d'accord, merci beaucoup !

J : Mais les anglais font du vin avec les fleurs.

A : Ah dandelion wine.

E ; Have you read Cranford ?

A : No...

E : Ah you should ! Cranford.

A : Ah ok, i need to read it.

J : Mais alors, on occulte toutes les choses qui sont moches. Qui sont vraiment pénibles.

A : Vous en avez parlé beaucoup après la guerre de vos expériences ?

J : Ce qu'il y a c'est que, on a gardé...nos amies, c'est ceux qui étaient avec nous dans le camp. Alors...on n'a pas eu...en fait on en parle pas beaucoup. Il y a seulement 5 years ago, on avait encore combien...5 ou 6 amis, des amis depuis 65...Nina, Anna, Louisa (elle est en hôpital en ce moment) Les autres sont décédées.

E: Méningites. She had. Can you imagine at 92?

J: On ne sait pas comment elle l'attrapée? Elle ne voit personne, elle joue au bridge avec les amies, mais c'est toujours les mêmes personnes....

A: C'est bizarre. C'est dommage.

J: Elle ne s'attrape jamais rien. Elle a eu un rhume. Elle m'a dit ça fait 15 ans que je n'ai pas eu de rhume. Je n'ai jamais rien eu. Elle a eu ce rhume, et après elle a eu ce...

A: C'est dommage. Est-ce que vous connaissez Margaret Williams ?

J : Ah Margaret Williams oui ?!

A : Parce qu'elle était, je l'ai rencontrée il y a un an, et...parce que maintenant elle est décédée...c'était jusqu'avant...elle était très gentille. Elle était bien, en fait elle était très très bien, et c'était un peu une choque, parce que...mais sa famille m'a dit que c'était pendant un mois...

J : C'est comme ça qu'on est quand on tombe...à nos Age...on est bien et puis on tombe...

A : Oui.

J : Elle était la quand on a eu cette réunion, il y a quelques années.

E : A Vittel ?

J : Non, ici à....

E : Ah oui elle était la, et Louisa aussi.

J : Il y avait Louisa, Anna, il y avait Joan, il y avait...cette famille qui était avec nous...ah je n'ai plus de mémoire eh ? C'est affreux. Comment elles s'appelaient ?

E : je me souviens de Mrs Harding...quand on a pris le train de Besançon, de Vendée, de la Roche sur Rion. On a pris ce train pour Besançon, il y eu quelque dans le train qui a chanté au milieu de la nuit, tu te rappelles? Moi ça m'avait frappé ça, je pensais que c'était Mrs Harding,

qui avait chanté, quelqu'un a chanté, une voix de femme. (she sings) "There's no place like home." Mais jolie, une jolie voix. Tu ne te rappelles pas ça?

J: On n'était peut-être pas dans le même wagon. Moi, ce que je me rappelle moi c'est quand on était mitraillé, parce que le train de Vittel...chaque fois qu'on est arrivé sur un endroit, il y avait les. Pétards sur la voie pour nous dire d'arrêter parce que probablement il y avait les résistants qui sautaient les vois (?), ils arrêtaient les trains pour pas que les gens soient...alors c'est pour ça qu'on a mis un temps fou pour arriver...et alors on a été mitraillé parce qu'on était dans un moment dans un endroit important et on a été bombardé par les anglais...mitraillé pas les anglais!

E: Alors Peter il a eu un bullet qui est, il a eu un 'padding'...mais un bullet comme ça eh?

A: Peter c'était quelqu'un dans le camp?

E: Quelqu'un du camp oui.

J: Peter, il est venu comme ça et puis il a dit, 'regarde', il y avait une veste qui était décousu...

A: Donc, les anglais ne savaient pas que c'était les anglais dans le train?

J: Beh oui. Parce qu'ils ont fait...

E: Ils avaient perdu la trace du train.

J: Et moi j'avais un petit costume, verte, couleur de l'uniforme allemand, alors je n'étais pas fière eh ?

A : Parce que les vêtements, c'était difficulté dans le camp ? Avoir les vêtements ?

J : Non, ça c'était quelque chose que j'avais avant-guerre. C'est très joli !

A : Ah, excusez-moi !

J ; C'était malheureusement le même couleur.

A : Est-ce qu'il y avait, je ne sais pas si vous souvenez, il y avait des personnes dans le camp qui ont soit collaborer avec les allemands, ou résister ? Les internées ?

J : Mais il y avait certainement des tas de...mais en fait, uh...il y avait beaucoup de choses dont on parlait jamais. C'est vrai. Et nous, enfin on était plus jeunes, alors ce qu'on était très important, pour nous, on jouait au tennis, on s'occupait de l'hôpital quand même, on s'occupait quand même...ma sœur travaillait avec les médecins qui étaient français...

E : Et il y avait un médecin écossait...

J : Elle faisait même les intervenues.

A : Ah oui ?

J : On a tout, moi j'ai fait des études, on avait un groupe, ce n'était pas vraiment de la médecine, mais il disait le médecin, il faut vous apprendre suffisamment d'abord savoir que vous ne savez rien, et les choses à pas faire...moi j'ai assisté quand même aux opérations.

E : Tu as appris l'allemand...

J : Oui, alors c'est typique eh ? Il y a deux personnes, après on a eu une opération, il y avait deux personnes qui nettoyait par terre, ma sœur Irène et moi. Le reste... (laughs)

A : Donc peut être parce que vous étiez plus jeune, vous n'étiez pas au courant des choses...

J : C'est à dire que on a...on est 'résilient' quand on est jeune. Ce n'était pas le même chose, à Besançon il y avait des vieilles dames, qui sont mortes. Il y en a qui sont morts de froid. Pour aller à la toilette en dehors. C'était très dur est ? Et puis on était de corvée de pommes de terre, alors ça à Besançon, corvée de pommes de terre, merci beaucoup. Les pommes de terre pourris, on ne pouvait pas avoir un morceau de pomme de terre convenable tu avais un pomme de terre comme ça, et à la fin il y avait ça.

A : Donc peut-être pour les femmes un peu plus âgées ? C'était plus difficile.

E : C'est sûr, oui.

J : Quand on est jeune...beh...on s'est fait des jupes, et des trucs dans les couvertures de soldats, les couvertures, c'était de la laine eh ? On a découpé les draps, pour se faire des chemises, des trucs, quand ils se rendaient compte qu'on avait un atelier de couture, ça a été, ils étaient furieux.

A : Ah oui ? Mais pourquoi, pourquoi ils ne voulaient pas ça ? Les allemands ?

J : On n'avait pas le droit de faire des choses comme ça.

E : Ça appartenait aux Allemands.

J : (laughs)

A : Il y avait, j'ai entendu, il y avait quelqu'un, Madame Bouloumié, qui a travaillé pour la croix rouge, vous vous souvenez d'elle ?

E : Non...

A : Elle a représenté la croix rouge...

J : Mais il y a beaucoup de gens qu'on connaissait de vue, comme ça, les prénoms, les noms...moi je ne me souviens pas beaucoup.

E : Quand je me suis retourné au camp, j'ai continué à suivre les cours, et j'ai passé mon BAC à Vittel..

J : (laughs) BAC ? Français, anglais, latin, espagnols. Points finals. Pas de maths, pas de...

A : Mais il y avait des langues dans le camp j'imagine ?

E : non mais...et alors en maths, moi je n'avais pas le maths, mais il y avait un garçon qui avait un problème et ce garçon il y avait un problème de...de mathématiques, je ne sais plus de quoi, et le professeur qui était venu de Nancy nous apporter les épreuves, il était de la...il s'est approcher de moi, c'était un français, il y avait un officier allemand qui nous surveillait, et le prof il est venu vers de moi et il a dit, moi je suis prof de science, et j'ai complètement oublié des maths, et j'ai dit, mais c'est pas à moi qu'il faut demander ! (laughs) Il voulait l'aider. Et alors moi j'ai eu, alors en espagnol, ils nous n'ont pas apporter des preuves, alors on avait tous les deux, il y avait un autre garçon, on avait le même book avec des textes et des questions, alors il a choisi le même texte pour nous deux, et moi j'en ai profité, ce livre je l'ai feuilleté pour trouver les idées, les mots etc. C'était formidable ! (laughs) Et alors en français, il fallait choisir un texte, moi je n'avais pas de texte dans le mémoire, Just une phrase, un poème, (sings a poem) c'est tous que je savais du poème.

J : Je n'ai pas de mémoire, c'est affreux.

A : Non, mais vous deux, vous vous souvenez des choses...c'est super.

J : J'ai perdu ma mémoire, je n'avais jamais beaucoup, mais alors là.

A ; Non, mais c'est super, vous avez raconté des choses très importantes. Donc vous êtes parti quand pour aller à Lisbonne, c'était quelle année ? Vous vous souvenez ?

E : Après la D-Day.

J : Mais ce n'était pas complètement libéré ?

E : Non ça venait de commencer.

J : parce que quand on est arrivé en Angleterre, moi je me souviens, il y avait un camp de soldats qui se préparaient à partir. Donc ce n'était pas fini eh ?

E : Non c'était le début.

A : le début de la fin. Oui. Donc vous étiez dans le camps pendant 3 ans ?

E : Deux ans et demi.

J : Il y a eu encore des VD encore...

A : Donc vous étiez la aussi quand il y avait les Juifs aussi qui étaient aussi dans le camp ?

J : Ah oui ça...

E : Ça c'était une abomination.

A : Et vous vous souvenez de ça ?

E : Jeanne elle a vu ça, moi je n'étais pas dans le camp.

J : On les a vu partir. D'abord il a eu une nuit, oui ils se sont suicidés, je ne sais pas combien se sont suicider. Ils se sont jetés par les fenêtres, il y avait un couple, un couple de jeunes mariés, qui étaient beaux comme les Dieux, distingués, magnifiques, ils se sont ouvert les veines. Et, la femme du Grand Rabin de Varsovie, s'est jetée par la fenêtre, sa fille aussi, mais sa fille s'est ratée, elle est tombée sur de la terre meuble, la terre qui n'était pas dure, elle n'a rien eu eh ? Même pas une fracture. Alors on l'a collée à l'hôpital immédiatement, ce qui fait qu'ils l'ont pas amené, avec ses enfants, elle a été sauvée avec le petit Stefan. Il faisait les courses avec sa grand'mère, sa grand'mère qui était une grande dame, la femme du Grand Rabin du Varsovie, elle parlait français officiellement, fin elle avait appris français quand elle était jeune, bien sûr. Alors elle parlait un peu difficilement, et alors il y avait Stefan qui était haut comme ça, il était en France depuis 3 mois, il disait, 'non grand-mère, c'est comme ça.' Ils ont été sauvés, mais il y a eu une petite fille qui était adorable, qui était belle, elle a eu peut-être 3 ans, tout bouclés, blonds, elle n'est pas revenue eh ?

A : C'est très difficile.

J : C'est affreux eh ? On les a vus partir. Crishou elle s'appelait, Christiane, Crishou. Elle partait avec sa poupée dans les bras qui partait sous ses 2 jambes là, tu sais donc...ce n'est pas possible....pas possible.

A : C'est horrible.

J : Ils ont sauvé un bébé qui était né dans le camp, ils l'ont mis dans une boîte à chaussures et ils l'ont passé dans les... les...

A : les barbelés ?

J : Oui, ils l'ont sorti du camp. Et puis il y a eu un jeune homme, Sacha, une vieille dame, une vieille fille, la vieille fille l'a caché dans le placard. Et finalement il est resté, il a été sauvé.

A ; Wow. Donc j'imagine l'atmosphère dans le camp ça a changé quand il y avait..?

J : Une famille, les Wentlands, les filles, il y avait des 3 filles, qui étaient des beautés, des beautés, il y avait une particulièrement, superbes. Et alors il y en avait une qui était liés en amitiés avec un des hommes du camp, et il lui avait dit je t'épouse, je t'épouse et comme ça tu es sauvé. Et elle n'a pas voulu, elle a voulu partir avec sa mère et ses sœurs. Elle n'a pas voulu.

E : Je ne sais pas si le fait de s'épouser l'aurait sauvée, eh ?

J : Beh je ne sais pas, si parce que, si...fin...il pensait...

A : C'était qui, quelqu'un dans le camp qui a fait ça ?

J : Il était sympathique.

E : Tu ne penses pas, ce n'était pas le chef du camp ? Qui les a dénoncés ?

J : Alors dans le camp il y avait des filles qui travaillaient à la Kommandantur, qui était, collaboratrices eh ? Ça c'est sûr.

A : Oui ? Mmm..

J : Enfin, on n'a pas eu tellement de contacts avec les Allemands, on avait de temps en temps, très rarement, on a fait des promenades à l'extérieur du camp, sous surveillance, en groupe. Et une fois on était une dizaine on a eu à faire à deux jeunes soldats allemands, officiers, et on a enterré ( ?) dans un café et ils voulaient danser. (laughs) danser ! On n'a pas.

A : Ils étaient jeunes les soldats ? Ou ils étaient plus âgés ?

J : Oui, oui. Oui les autres... il y avait qui étaient très désagréables.

A : Ah oui. Vous avez eu peur des soldats ?

J : Non. Non parce qu'il faut dire qu'on est un peu inconscient, on ne s'est pas rendu compte, mon amie Louisa qui est maintenant à l'hôpital dit, on est passé au travers de tout, comme ça, complètement inconscient du danger. C'est vrai ?

A : Et ça c'est à cause de votre âge, vous pensez ?

J : Mais j'ai été quand même, quand on allait partir pour être rapatriés on était passé pour regarder les bagages, regarder que ce qu'on avait etc. Et devant moi il y avait une fille, et ils ont fouillé sa valise, et c'était une juive, mais une juive anglaise qui partait eh ? Et il y avait un portrait de son fiancé, allez jeter-ça dans la poubelle. C'est la méchanceté pure. C'était, elle m'a dit il est mort et c'est le seul portrait que j'ai de lui. C'est affreux. Comment on pouvait faire aussi méchant, bête et méchant comme ça ? C'est inutile et à quoi s'arrive ?

A : Donc, elle était anglaise et juive et elle n'était pas déportée ?

J : beh non.

E ; Elle était anglaise.

A : A cause de sa nationalité anglaise ? C'était plus important, si vous voulez que...

J : Mais ceux qui était là dans le camp, c'était tous des gens qui avaient acheté des passeports américains, autrement, ils ne seraient pas revenus. On ne les aurait pas, on les aurait pas eus

au camp. Alors ceux qui étaient reconnu par des pays américains, Costa Rica tout ça, ils sont restés dans le camp, mais tous les pays qui ont dit, 'non on les connaît pas,' ils sont partis. Et ces celles-là qui sont partis, ils ont acheté des passeports, mais...

E : On ne se rendait pas compte. Les pays étrangers ne se rendaient pas compte de ce qui se passait.

J : Mais il y avait un des dentistes, un des français prisonniers militaire, un dentiste qui était assez ami avec une des jeunes femmes, et elle lui avait donné tous les bijoux qu'ils avaient pour l'espérer, la petite fille espérait de la faire sortir du train ou la faire, pour qu'elle ait de quoi à l'élever avec les bijoux. Mais il a gardé les bijoux mais il n'a jamais...elle est morte eh.

A : Il y avait un docteur juif dans le camp ? Levy ?

J : Oui, il a eu de la chance lui. Parce que, avant le camp, quand on les a tous mis ensemble, il a dit, est-ce qu'il y a les juifs parmi vous ? Personne n'a pipé. Il passait. Personne n'a pipé. Il faut dire qu'il était très utile. Parce qu'il était gynécologue, et c'était un type formidable, après la guerre il était à Villejuif, l'hôpital, et quand il arrivait ils mettaient le tapis rouge. C'était quelqu'un. C'était extraordinaire.

A : Parce que, j'ai lu de quelque part qu'il a peut-être travailler avec la résistance ?

J : Ah c'est possible eh. Ils ne se vendaient pas, ils en parlaient pas, donc on aurait jamais su. Lévy était quelqu'un eh ? Et Monteith ? Monteith était un anglais alors là, un écossais comme son nom indique.

A : Il était comment Monteith ?

J : Un Scotland ...(inaudible)!

E : On l'a revu...

J : On l'a revu en Angleterre, on s'est allées promener, et qu'est ce qu'on voit arriver sur le seafront ? Monteith ! Oh ! Alors, devant les anglais qui sont...Ai je t'embrasse, je t'embrasse ! (laughs) Monteith était formidable, il jouait au bridge...

A : Il parlait français Monteith ?

J : Oui, plus ou moins, avec un accent écossais ? C'était un drôle de groupe eh ? ils étaient comme ça tous. Les médecins. Heureusement qu'on pourrait rire un peu eh ?

A : Mais oui...et il y avait des histoires d'amour dans le camp ?

J : C'est à dire qu'il y avait beaucoup de femmes qui souffraient d'être seules. Alors nous évidemment on était adolescents, ce n'est pas pareil, on flirtait peut-être s'il y avait, il y en a qui se sont mariés après, après le camp, Anna elle a fait connaissance de Jack dans le camp,



Laura épousait Ted, et cette copine qu'il y avait dans la guerre...qui a épousait Lesley Prigg elle a épousé...ça c'est marqué. Mais les femmes d'un certain âge, il n'y avait pas d'hommes...

A : C'était surtout les anglais avec les anglaises ?

J : Il n'y avait pas eu. Oui...on n'a absolument pas, on a pas eu du tous les conflits avec les américains, tu te souviens de Joan Bates. Alors quand on a été mitraillé, on s'est sorti du train et on est allé dans les arbres pour se protéger, et quand elle est revenue, elle m'a dit regarde, elle est allée chercher sa valise et elle a sortis ses vêtements, c'était des dentelles, il y avait eu trois ou quatre dans sa valise elle avait ni un seul ne culote ni...tout était plein de trous.

A : (laughs)

J : Pauvre Joan.

E : C'était à Château Neuf du Pape.

J : Et donc vous êtes resté en contact avec les personnes ?

E : plus ou moins oui.

J : A oui, plus ou moins, on n'a pas vu, à part de notre groupe...  
(Telephone rings)

A: Donc après, quand vous êtes, j'essaie de finir un peu l'histoire, quand vous avez été rapatrié en Angleterre, vous avez fait quoi?

E: On nous a envoyé dans un camp à Bridlington, on était a cottingham avant, the largest village in England, Cottingham. On a reste quelques mois-là.

J: On n'est pas resté très longtemps. Après on était à Bridlington. On était billetté dans une maison, on a partagé.

A: Tout ensemble, où?

E: Avec maman. Et puis on est resté là un moment, Jeanne a travaillé à Carleton, c'était un magasin, un grand magasin.

J: C'était un magasin et en plus de ça on fabrique les vêtements pour les schoolgirls.

E: Olga est un dressmaker.

E: Et my sister Irène worked for a notary, a notaire...c'était plutôt un...

J: Huh? Elle était plus ou moins secrétaire, de comptabilité.

E: And I joined the army, I joined the ATS. So, I spent 2 and a half years in the service. I was sent to...to...I forget the name.

A: Abroad or in England?

E: In England, in Wales. In Yorkshire, Lancashire and in Wales.

A: And what did you do in the ATS?

E: I was taught how to drive. Then I was still in the training school when I had an accident, and I was taken off.

J: On n'a pas parlé de Miss Mason. Elle était professeur, c'était...

E: She was a dragon.

A: Ah, oh wow. Elle était dans le camp?

J: Oui. Elle était...

E: She taught German.

J: Miss Mason elle nous faisait un peu peur, on la craint un peu, mais c'était une brave femme. Et Joan Foster, Joan Foster et après le camp, ou à la fin de la guerre, elle était rentrée dans les soldats américains, ce n'était pas l'ATS mais c'était les américains, enfin...bref. Et elle était en Allemagne, et elle a rencontré Miss Mason en Allemagne. Et alors évidemment, elles étaient ravies de se voir et tout ça, et Joan qui était un numéro, elle nous a dit, on va prendre un drink ensemble, et elle l'a persuadée de prendre un cocktail avec, c'était la fruit cocktail, c'était une base de champagne, et miss Mason était...(mimes 'drink' gesture) pour la première fois dans sa ville, elle était gaie! (both laugh) Terrible Joan. Elle descend les Champs Élysées en uniforme, et elle voyait il y avait un officier américain dans un uniforme, alors elle lui fait comme ça, et puis, un quart d'heure après, elle réalisait, c'était Eisenhower. E: Il aurait été très contente. Elle était très jolie.

A: C'est Joan

J: Elle est morte maintenant. Elle était mariée avec un type qui travaillait au Suez. On est allé les voir, avec Louisa toute les deux.

A: Et donc après, vous avez travaillé pendant la guerre? Tous les trois. Et après, vous êtes rentres en France?

E: Alors après l'armée, quand j'étais démobilisé, j'ai continué, ma sœur Irène était revenue en France, et Jeanne et maman était là.

J: On est resté un moment, oui.

E : Et finement je travaillais à l'hôpital de Bridlington comme secrétaire, secrétaire de la matrone.

J : Elle a une pension de l'armée, mais la première fois qu'elle a reçu, à la banque prenait quasiment tout pour payer pour les frais de...

A : de repatriation ?

E : Beh je ne sais pas, ils trouvaient toujours de bonne raison. Et alors maintenant que je suis vieille, il faut que je fasse signer souvent, pour dire qu'elle est encore là. Je le fais avec la mariée ils ont un système-là.

A : Et Irène, elle s'est mariée ?

E : Elle s'est marié un français qu'on avait rencontré à Bridlington parce qu'il était à l'époque dans l'aviation française, il était en poste à Filey à côté de Bridlington, ils venaient à Bridlington pour se balader et nos amis, nous avons des amis, dont le mari était dans l'Air Force, elle est française qu'on avait rencontré à Bridlington, et par leur inter médiateur, on leur a connu, des jeunes gens de la Free French Aviation, et mon beau-frère était parmi eux, et on l'a connu comme ça. Puis quand elle est rentrée à Paris, on a vu nos amis, lui était dentiste dans l'Aviation...

J : Et puis on a eu dernièrement, la famille de mon beau-frère, c'est une grande famille, ils sont très nombreux, un groupe de 4 sœurs. Ils sont un peu plus de 600 et ils ont un journal, alors de temps en temps on reçoit ce journal. Et mon beau-frère, il est mort maintenant, mais il a écrit 'les aventures pendant la guerre.' Mais parce que ses fils ont trouvé le manuscrit, il a passé le front espagnol, il a payé les passeurs, ils les ont laissés en plein Pyrénées, alors ça s'arrête au moment là...donc on attend la suite !

A ; Oui, its a cliffhanger !

J : Parce qu'il ne voulait pas travailler en Allemagne, donc il s'est sauvé quoi.

A : Avez-vous des photos, des choses de pendant la guerre ?

E : J'ai cherché mais je n'ai rien trouvé. Je suis désolée.

A : Non, pas de soucis.

E : J'ai un terroir plein de photos, il doit y avoir une autre boîte, mais où ? C'est celle qui est dans le... Je suis désolée. Il y en avait, il y avait des photos de...

J : Il y avait des photos de théâtre.

A : Ne vous inquiétez pas...

J : Il y avait une photo de tous les jeunes gens habillés en 'girls' et alors ils étaient comiques.

A : Je ne sais pas, peut être moi j'ai des photos, parce que dans les archives...je vais arrêter ça...

## Interview Notes

Full transcripts can be provided on request.

### Interview 1

**Interviewees:** Ted and Nora Fisher

**Interviewer:** Ayshka Sené

**Date and Time:** 07/08/2015, 12.00

**Location:** Interviewee's home

**Duration:** 78 minutes

### Nora

Father b.1900 mother b.1902 Glasgow. Father did degree in French and then accountancy. Mid 20s in Scotland hard to find work. Got job for PWC in Glasgow and then transferred to Paris initially for 6 months. Interested in French literature. Engaged to mother. Kept extending job. Go back to Glasgow to get married, offered good job, bring wife. Mother had not been to university, stayed at home till she got married, typical of that generation. Couldn't speak a word of French, hadn't been out of Scotland. She then lived in Paris for 50 years and although she was very good at going to market, buying food and everything else she always had an atrocious accent. Scottish accent. She got by for 50 years. They got married in 1928. B. 1931. Father moved to Mobil oil. End of 20s-30s lived a very comfortable life, lived in le vesinet. Where all the English colony had congregated, mother mixed much more with English people than with French people because of the language problems. Had a very nice house there with a tennis court, they had 10 years of very nice life. But...39 fathers office moved to novaire, all had to move down there. We had to join the queue of cars going down to Bordeaux trying to escape in June 1940, left everything, never saw their belongings again. This is why in our family we have no photographs, or very very few or any material things that date from these years...they lost everything. They got on that boat. Daphne and her family were on a boat the day before. Both her boat and our boat ended up in Falmouth, they were given tickets up to Glasgow where my mother stayed with my sister and I for two years. Went back to France in 1944, father offered a job back in Paris, started from scratch. Could build up their lives again. They lost everything, all their belongings. On the boat, this was a very small Dutch boat; there was a crew of only about 10. So, the children, I remember sleeping in the bunks because the crew had given up their bunks for the children, but the parents were just sleeping on board with whatever food they had brought with them. Boat went out into the Atlantic to avoid submarines. Took quite a few days. "To me, it was just an adventure." I remember driving down with a mattress on top of the car. Family made their own decision, 'we're just going to go, we're not going to wait, they're not telling us anything. It was obvious that the Germans were sweeping through the north.' In England people knew. 'You were jolly lucky if you had enough petrol to get your car down to Bordeaux.' Belgian people coming down as well, not just the British and the French. Compounded with different people. In those days Belgians with huge horse and carts. 'I do remember arriving in Falmouth and being taken to the town hall and being fed tea and sandwiches. And everyone was eating all these platefuls of sandwiches, we

were starving! And all these young nice ladies looking after us. They were all volunteers working there I suppose. Everyone was given some money. English money.' Left in a day or two. Had a suitcase. That was all we had. In Falmouth they would give you tickets. I remember staying one night in this family. A night or two with local families. Then we were given tickets to wherever you happened to have families. Whether the families wanted you or could put you up that was another matter. Not their problem. Wanted you out of the way for the next lot coming in. the first railway from Paris to saint Germain le pec used to go through le vesinet. This is where all the houses were built because English people wanted houses, French people wanted apartments. They were living in an area, in different houses. They came as bankers, all British companies. England was an aggressive business, always wanted an English manager. All men in high-powered jobs, all had good jobs, very nice houses. Similar social class. "My mother for her social life would very much have kept amongst the English ladies because of her French not being, well it was adequate, but she kept very much with the other wives there. This is where I met Daphne, we were both being pram pushed by our mothers. My mother had a very nice life. But it all came to an end. Our house was taken over by the Germans. When they left they just smashed everything up. It was a rented house. The English didn't seem to buy houses." May have sold the furniture to pay the rent because they had gone. "Many people had far worse stories during the war. Touch wood in our family we never had anyone who died during the war." Mum came back after the war, decided to stay in France. Gradually over the years they built up a life again. Sister stayed in France. I did baccalaureate in France and then secretary level. "I was never asked by my parents or school; did you want to go to university...I always regret never having been to university." Lots of English people didn't have any French friends really. We all focused around the standard athletic club. All English clubs.

### Ted

Father and mother born in London. Father called up in 1918 in WW1 sent to Russia, during Russian revolution, imprisoned there and had a bad time. Eventually repatriated in 1922 and returned to England and worked for the western union telegraph company (US company). He was an accountant/book keeper. There was an 'indelicatesse' – he was sent out there to straighten things out and then 2 weeks later he said he was ready to return and then they asked him to remain. Mother came and went to France and they settled there. He became quite a prominent fellow in the British colony. When the war came in 1939, America was not in the war, so all the British got out, my father had to remain as he was working for an American company. He had to evacuate the staff down as the Germans were approaching. When they finally did decide to leave it was too late and they were caught and put in camps. I was in England by that time at boarding school.

"Rather worrying time, especially for my mother. German propaganda saying England was being bombed to pieces, saying, you know 'where's my boy?'" My mother and sister at first were caught and taken to Besançon. Father put in Fresnes prison and then to saint Denis. They made him the postmaster in saint Denis. He had to deal with all the mail coming in and out and he was allowed out in saint Denis. He used to take out all these British Red Cross cigarettes for people. He had a bit of freedom. "I can always remember my dear mother telling me that all the women were saying, our husbands are going to be repatriated next week but you've got to remember they're not like they used to be because they've had a 'rough time' a tough time. And then of course they all turned up, my mother was absolutely disgusted with my father, he turned up with a deckchair and his Homberg hat, beautiful clean shirt and everything. Other

fellows were unshaven, but he just didn't give a damn." Would play the German officers at tennis. Drottingholm which they called the 'trotting home.' My father did a lot for the British colony; he was president of the club. 1940 when he went up to the embassy he would say, do we evacuate? 'Oh no, no, no, we're going to send them back. Stiff upper lip and all that kind of thing. The third time he went they were all gone, and he was left high and dry. "My mother worried terribly about me." (Daphne) because you were at boarding school in England?

Ted – "My mother used to say, remember Ted, we're not 100% British we're 150% British...At school I used to be called a 'sale anglais' and I used to fight like hell and beat these kids up and then the parents would come along and complain to my mother that I had bullied them and she used to say, 'no, no, my son is a wolf cub, he's English and he never tells a lie.'"

"I love England, but for God's sake in the winter you've got to get out of it"

## Interview 2

**Interviewee:** Monique Clement

**Interviewer:** Ayshka Sené

**Date and Time:** 14/09/2015, 16.00

**Location:** Musée du Patrimoine, Vittel, France.

**Duration:** 25 minutes

Prostitutes brought in my Germans to 'work' in the camp.

Social class completely erased. Felt united in their hotel groups.

Some had more money than others. United in the lack of liberty, their environment.

Felt English. They kept their customs, ceremonie de thé, you can feel their Englishness in the accounts, they had to keep their custom of having tea. They tried to redeem themselves with their English rituals "se rattrapper sur des rites tres Angliais meme en pays francais et meme en captivite."

"on sent que le thé etait tres tres important dans leur vie"

they manage to have a canteen where they could heat water, they would come down at 4 o'clock to heat the hot water. Tea supplied by RX.

There was a little shop where you could buy things.

Germans watched exchanges happening with local people, fresh produce.

French needed things too – soap (her father), father gave them wood, they got together and gathered things for the baby, wool and soap.

Manque de liberte most difficult thing.

Voluntary internees – they were safer there than outside, no way of getting home, having to travel across a country at war, no place to go,

Woman from Lille – when she returned, the Germans had lived in the apartment and had taken everything, her parents had died in the meantime, she was on the streets. They preferred to stay and remain interned for a while to organize themselves. Parcels were only distributed to people that had signed the treaty. Jews did not receive parcels. Poland had not signed the treaty. They had nothing. Some English women gave them something, but they had almost nothing.

Not much communication between Jews and English internees, because Jews were terrified, shut up in their hotel afraid of what would happen. They did not mix much. Children went to the school with the other children. Communication difficult as they did not speak the same language. Some tried to take them food, but not the majority. People were united in their

hotels, because the providence hotel was further away. Language barrier, fear of Jews, they could cross the road.

Social feeling very strong from being in the same situation. Some women did not want to participate. Individual personalities, some did not mix.

Memory - English never came to find out thing. Vittelois thought that collaboration with Germans wasn't good, wanted to be separated from what had happened, ambiguous camp. (20.10) Complicated history, even now. 60 years on – people still saying that they do not want to know about it, father was tarnished by his association with that. It will soon be too late, no stories left. They have 4/5 people per year who come who are interested in the camp, English and Jews. Jews consider Vittel as a transit camp rather than an internment camp. History of the camp interests them less. They were there for 6 months. Very difficult to get schoolchildren engaged in what they are doing. Offered to go and speak to the children at local school and they are not interested. People say different things about the camp, the memory is not the same. [REDACTED] interested in their daily life. 'C'est l'humain.' When we find ourselves opposite someone who lived the internment experience.

### Interview 3

**Interviewee:** Margaret Williams

**Interviewer:** Ayshka Sené

**Date and Time:** 17/04/2015, 14.00

**Location:** The British Legion Paris Branch, Paris, France.

**Duration:** 18 minutes

In Besancon for 5 months, released at 13. Heard a few weeks later that they had been moved to Vittel. English people from all over Europe, Americans from all over Europe. Jews who came - middle of the night 4am, heard shouts and the Germans had come to take the Jews away. They knew what was happening. People threw themselves from the windows. We knew where they were going, to the camps. One broke his arm, hid himself in her brother's room. His wife in hospital and didn't want to leave her. Stayed for three days. Family concealed his wife. He stayed with them until the end of the war. After the war the legion became bigger, came back to work in Paris. Three brothers all there, little brother, father, in the resistance, got to south of France and contacted Buckmaster's team and SOE. British women in resistance. Went to England, English people who used to be in Paris. Work in Paris after the war. Assistant General manager, 2 years initially, stayed for 40 years. Language skills.

### Interview 4

**Interviewee:** Jean Michel

**Interviewer:** Ayshka Sené

**Date and Time:** 16/09/2015, 15.00

**Location:** Musée du Patrimoine, Vittel, France.

**Duration:** 66 minutes

Nuns caring for elderly during war rounded up. British working in stables in Paris had apartment, bank acc, all rounded up. Transferred money from different countries so that internees could buy things in the camp. Not everyone had a bank account. Only those who had lived in France. They continued to use their money. Those who lived in France without funds, prostitutes. 80 old people with nuns. Family regroupement – civilians.

They had 3000 in the camp and the numbers were reduced to 1500. Some who didn't want to leave and were better off in the camp. Some who had no family or apartment. All religions together and they didn't discriminate against Jews. British Jews lived normally, they did not suffer from being Jewish. Bloch states that there was a difference and that Landhauser did not give the same opportunities to Jews as to others. British status was more important than religion.

Vittel was a window to the Germans – a privileged space. Hospitals had been there since the beginning of WW2. Hotels able to receive lots of people.

US and Up journalists welcomed into the camp – Yank magazine.

Although they had 3000 and some were released, they still received 3000 parcels. Stocked in the casino. Gave food to internees in Troyes and Russians and then Polish Jews.

Women did not want Germans in their rooms so each hotel had one person in charge who looked after discipline etc. Mme Bouloumié gathered all the demands, she was president of the Vittel RX. Received Landhauser every week for food. Some Vittelois thought that she was a collaborator, but she did this for the good of the internees.

Landhauser was an Austrian, educated, musician, but still a Nazi soldier and had to follow orders. He allowed exchanges to happen between the French and internees. He wasn't 'si mechant.'

There were some escapes, Rosainvilliers airfield. Important English internee who escaped with the help of the maquis. Plane landed, collected internee and departed. Then they closed the airfield.

Born in 1936 – 8 years old. Remembers Germans occupying. Story of internees with German guard. Bistro so they could phone home, got soldiers drunk and then helped them get home. "Elles reagissaient avec les moyens du bord" – they reacted/made do with what they had to hand. SURVIVAL.

Soldiers in the camp were 'anciens blesses'.

Schools – at the beginning there were almost no children, they came later when family regroupement was in place. Vittel was the first place where this happened. They lived in the Hotel des Sources. Had an apartment together, had more babies, some got married.

Woman interned, husband came and married her. Those internees invited, left, went to have a party in a restaurant nearby outside the camp with no problems and then returned back to the camp. "Curieux comme methode"

A foreigner could marry an English person and take her nationality – Jewish man who had married English woman. Arrange marriage. 2 days after the marriage he was deported, Landhauser said that it didn't count. (look in marriage registers).

Children 16+ were allowed in camp and then after family regroupement then others joined.



Undertaker who worked in the camp, 2 women who wanted to leave. They dressed in black and he gave them a wreath and they took the train and left. Older women, more convincing.

French women who worked in the camp, as cooks or laundry people. One smuggled out katznelson's poem.

Some redecorated their rooms or who had a room and who paid to get it redone. At the start there was no central heating, internees came in May. For autumn they put heating in the continental, grand hotel, palace, hotel central and Thermes didn't have central heating. There were little fires which were installed by the women. There were women with money. There were Jewish people who had a certain standing, they did not have their money confiscated. Americans, Russians, Palestinians arrived later. They were all together, mixed. Polish treated separately. Warsaw Polish Jews had false papers. They had bought from the Swiss consulate (neutral country), proprietors of a house/land, paid for this, Germans said that all those who were foreign subjects sent to Vittel. Sent to Providence hotel. They explained to the English internees about the concentration camps etc, the English were not aware. They were shocked, demanded explanation. Polish treated separately. Had children, nuns took them and educated them, taught them English. School next to maternity building, run by the sisters. Then the Polish could integrate with the internees, no longer separate. Had parties with children, looked after children. Integrated children. SS from Paris arrived one day to check the papers. Had a list of those who had false papers taken from the Warsaw Ghetto Germans. They were all taken to Auschwitz. There were interrogations, they were tortured. Hotel splendid. Beau site did not have internees, they used this to torture Polish Jews to get them to admit what they had done. That the papers were false. Some committed suicide. Quite a dark period. His wife lived near the Beau site hotel and she remembers hearing people screaming while they were being tortured. Vittelais were a bit aware of what was going on, when the Jews were taken away by train the Vittelais were not happy. Vittelais made a barrier and the German army came and put things back in order. At that moment things became more strained. A train came from Lyon or Dijon to take the Jews to Auschwitz stopped in Vittel. Everyone was locked in. Mme Bouloumié intervened and got them out of the trains, gave them food and drink. She had problems with the Germans after that, they were not happy. It caused arguments. At what point do we collaborate or not? Resist or not?

Mayor of Vittel – there were maquis Montcour, Saint-Etoile, Levy was with them. He helped people escape. When they deported the Jews, he saved some lives. Said that people would die and so saved them. Mayor remained in service during the war. He went to Paris, helped found UFF.

Liberation of Vittel the town. Explains local resistance helping. Putting the French flag at the top of the church. False liberation. Soldiers left a few days later. Leclerc liberated camp. Elite of English people who were in the camp – musicians. Played tennis.

The Germans heard of Leclerc's army approaching and fled, one day the internees awoke and there was not a German to be seen in the camp. Everyone had disappeared. Maquis brought supplies to the camp in-between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>

What happened to internees. Propaganda film made by Germans. Claude tried to contact them, no archives remain. Model camp, Hitler wanted to have a bargaining chip. Exchange Germans with English. Civilians. 1944 – started to release English civilians via Lisbon. 3 significant exchanges at the end of the war. When he thought that things were lost. “All the poor Polish Jews who were here who thought they were saved, out of 300, there were about 10 who were saved.” A friend of Claude’s, his father was the director of the Grand Hotel. He lived there in an apartment in the Grand Hotel. They saw a family of Jews come out of the top floor of the palace hotel to kill themselves and there is no trace of them in the list of deaths in Vittel mayor office. They lied and said that there was a train derailment which killed Jews and English people but in fact the Jews committed suicide in the camp. A Jew hid in the oven.

Did a conference in Vittel. At 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Liberation, [REDACTED] decided to gather together ex-internees. They still had links with local people. They told the stories of their internment. Videoed them.

### Interview 5

**Interviewee:** M. Dupont

**Interviewer:** Ayshka Sené

**Date and Time:** 12/09/2015, 14.00

**Location:** Interviewee’s home, Vittel, France.

**Duration:** 65 minutes

1940 – young student in Paris. Came back to Vittel once or twice before leaving France for Spain. Didn’t see camp installed, but barbed wire installed, Kommander’s house. Didn’t salute Landhauser, wasn’t sympathetic at the time. Stefan was in reality the camp commander, spoke French perfectly. Had worked in champagne region, suspected of being a fifth columnist. Stefan behaved in a diplomatic manner, said to Germaine Bouloumié that he did not want reprisals with Germans. Camp managed in accordance with Red Cross rules and in fear of English reprisals if anything happened. Young women, bluebell girls from the Paris lido. Ceres hotel. He would walk past and listen to them singing and was chased away by the ‘elderly’ German guard saying Raus! Raus! Young German soldiers who were recovering, Naval soldiers who were bored. Staying in the Hermitage hotel. Dug a tunnel under a cascading tree and collected Bluebell girls who would go and dance with them in the evening and then brought them back the next morning.

Info about history of Vittel.

(21.29) Important for mayor to keep Vittel going. Lots of Vittelois left during exodus. He had to communicate with the Germans. Relations had to be established quickly because of the international accords of the RX. Relations between Gestapo and mayor regarding Polish Jews are completely impossible. The mayor did all he could to help without success.

Germaine Bouloumié – Montluc, Lyon prison directed by Klaus Barbie. Barbie sends prisoners to Germany to be exterminated. The last train from Montluc. Train comes through Vittel. She visits German army commander. Need to help these people. She puts herself in front of the train. Officer phones Paris. They agree to stop the train, people are fed, can go to the toilet, their names taken, messages for their families collected. She was decorated by the English for that. They talk about her intervention during the trial of Barbie.

English taken care of by Landhauser, Jews by the SS. Especially as the war intensified.

Plaque inaugurated by Bouloumié for Katznelson.

Commemorations continued after the war. Lorraine patriotic, some collaborators, traitors but rare. Lorraine people are patriotic. Left France to fight. 2 DB. Twinning with Germany after the war. Famille Thomas who were resistants during the war.

2 men who came regularly to inspect the camp, two Swiss men. Wanted to show that all was well.

### Interview 6

**Interviewee:** Alain and Marie Gasparian

**Interviewer:** Ayshka Sené

**Date and Time:** 20/02/2016, 14.00

**Location:** Interviewee's home, Paris, France.

**Duration:** 80 minutes

“Elle est toujours anglaise, elle a gardé la nationalité anglaise” (0.47)

(13.00) « Chez [REDACTED] la branche est terminée »

(13.34) « Ça c'est le travail d'archiviste de [REDACTED]. C'est un archiviste. Elle a fait un travail formidable, formidable.

Ayshka : elle voulait le garder.

Alain : Oui bien sûr.

(21.43) Ayshka “Elle était fière de ça j'imagine ?”

Alain – Oui...

Alain: Evidemment les gens dans la maison de retraite sont tout étonné, 'ah vous étiez mannequin?' extraordinaire.

D'abord vous êtes anglaise. Elle est anglaise. Elle n'a jamais eu la nationalité française. Sa sœur pareille.

Ayshka: Donc, c'était important pour elle.

Marie: Oui c'était important pour elle. Très. Qu'elle ait le passeport anglais. Très important.

Cathartic/therapeutic talking about [REDACTED]

(1.09.42)

Ayshka: Moi je trouve intéressant qu'elle a, donc elle a vécu en Angleterre pendant 4 ans, elle était renfermée dans un camp pendant 4 ans pour sa nationalité et elle a gardé sa nationalité anglaise pendant sa vie.

Marie: Oui. Oui.

Ayshka: Elle se sentait Anglaise?

Marie: Elle est complètement anglaise. Elle se sent anglaise. Son pays c'est l'Angleterre.

Alain: Il fallait aboutement qu'à quatre heures elle ait son thé.

Ayshka: Oui?

Alain: Oui. Pendant toute sa vie.

Ayshka: Dans le camp aussi, peut-être c'était une période de formation...?

Marie: Oui, tout à fait. Avec les autres anglaises. Elle, oui, beaucoup. Ça sœur a été professeur d'anglais.

Alain: Au retour du camp elle a cherché du travail et comme elle parlait, les américains occupaient encore Paris, donc on cherchait beaucoup de secrétaires ou de personnes qui parlaient anglais.

Alain: [REDACTED] avait posé sa candidature pour renseigner à l'école Berlitz. Mais entre-temps elle a eu un travail à Western Union [...] Comme par hasard elle a dit qu'elle était dans le camp et ils lui ont dit, mais le directeur ici il connaît très bien cette histoire de camp. Alors il a dit oui oui, moi aussi je suis passé là-bas à Besançon et donc ils l'ont engagée tout de suite.

Alain: Sa sœur a été à l'école Berlitz et ils l'ont prise comme professeur et après toute sa vie elle a enseigné l'anglais à l'école Berlitz. Sa sœur oui [...] Elle a même organisé des camps en Angleterre avec des jeunes français qui veulent apprendre l'anglais.

Alain : Évidemment ces jours, en camp, l'a marqué aboutement...puisqu'elle a écrit, elle a...

Marie : Elle a recherché des documents [...] Après quand un film a été fait sur le camp de Vittel plus axé sur les juives [...] donc elle a fait un documentaire et Sona était interviewé longuement, elle a gardé les cassettes et tout ça.

Ayshka : Donc c'était très important. A transmettre... ?

Marie : A transmettre. Oui.

Alain : oui oui. Ça a été dans ses conversations quotidienne. Tous les jours pratiquement.

Marie : Parce qu'en France, la plupart des français, ignorent totalement...Ils sont très étonnés les amis quand on dit, disant on ne savait pas que les anglais étaient internés.

[...]

Marie : Pour [REDACTED] ça a été très important, elle disait, mais comment, on ne connaît pas, on ne connaît pas cette histoire. Elle était révoltée même. Elle disait. Alors quand ils ont fait le film et tout ça, elle a dit, mais c'est trop tard. Vous avez perdu la moitié des témoins. [...] On l'a beaucoup encouragé. Elle disait, ça ne vous intéresse pas, on disait si si [REDACTED], ça nous intéresse encore très...on a appris beaucoup.

## Interview 7

**Interviewee:** Laura Giraud

**Interviewer:** Ayshka Sené

**Date and Time:** 23/02/2016, 11.00

**Location:** A café, Paris, France.

**Duration:** 53 minutes

For mum, it was complicated...it was very complicated...because Mum was Jewish as well. So, I won't tell you the fear...the fear of my family. I don't want to cry, but imagine. Because in fact they were saved, because they were English. But they were Jewish at the same time, it's unusual... And that is why...British people, they are amazing to me and anyway it was always amazing because my parents wanted to go and live in England. It's complicated. When I speak about my grandparents, I mean my maternal grandparents. My paternal grandfather was a 'proper' Englishman, born in Manchester. He was good, but he was a man who liked women and made my grandmother suffer and my father. Because he had lots of women at the same

time, lots of families. Relational ties with him weren't easy. My dad was always kind to his father. Even gave him money. Maternal grandparents were both Jewish. My grandfather escaped from Russia. To flee the misery there. And he wanted to go to the USA, he got the wrong boat and arrived in England. He loved Great Britain. He left Russia twice, once in OSen (?) and he was robbed on the train, went back and sent to his parents. And left again at 14. Hidden in a coal bunker on a boat. He did all his classes. England was his adopted homeland. He never forgot Russia.

In England, he learnt everything, worked, learnt everything in London. I think he even met Charlie Chaplin. And then my grandfather became a soldier in the British army. He has all his medals. Both my parents died in 2014. In 2015 I was...trying to organise everything. They have all his medals, he did a tour in Egypt...a soldier in the British Army. He was a humanist, they had lots of hope, in man. He believed in the man. He would do speeches in Hyde Park. But my mum suffered. Mum and her little brother and big brother. They waited on the steps of Hyde Park for him to finish his speeches. It was complicated. But my mum always said, I knew my grandparents, granddad died when I was 22. My grandmother I was 14/15. More than 50 years. My grandmother (maternal) she was also a Jew. She was from a more well-off Jewish family than my father. His family were a bit poorer. That's why he left. Grandma was from a more comfortable, comfortable family we can say. No shame in saying that we have all that is needed to live, and even a bit more. She had a good education. It was a Romanian family. Russia and Romania aren't that far apart. They didn't meet there. My grandmother's family went to Egypt and my grandfather, a British soldier, on tour in Egypt. And they met there when he was a soldier.

(07.09) A very rich life. If I had the courage and the will...the will...I have the courage. I have so much in my head with this story. They suffered a lot. My grandmother was happy. But my grandfather was a bit 'original' he had learnt everything on his own, had left home as a child, he was courageous and hardworking. A good soldier. Pretty medals. Crosses etc. He was brave. But a bit tough. And my grandmother, from a better off family, left Romania for Egypt, was in an Italian finishing (?) school. She knew all the Italian operas. A soldier who came from a harder life, he was good though.

After the war they came back to England. My granddad worked for the Evening Standard. That's why when I got to London I always buy the evening standard. He was rather...representative/correspondent. More commercial. From London they went to France. He must have had a transfer, job proposal. And he was the evening standard correspondent in Paris. I don't know whether in London he worked.... but in Paris he was the correspondent. He received papers, there were piles of newspapers. He loved that. In the garage there were loads of English standards. My grandma had depression. Life was tough. Granddad was...they just had enough. They were brave. There were easier times when he was at the standard. But life was tough though. She never complained, never. But she had left her whole family, left them in Egypt. She had lots of sisters. It was a lovely, big family. She had left everything. They were a

bit on their own. They didn't have loads of friends. She had lots to do. They were in the suburbs of Paris. My granddad wanted her to learn to cycle, she never managed. My uncle was ill. He worked at Pan Am. Life wasn't easy. No electricity, the ground was barely liveable (?) They bought a little patch of ground.

I think the internment period, she didn't really get over it. My mother didn't manage very well afterwards. And yet...it wasn't a concentration camp. But it changed her whole life. There were families. I don't know whether you know this, but in Vittel there were those with false papers. Jews with false English papers (?) And mum told me that. Since I was little mum told me that. She talked to me about it all the time and it really struck me/touched me. (12.46) I couldn't stand Germans when I was little, didn't watch war films. There were Jewish families who had false papers and mum told me that there were Jewish families who threw themselves out of the window. They were not saved by the British, they were 'faux-anglais' had false English papers. They were taken. Mum told me that it was the gendarmes who came to get them at their house. And because everyone knew that they were Jewish, they were in a café and the restaurant owner said, get going, escape. But people didn't know. And they thought they were normal, they had nothing to fear. So they were saved because they were English and because my grandfather had his medals. And families who were not saved had false English papers.

Phoney war – they were between France and England and they decided to stay in France because he had a job in France. He went to France because his work took him there and he loved his job, a lot. My grandfather was humanist and for him a newspaper was important for the population. When he did his speeches in Hyde park, was it before or after he worked for the Evening standard. He never wanted to study (?), he was a free man. Not an anarchist, but a libertarian. He believed in progress, science, modernity. There was hope. He would invite people who didn't have enough to eat to have supper with them in Paris. Grandmother more cautious. She was aware how little food they had. If someone didn't have a coat he would give them his.

Exodus – they left. Granddad was afraid for his house and so came back. People went and then came back. They left because of fear and then came back. Mum was 22 during the exode. She was there with everyone. Slept in farms. There were even people who said, leave, take a boat, leave. Because they were Jewish. Qn – did they feel protected? Safe because of their nationality? Yes, I think so. My granddad was not anarchist, he wouldn't kill for his cause, he loved liberty and worked hard. But he still had ideas which were a bit libertarian. His medals and his letters which saved him. My dad loved his father in law. His medals proved that he was English. I don't think his papers were in order, but his medals saved him. When they left, they must have known the same day or the night before that they were coming for them, to take them to maybe a concentration camp, maybe and internment camp. They didn't know which. Granddad went to fetch a pair of shoes for mum. To leave. French police came to collect them. The French, not the Germans. 1940. They were in Besancon first. It was hard. People died.

Pregnant women who gave birth who knows where, it was cold, they were in a castle. NEEDS TO BE TRANSCRIBED FROM HERE ONWARDS

Grandad in a different camp. Maybe not interned. I am sure that my Grandad was with his son after. All the neighbours thought that they wouldn't come back. They took everything in their house. The neighbours emptied their house. Mum said that when they came out, she saw her friend who had her bike. Curtains, linen...they helped themselves! They thought that they wouldn't come back. My grandparents were afraid at the beginning, because their papers weren't in order, thankfully he had been a soldier and had his medals. Grandparents spoke English well. He spoke better English than French. Grandma knew lots of languages. Mum spoke English well. She came out of the war. Mum and parents left England when she was 4/5. She never forgot her English mum. When she left the camp she worked at the US embassy. They were almost more English than French. That's why...I always wanted to go to London.

Paternal grandfather from Manchester worked in Le Havre on boats. He liked women and alcohol. He had an important post. He was never interned. Maybe he escaped, I'm not sure. But my dad, yes he was. But my granddad was in NY. Maybe he went when they were rounding up others. He was around 17 when he was taken. They were interned between 16 and 20, or maybe 17-21. They remained there for 4 years, maybe dad just 3 as the men came after. Father was all on his own. His father wasn't there. And they met in the camp. They were protected in the camp, from the war. Guarded by soldiers, barbed wire. Some wanted to escape. It was hard but they had nothing to do, one had to distract oneself.

They had work after the war because at the time there weren't many people who spoke English in France.

Mum made no photo album of her life, apart from Vittel. It was all her life...well it touched all her life.

They were very proud to be able to go to Vittel for the anniversary. It was all their life. They were honoured.

We are marked by that, a bit between the two [countries].

Mum passed a red cross diploma while she was interned. Certificat d'aide medico-social. When they were taken by the French. She was studying when they were taken by the French police. They organised a life.

There were some Jews who were 'protected' but not all. It was difficult being Jewish and seeing other Jews deported? Yes. (she doesn't speak about it much).

My parents had a double passport – English/French. They were 20 in the camp and had to choose their nationality and they chose British nationality. But after the camp and the war, they would say that it was not valid. Because they chose during a time of war. They had to choose but it wasn't valid. So they had to apply again at the end of the war. But they chose British nationality. Why did they choose British? 'Parce que de Coeur' There's always one that we love more than the other. They loved English more. The Queen, mum talked about the queen. There was no doubt. Also they had lived, it's true that my mother's early years were in England, interned there with English people. For them, they had no doubts. For them, they were English. They continued to grow up/mature (grandir) there [in the camp]. So they had double nationality, French and British passport. So I can ask for an English passport too. Father's family were in England too. Older brother was interned in the camp. He had 2 women in the camp.

Mum was young, 16/17, she wasn't afraid. Grandmother was afraid. Mum was in love.

Afterwards, mum and dad went back to London. They wanted to live there. Mum missed her mum who was in the Parisian suburbs.

Write a book about them (33.10)



Appendix CLetter from Sofka Skipwith to John Balfour, Foreign Office, London.

Unnamed collection., Musée du Patrimoine Archives, Vittel, France.

John Balfour, Esq.  
Foreign Office  
London

2/12/44

My dear Jock, I do hope that you are in London so that you can lay this matter before the proper authorities. As you will see it is a matter of the gravest importance. In this camp at Vittel there are some 250 Jews with S. American papers, issued by the consulates of the various states, and as yet not ratified by the S.A. States themselves. These people whose names and present nationalities are on the adjoined list, have been moved to an hotel outside the precincts of the camp, although connected with it by day, and are threatened with deportation to Poland (which means a certain and horrible death) unless they are accorded either 1) immediate recognition by their respective States, or 2) certificates proving them good for exchange to Palestine, or 3) protection either by England or the USA for the duration of hostilities, thus enabling them to remain unmolested in this camp. It is urgent that measures be taken immediately. These people and the ones with similar papers in Bergau and Bergen Belzen (2000 in all) are what remains of all the Jews of Poland and they are eye-witnesses of all the unbelievable horrors that have been perpetrated on their race. Their lives are important from a documentary as well as from a humanitarian point of view. Their danger is only too real and I cannot sufficiently stress the need for rapid action. Their nerves are at cracking point and since they have a fortnight ago a state of panic and anguish exists in the camp. There has been one suicide already and another woman has gone mad. I am writing for a large group of the British Internees and we all beg that some official reassurance and guarantee of safety be given without delay. I know that you will do all you can in this matter, and therefore pray that you are not in some outlandish spot. Moppy has been very ill lately, Uncle Peter is extremely tired but carries on with his job. I hope to see Moppy soon on a visit here.

Love to you and Frances

Sofka Skipwith  
Internierlager  
Vittel.

Le Camp de Vittel (1941-1944) et sa Relation à Auschwitz, June 2017: Conference flyer

COLLOQUE | JUIN 2017

# LE CAMP DE VITTEL (1941-1944) ET SA RELATION À AUSCHWITZ

**INVITÉ D'HONNEUR :**  
**SERGE KLARSFELD**

**INTERVENANTS :**  
**MARYVONNE BRAUNSCHEWIG,  
DIDIER DURMARQUE, JOËLLE NOVIC,  
JEAN-OLIVIER VIOUT**

Participation gratuite, réservation obligatoire

**CONTACT PRESSE**

**AGNÈS 7<sup>ème</sup> ART** ✕ **FRÉDÉRIC LÉVY**  
06 32 83 98 03

Le colloque est organisé par la Ville de Vittel et sa bibliothèque municipale.

conception graphique stéphane pré | 2017

## — PRATIQUE

### INFORMATIONS/RÉSERVATIONS

Pour une meilleure organisation il sera demandé une réservation au préalable pour assister au colloque.

>> Bibliothèque Médiathèque de Vittel  
402 rue Saint Nicolas | 88 800 VITTEL  
mediatheque@ville-vittel.fr | 03 29 08 98 53

### PALAIS DES CONGRÈS DE VITTEL

Palais des Congrès  
1 avenue Bouloumié  
BP 20057  
88802 VITTEL Cedex  
Tél.: +33 (0)3 29 08 18 30  
Fax: +33 (0)3 29 08 66 01  
Mail: infos@vittelcongres.com

### PLAN D'ACCÈS



### HÉBERGEMENT / RESTAURATION



>> [www.vitteltourisme.com](http://www.vitteltourisme.com)

## LE PROJET

L'objectif est de faire la somme des connaissances historiques et des approches littéraires autour du camp de Vittel.

Il ne s'agit pas d'évoquer seulement une histoire douloureuse, mais plutôt de voir que le camp de Vittel a été protéiforme, dans l'internement des civils anglo-saxons et des Juifs polonais. Cette bipolarité a engendré plusieurs histoires du camp, histoires fortes, tragiques et passionnantes, qui engagent aussi la population vittelloise.

De grandes figures héroïques constituent les phares du camp, dans le camp anglo-saxon (Sofka Skipwith et Madeleine White), du côté français (Myriam Novitch) dans le camp des Juifs polonais (Yitzhak Katzenelson, Hillel Seidman, Nathan Eck) autour de « l'affaire des passeports latino-américains ».

En dernière instance, le camp de Vittel a été le théâtre de la création d'une des plus grandes œuvres poétiques du XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle, *Le Chant du peuple juif assassiné* de Katzenelson.

L'exposition photographique et artistique autour du camp de Vittel sera organisée par **Jacqueline Verrier** (Musée du Patrimoine et du Thermalisme de Vittel).

Le temps de programme intègre discussion et débat.

## LE PROGRAMME

(DURÉE INDICATIVE)

### 23 JUIN 2017

**9 h30** Le camp de Vittel : micro et macro histoire d'un camp méconnu.

Intervenant : Didier Durmarque

DURÉE 2 H | LIEU PALAIS DES CONGRÈS DE VITTEL

**14 h30** Les Juifs et les Justes du camp de Vittel.

Intervenant : Maryvonne Braunschweig

DURÉE 2 H | LIEU PALAIS DES CONGRÈS DE VITTEL

### 24 JUIN 2017

**10 h** Conférence : « L'évocation du convoi ferroviaire du 11 août 1944 au procès Barbie ».

Par Jean-Olivier Vitout, Ancien procureur général, près la cour d'appel de Lyon, Procureur-adjoint au procès Barbie.

DURÉE 1H30 | LIEU SALON D'HONNEUR (MAIRIE DE VITTEL 38 PLACE DE LA MARNE 88100 VITTEL)

**11 h30**

**Cérémonie souvenir** en présence des personnalités civiles, militaires et religieuses, de M. Guy de la Motte Bouloumié, ancien maire de Vittel, M. Serge Klarsfeld, M. Jean-Olivier Vitout et M. Jean-Paul Bazelaire.

**Dévoilement de la plaque**

**commémorative** suivi d'une allocution de M. Jean-Jacques Gautier, maire de Vittel.

**14 h**

**Conférence : « Le camp de Vittel à partir de la littérature des camps ».**

Auteurs abordés : Joseph Bialot, Mary Berg, Ber Baskind, Hillel Seidman, Katzenelson. Intervenant : Didier Durmarque

DURÉE 2 H | LIEU PALAIS DES CONGRÈS DE VITTEL

**16 h30**

**Visionnage et débat autour du film de Joëlle Novic, Le camp de Vittel.**

Intervenant : Joëlle Novic

DURÉE 1H30 | LIEU PALAIS DES CONGRÈS DE VITTEL

L'INVITÉ D'HONNEUR  
**SERGE KLARSFELD**



LES INTERVENANTS



MARYVONNE  
BRAUNSCHWEIG



DIDIER  
DURMARQUE



JOËLLE  
NOVIC



JEAN-OLIVIER  
VITOUT