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‘Europe Against the Germans’: The British Resistance Narrative, 1940-50

There is considerable consensus among historians about the impact of the Second World War on British attitudes to continental Europe: one which identifies 1940 as a defining moment. The fall of France and the retreat from Dunkirk figure strongly in the view that the Second World War reinforced the story of Britain as an island nation. Richard Weight’s comment that the Second World War ‘honed the island identity of the British’ is echoed by Timothy Garton Ash who uses a David Low cartoon to illustrate his argument that an island identity ‘acquired a huge boost during the second world war, and particularly in the formative moment of 1940’.¹ The Low cartoon, captioned ‘very well alone!’, Ash notes, shows a British soldier standing defiantly on a shore nearly engulfed by waves and shaking his fist at a sky full of Nazi planes. According to Kenneth Morgan, ‘Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain, the image of ‘standing alone’ and subsequently saving a stricken continent from itself went deep into British folk memories’. Morgan argues that: ‘the triumphant record of the Second World War strengthened amongst the British people a powerful sense of detachment from continental Europe’.² Malcolm Smith similarly notes that: ‘France’s defeat, and Britain’s subsequent survival, not only worked to confirm Britain’s sense of innate national superiority but also helped to cement a more general distrust of European entanglements for generations’.³

‘Europe against the Germans’ — the slogan of the V for Victory campaign begun in 1941 — suggests a rather different version of British-European relations from the island story. From 1941, at a time when mass murder and genocide were under way on a vast scale, the continent was increasingly portrayed in the British

media through a narrative of resistance that told of civilised, decent and gallant nations united against Nazi Germany. Repeated tributes were paid to the courage and heroism of resisters, often showing resistance movements working autonomously, but also showing unity between British and continental Europeans in common resistance to Germany. Such images, I argue, meant that in 1942-4 the British media came close to identifying Britons as European — perhaps closer than at any other moment in the twentieth century. Indeed in 1942-4 the connection made between Europe and civilisation was so emphatic, and the definition of ‘good Europeans’ so routinely constructed against Germany, that the narrative of a continent united in resistance meant that it was Germans who were sometimes explicitly, and always implicitly, shown as ‘not-European’.

The V for Victory campaign of 1941 was initiated by Victor de Laveleye, a Belgian refugee in Britain: one of a number of European exiles in Britain who contributed to the development of the resistance narrative through their work in the British media. De Laveleye, who worked for BBC radio, used the letter ‘V’ as a rallying sign in a broadcast on Radio Belgique, choosing the letter because it stood for ‘Victoire’ in French and ‘Vrijheid’ in Flemish.⁴ His idea was quickly taken up in propaganda radio broadcasts targeted at occupied European nations. Like other British wartime propaganda aimed at recruitment to the war effort — women to war industries in Britain, Indians to the armed forces and, before December 1941, America to the Allied cause — the V campaign aimed to recruit resisters to the war effort, creating ‘the frame of mind in which our listeners will feel themselves part of a great army’ and encouraging them to identify their resistance particularly through the V sign — chalked on a wall, signed with the fingers, or made with sound through the

Morse code rhythm for 'V' — the same rhythm as the opening notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony — which became the identification signal of the BBC European service.⁵

The resistance story was also produced for domestic consumption. As Michael Stenton, commenting on British wartime broadcasts to occupied Europe observes: 'Resistance was a story, a meaning, which Radio London could transmit to others because the British told it to themselves'.⁶ The V for Victory campaign may have been targeted at occupied Europe, but it was also widely reported for domestic audiences, while a range of cartoons about the campaign in the British press in 1941 assumed a considerable level of knowledge from their audiences.⁷ A similar assumption that British audiences were familiar with the idea of clandestine listening to BBC radio in Europe is evident in a cartoon in *Punch* captioned 'The Secret Hope', which depicts a group of three men and one woman listening intently to the radio in a cellar, but makes no reference to the BBC, suggesting the extent to which the audience were assumed to recognise the identity of the broadcaster that brought Europeans hope.⁸ After 1941 the V campaign often featured in resistance films, as in *The Day Will Dawn* (1942), where Norwegians defy a compulsory German entertainment with a noisy assertion of the rhythm of 'V', tapping it on table-tops and stamping it with their feet, before it is taken up by the band in a musical rendition.⁹ The extent to which a wider narrative of the resistance became quickly established is also suggested by complaints about its over-familiarity by film critics. Despite the novelty of resistance films, the *Times* as early as September 1942, reviewing *The Secret Mission* set in France, urged producers to ask themselves 'whether, if they are determined to set their scenes in one of the occupied countries, they have anything

fresh to say or any fresh way of saying what has become distressingly familiar'.¹⁰ The *Monthly Film Bulletin's* review of *Undercover* (1943), set in Yugoslavia, complained less than a year later: 'The incidents are all too familiar to war audiences who, for years, have been made aware of hostages, torture, raids and death'.¹¹

Tony Judt, commenting on the emergence of a range of stories about resistance in post-war continental Europe suggests that, in the Netherlands, 'accounts of heroic farmers rescuing downed British airmen became part of national mythology'.¹² But such an account was first given in a British wartime film, set in the Netherlands, which enjoyed considerable popularity: *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* (1942).¹³ The British wartime resistance narrative in many ways foreshadowed those produced so rapidly in continental Europe once the war was over. Like them it obscured genocide against Jews, the extent of collaboration, and divisions within resistance movements, showing nations united against the German oppressor. In countries occupied by Germany where resisters were subject to arrest, imprisonment, torture and death, no public narrative of resistance could be produced in wartime outside the underground press. For the same reason, with occasional exceptions, it was not possible in wartime to disseminate British visual imagery to occupied countries. Although two French-language films about the French resistance directed by Alfred Hitchcock were made for screening in France, they had very limited distribution there.¹⁴ The British resistance narrative was thus the first to be produced and disseminated publicly in Europe, largely to British audiences.

The public resistance narrative produced in continental Europe once the war was over has attracted considerable attention from scholars.¹⁵ This literature points up

its importance to unity, stability and the development of post-war identity in nations that were formerly occupied by Germany. It also pays considerable attention to the idea of a wider continent united in resistance as one of the foundational myths that supported ideas of European integration, providing heroes that Pieter Lagrou calls ‘a very convenient, noble and consensual set of founding fathers’ for the nation-building project of European federalists.¹⁶ However, the onset of the Cold War meant that — unlike the British wartime narrative of a continent united in resistance — ideals of European integration encompassed only Western Europe.

By comparison with the post-war resistance narrative on the continent, the British resistance narrative has received little attention. Although there is interesting work on the wartime cycle of British resistance films, this does not situate these films within any wider investigation of the impact of war on British attitudes to Europe.¹⁷ This article, tracing the development of stories of the resistance and focusing on those that the British told themselves, argues that they suggest considerable British engagement with the continent. The image of ‘Europe against the Germans’ emerged slowly and early narratives were confined to celebrating the resistance of brave individuals. Even so they denied the insularity that had been used to justify appeasement. From 1942 there was an increasing development of an image that I have called a ‘people’s resistance’ which corresponded in many ways to the vision projected of the British war effort in imagery of the ‘people’s war’ — unity across differences of gender, class and age in a common endeavour fighting for common values.

British engagement with Europe in wartime is demonstrated by the media attention given to European resistance by comparison with nationals from countries that entered the war as Allies in 1941 — the Soviet Union and the United States — and by comparison with empire. Although an image of a ‘people’s empire’ was produced in empire propaganda, especially after 1942, it was never as strongly developed as the ‘people’s resistance’.¹⁸ In contrast to a prolific cycle of feature films showing resistance in continental Europe, empire propaganda was mainly confined to documentaries. Moreover, once the war was over, the Soviet Union the United States, and the imperial war effort were generally expelled from imagery, but the resistance narrative proved enduring. Indeed it became pervasive in British culture and a significant element in memories of war. Widely disseminated on television, it continued to be told throughout the twentieth century and into the new millennium.¹⁹

The resistance narrative, however, not only demonstrates British engagement with Europe in wartime and in memories of war, but also different versions of British-European relations in play at different moments in wartime and its aftermath. This article, exploring the resistance narrative as it was developed in the mainstream British media in wartime and reworked in the context of victory in 1945, looks at the shifting meanings it assigned to the continent and to British relations with the continent, and its significance in British memories of the Second World War.

Early Beginnings of the Resistance Story

It would be hard to dispute that in 1940, the Dunkirk myth of merciful redemption, quickly developed and celebrating what the *Daily Express* called ‘the

amateur sailors of England' and their 'ragged armada', emphasised the island nation.²⁰ An atmosphere of suspicion and hostility to foreigners also characterised Britain in 1940. A policy of mass internment of enemy aliens was introduced in May and the entry of Italy into the war in June not only swelled the numbers interned but also prompted anti-Italian riots in a number of British cities.²¹ In May, Mass Observation reported that stories of aliens acting as Fifth Columnists in Holland meant that: 'the enemy in our midst is easily visualised. The always latent antagonism to the alien and foreigner began to flare up. Nearly everyone, as previous research has shown, is latently somewhat anti-Semitic and somewhat anti-alien. But ordinarily it is not the done thing to express such sentiments publicly. The news from Holland made it the done thing all of a sudden ...'²²

The resistance narrative did not emerge strongly in British cinema until 1942, but four early films countered aspects of such anti-alienism. As in later stories of resistance, attention was divided between continental Europeans — in these early films Germans and Austrians shown acting against the Nazi regime after Hitler's rise to power — and British anti-Nazi action set in continental Europe. All four films are notable for their setting in the past, before Britain declared war on Germany. Through this setting, as well as through their plots, those that showed British anti-Nazi action in Europe read back such action into a period when the policy of the British government was appeasement, denying the insularity that had been used to justify that policy.

Before September 1939, the policy of appeasement meant that films that were openly critical of Nazi Germany were not passed for production. However, *The Lady*

Vanishes, which criticised not only Nazi Germany but also British appeasement of Germany, was released in 1938.²³ Since the British Board of Film Censors would sometimes pass films where countries were not identifiable or were given fictitious names, much of the action in *The Lady Vanishes* is set on a train crossing the fictional mid-European country of Bandrika, so that its anti-Nazi themes are disguised, if thinly, and its criticism of appeasement necessarily oblique.²⁴ It shows a highly sinister group of Europeans, intent on murdering a British governess, who is later revealed as a British agent. Appeasement is most obviously critiqued through the character of Eric Todhunter (Cecil Parker) who continues to believe that the sinister group is acting in good faith even when they besiege the train. He steps outside the carriage to negotiate with them, waving a white handkerchief, only to be immediately shot, and dies muttering 'you don't understand'. Other British passengers all redeem themselves by putting up determined and resourceful opposition to the sinister group, but only after they have been shown as slow to recognise danger and reluctant to get involved.

The Lady Vanishes was a comedy thriller which introduced the characters of Charters and Caldicott (Basil Radford and Norton Wayne). Much of its comedy derived from their determined insularity in a European setting where they encounter continental Europeans who, unaccountably, cannot speak English. They are constantly barked in their quest to keep abreast with the cricket test score and get back to England in time to see the end of the match. Early wartime films and radio programmes reprised these themes. *Night Train to Munich* (1940) and *Crook's Tour* (1941) — a radio series of six adventures as well as a film — were all comedy thrillers in which Charters and Caldicott were once again caught up inadvertently in

European adventures.²⁵ In *Crook's Tour*, as in *The Lady Vanishes*, they finally arrive back in England only to find the test match cancelled. The contrast between the dangers they face and overcome in continental Europe and their arrival home to a place of safety became a characteristic theme of resistance narratives which showed continental Europe as a highly dangerous place. The idea of Britain as a haven for continental Europeans was a recurrent wartime theme. In the same week that *Night Train to Munich* was released, there were a range of stories in the press about Europeans seeking to escape to England from the Nazis, and of the Albanian and Dutch royal families finding refuge in England.²⁶

Addressing the nation on radio just before flying to meet Hitler in 1938, Neville Chamberlain used insularity to legitimise the Munich agreement he signed three days later. Speaking of Czechoslovakia, he said: 'How horrible, fantastic, incredible it is, that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas masks here because of a quarrel in a far away country between people of whom we know nothing'.²⁷ It is perhaps significant that *Night Train to Munich* foregrounded Czechoslovakia, opening with shots of its invasion and ending with sequences where a British agent, masquerading as a Nazi officer, helps a Czechoslovakian scientist and his daughter to escape from Germany. These sequences are set on the night that Britain declared war on Germany and involve a Nazi-British struggle which, as in *The Lady Vanishes*, takes place on a train. In showing Britons protecting and aiding Czechoslovakians the film obscures the pre-war history of British-Czechoslovakian relations, particularly the Munich agreement which conceded Hitler's demand for the annexation of Czechoslovakia's border regions by the Third Reich. *Night Train To Munich* ends with a shoot-out in which the Czechoslovakian scientist and his daughter

rely on the British to beat off Nazi assailants. Charters and Caldicott acquit themselves well in this gun-battle as they do in the shoot-out in *The Lady Vanishes*, suggesting that the insularity they represent is easily compatible with determined and resourceful resistance. In reading opposition to Nazi Germany back into the pre-war period, and showing the British as protectors of Czechoslovakians, *Night Train to Munich* denies the insularity used to justify the Munich agreement, showing British engagement with oppressed Czechoslovakians.

The credentials of pre-war anti-Nazi action are also established in *Pimpernel Smith* (1941) which, like *Night Train to Munich*, is set in the period leading up to the British declaration of war on Germany and shows Britons saving Europeans from the Nazis.²⁸ Its hero, Professor Horatio Smith (Leslie Howard), aided by a team of Cambridge undergraduates, ostensibly goes on an archaeological dig to Germany, but is actually on a mission to get artists, intellectuals and scientists across the German border. According to the *Kinematograph Weekly*, Leslie Howard, who not only starred in the film but also directed and produced it, was British audiences' most popular film star in 1941. Antonia Lant writes that: 'He could invoke, through his mere presence, the idea of a unified nation, despite the diversity of accent, class, and character that comprised it'.²⁹

Like *Night Train To Munich* and many post-1941 resistance films, *Pimpernel Smith* represents continental Europeans chiefly through a father-daughter pair, a device which offers scope for a romantic plot between the daughters and British men. The heroes of *Night Train To Munich* and *Pimpernel Smith* duly fall in love. The gendering of these images where British heroes save the day and the main continental

European characters are female, positions Britishness as masculine and paternalist in relation to the continent. British heroism, offering a very different version of masculinity from the jack-booted hyper-masculinity of brutal Nazis, conforms closely to what Sonya Rose has identified as ‘temperate heroism’.³⁰ But these early films do not conform to imagery of a British ‘people’s war’ or a European ‘people’s resistance’. Their British heroes are both Oxbridge men, while the Europeans that they rescue are described in *Pimpernel Smith* as ‘scientists, men of letters, artists, doctors’.

Like *Night Train To Munich* and *Pimpernel Smith*, early films that showed Germans and Austrians acting against the Nazi regime — *Pastor Hall* (1940) and *Freedom Radio* (1941) — are set in the period before war was declared, and show temperate heroes, in this case Germans and Austrians.³¹ Indeed their heroes, played by British actors, are domesticated for a British audience, as English-speaking exemplars of temperate masculinity. They are stoical, calm, kindly and, like Professor Horatio in *Pimpernel Smith*, committed to non-violence, offering no armed resistance. The British Board of Film Censors rejected the initial proposal for *Pastor Hall* as late as July 1939, judging that ‘even with the nationality disguised, it must be evident that the story is anti-Nazi propaganda’.³² But once war was declared it was made quickly, drawing on the story of the German Pastor Martin Niemoller, and showing Pastor Hall (Wilfred Lawson) speaking out openly against Nazi ideology and practices. The censors had no problems about passing the scenario for *Liberty Radio* (retitled *Freedom Radio* for release) in October 1939.³³ The film had a similar focus on a brave individual, showing Doctor Karl Roder (Clive Brook) setting up a clandestine radio station through which he exposes Nazi lies.

Pastor Hall and *Freedom Radio* are particularly interesting in relation to two historically important strands in British anti-alienism: anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism. They show Germany and Austria as Christian countries now assailed by a new barbarism: anti-Christian Nazis. This is a major theme of *Pastor Hall* and is also apparent in *Freedom Radio* which shows the murder of a priest — Father Landbach (Morland Graham) — by Nazis in view of his congregation because, from the pulpit, he publicly names friends who have disappeared. This murder is important to the film as a turning-point for Karl Roder — an old friend of Landbach's who witnesses his death. It is from this point that Roder begins to dedicate himself to truth-telling, setting up the radio station. Landbach is a Roman Catholic priest while Pastor Hall is Protestant, but such distinctions are irrelevant within the portrayal of anti-Christian Nazis.

Pastor Hall was highly unusual in showing Nazi persecution of the Jews. This theme was not taken up or developed in subsequent resistance films which generally excluded Jews both as resisters and as victims of Nazi atrocities. *Freedom Radio* offers a very brief glimpse of stones thrown at windows which bear the graffiti 'Jude' as its only reference to Nazi anti-Semitism. There is no explicit reference in *Pimpernel Smith* to those who escape from Germany as Jews: the opening titles refer only to 'people of many nationalities who are being persecuted and exterminated by the Nazis'. Even in *Pastor Hall* the persecution of Jews is a minor theme, subordinate not only to the story about a Christian pastor, but also to the story of the rape of a young woman by a Nazi officer. In showing the murder of priests in Christian countries, both *Pastor Hall* and *Freedom Radio* suggest a wider sense of Europe as

Christendom now under threat in which Jewishness has little place. The contribution to these productions of Jewish European exiles, migrants and their descendants was nevertheless considerable.³⁴ *Pastor Hall* was based on a play by Ernst Toller — a German Jew living in exile who committed suicide shortly before the film went into production. Mutz Greenbaum, also a German Jew, was the cinematographer for *Pimpernel Smith* while Leslie Howard who directed and produced it was the son of Jewish Hungarian parents, born to them soon after they arrived in Britain.

Early resistance narratives began to define ‘good Europeans’ by their anti-Nazi action and, through their portrayal of such ‘good Europeans’, countered the anti-alienism of the Fifth Column scare. Their theme of British anti-Nazi action in the pre-war period meant that they denied appeasement and the insularity used to justify this policy and, through their focus on the past, did not begin to develop any narrative of wartime resistance. It was from 1941 that such a narrative became quickly established in stories that moved away from the period before the British declaration of war on Germany, celebrating the courage of resistance movements in countries occupied by Germany. The ‘good German’ portrayed in *Pastor Hall* and the distinction between Nazis and Germans increasingly faded from view and, after 1940, the possibility that Germans could be ‘good Europeans’ was seldom entertained.³⁵ But good Europeans, as defined by their resistance to Nazi Germany, multiplied in narratives that increasingly suggested an entire continent engaged in resistance.

Europe against the Germans

In late 1941, Jiri Weiss, a Czechoslovakian Jewish filmmaker who had fled from Prague in 1938, advocated enlarging the ideological scope of British documentary film. British film propaganda he suggested, should make clear that 'Britain stands for much more than just the British Empire' and tell 'true stories of the multitude of nations which have forgotten the enmities of yesterday, and now stand side by side'. He urged his colleagues to show not only the face of Britain, but also 'the face of Poland, of Holland, of Czechoslovakia'. But he also urged particular types of face — not those of the 'notables' like Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands and King George of Greece, but those of the ordinary people 'over there, at home, facing the terror of the enemy'.³⁶

In 1942-4 resistance films — feature as well as documentary — began to focus on the faces of ordinary people, producing an image of a 'people's resistance' on the continent corresponding to imagery of a 'people's war' in Britain. Tributes to brave individuals like Pastor Hall and Doctor Roder were succeeded by emphasis on an organised collective. In *One Of Our Aircraft Is Missing* — the first of a number of resistance films released in 1942 — this collective consists of all the Dutch portrayed — diverse by class, gender and age — with the exception of one collaborator. In *The Day Will Dawn*, also released in 1942, it encompasses the entire Norwegian village portrayed, again with the exception of one collaborator. A core resistance group is identified through a characteristic father-daughter pair who are seaman and seawoman, and a schoolmaster, postman, and baker. The film preserves a gentlemanly British hero in Colin Metcalfe (Hugh Williams) who encounters resisters in Norway first as a journalist and then as a British agent.

The good European in resistance imagery was above all else a good patriot, and resistance was usually shown in specific national contexts, but there was a constant pull towards the idea of an entire continent united in resistance, as in the slogan of the V campaign of 1941 — ‘Europe against the Germans’. In a preliminary plan for the campaign, Douglas Ritchie of the BBC European News, suggested that: ‘The first weeks might be devoted to establishing a feeling of solidarity between oppressed peoples. In fact a European consciousness’.³⁷ The cumulative effect of narratives contributed to the idea of such a consciousness and is particularly evident in BBC radio series. *They Shall Rise Again*, broadcast in 1942, had a title that united ideas about resistance across the continent, paying tribute to famous cities now under Nazi rule including Athens, Belgrade, Paris, Prague, Louvain, Rotterdam and Warsaw.³⁸ *The Silent Battle* — a six-part series broadcast in 1944 — celebrated a wide range of resistance activities in Belgium, Holland, Poland and Yugoslavia. Its episode on the underground press, named French, Belgian, Dutch, Norwegian, Polish and Danish newspapers and made them a symbol of European unity: ‘When each occupied country stirs to the grind of secret presses it talks to all Europe under the noses of the conquerors’.³⁹ In an episode set in Poland where radio-ownership was banned, it made similar claims for secret radio: ‘It might symbolise resistance all over Europe; it might be the voice of the Underground itself in any enslaved country until ... God speed the day ... the nations rise again and the silent battle is won’.⁴⁰

Within imagery of a ‘people’s resistance’ Jews rarely featured either as resisters or victims of atrocities, while divisions within resistance movements and the prominence of Communists were obscured. The absence of collaborators was also notable. Sometimes, as in early examples like *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* and *The*

Day Will Dawn there is one collaborator — an isolated individual, easily outwitted by the collective organisation and unity of resisters. In these ways the story told in wartime Britain foreshadowed stories told on the continent once the war was over.

In many films in the resistance cycle, continental Europeans who are ostensibly collaborating — and earning the hatred of local communities for doing so — are in fact using collaboration as a cover for their resistance activities. Both the hatred they earn and their true identity as resisters mark out the idea of widespread support for the resistance. The theme was taken up in radio programmes. In the episode of *The Silent Battle* on secret radio, set in Poland, a woman mistakes a resistance leader — Jankowski — for a collaborator and informs on him to the Gestapo. The programme celebrates the way in which, despite this information, Jankowski successfully evades discovery. But when he tells the woman of his true identity, he comments that: ‘the worst of the case is being despised by your own compatriots’.⁴¹

Resisters who masquerade as collaborators are often father-daughter pairs — a pairing already apparent in early resistance stories. In *Uncensored* (1942) set in Belgium, and *The Secret Mission* (1942) and *Tomorrow We Live* (1942), both set in France, father and daughter work closely together, entertaining and flattering Nazis, but also constantly outwitting them.⁴² This family theme means that encounters between Nazis and continental Europeans sometimes take place in domestic interiors. But German civilians like Pastor Hall largely disappear from view after 1941, and virtually all Germans shown in feature films — with the exception of spies — wear military uniforms. Encounters between Germans and other Europeans are thus

invariably between military men and civilians, including women. The ‘hyper-masculinity’ of the Nazis noted by Sonya Rose was much in evidence in resistance imagery often contrasting with the familial virtues of the father-daughter pair, although the figure of the stupid, blundering officer provided some reassurance that not all Germans posed a serious threat. Such officers were frequently fat and always easily outwitted.⁴³

A BBC European Intelligence Report in 1941, commenting on the V campaign, stated that ‘our aim is to produce resistance without revolution’.⁴⁴ Much of the imagery of Europe in resistance narratives presented a conservative continent, with emphasis on freedoms enjoyed before Nazi occupation, and the awaited liberation as an event that would restore such freedoms rather than producing any new order. This was the theme of the BBC *They Shall Rise Again* series and a further radio series broadcast in 1942 entitled *Salute To* — that included Belgium, Czechoslovakia and the people of France, Holland, Greece, Luxembourg and Poland amongst those it saluted. Both rehearsed historical details of the cities and nations they celebrated, emphasising their love of freedom as well as patriotism as the basis of their resistance.⁴⁵ *La Libre Belgique* attracted more publicity in wartime Britain than any other underground newspaper, perhaps because it bore the same title as its First World War counterpart.⁴⁶ *Uncensored* (1942) — a film devoted to honouring resisters who produce this newspaper — makes much of this connection. It celebrates Belgian heritage when, after Nazis discover the printing press, resisters continue to produce the paper on a seventeenth-century press in the Musée Des Beaux Arts which, miraculously, still works. Perhaps the most conservative of all films was *The Flemish Farm* (1943) which shows a Belgian airman’s return to occupied Belgium to bring

back the regimental colours that are buried there.⁴⁷ A former commander aids the airman on this mission — a resistance leader who is labelled a ‘Jew Communist’ by Nazis before they shoot him. This is of course a lie. Celebration of Communist or Jewish involvement in the resistance is very far from the film’s purpose.

Despite their prominence in resistance movements once the Soviet Union entered the war, Communists were generally excluded from British resistance narratives. After 1941, British propaganda on the Soviet Union offered praise for the virtues of the Russian people while managing to avoid references to Communism and resistance narratives followed the same model.⁴⁸ *Undercover* (1943), set in Yugoslavia, was originally intended to celebrate the activities of Chetniks as guerrilla fighters and entitled *Chetnik*. When the British government decided to support the Chetniks’ rivals — Communist partisans led by Josip Tito — the film-makers changed this title. Even so, *Undercover* obscured both the Communism of the resisters and divisions within the Yugoslavian resistance movement.⁴⁹

Conservative imagery did not preclude unprecedented support for clandestine organisations using terrorist methods — sabotage and murder. The commitment to non-violence that characterised early resistance stories, expressed through characters like Pastor Hall, Doctor Roder and Horatio Smith, receded. Saboteurs featured in cartoons. In one *Daily Mail* example in 1942, a man carrying boxes labelled ‘Dynamite’ taps a Nazi on the shoulder asking for a match.⁵⁰ On occasions there is an attempt to soften the image of saboteurs — *Uncensored* shows a resister’s anxiety to prevent a woman wheeling a pram into an area where he knows an explosion is imminent. But there was also considerable support for violent revenge against Nazis.

The hero of *Uncensored*, finding that Nazi troops invading Belgium have used flame-throwers to burn women and children alive, later encounters one of the perpetrators of this massacre and bayonets him to death, confessing to a Roman Catholic priest that he has 'killed a man in cold blood'. In the radio programme 'They Saw Him Die' (1944) a Polish wedding party is massacred by Germans and avenged by the bridegroom's brother who works in the resistance.⁵¹ Support for violent revenge in Europe coincided with condemnation of non-violent resistance against British rule in India when, in 1942, demonstrations by the Quit India Movement were condemned by Winston Churchill, followed by much of the British media, as the work of 'hooligans and agitators'.⁵² Thus violent resistance to German rule in Europe produced a very different verdict from non-violent resistance to British rule in empire. Good patriots were European, not Indian.

In September 1942, the Director of Talks at the BBC commented: 'It is not easy to make the British public realise what is happening in the Continent since we find that there is a distinct "sales resistance" to horror stories'.⁵³ This cautious approach was based on fears that audiences' identification of 'horror' as propaganda would undermine British claims to truth-telling. Even so, Nazi atrocities were a pervasive theme of resistance narratives and some made such atrocities their major focus. *The Silent Village* (1943) shows the Nazi massacre of the inhabitants of the Czechoslovakian village of Lidice which took place on 10 June 1942. It ends with a sequence where the women and children of the village are marched off to detention camps, and all the men are backed up against a wall, then shot.⁵⁴ However, genocide against Jews in Europe was only given sporadic attention in the media because of fears that publicity would stimulate anti-Semitism at home, while the idea of the good

patriot and the good European was not generally extended to Jews. Nor were Jews incorporated into a common idea that resisters were particularly determined to act against Nazi Germany because of their first-hand experience of persecution.

In 1942 British media, including the BBC, gave Nazi genocide against Jews substantial publicity, especially through reporting a speech in Parliament by the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, where he stated that the German authorities were now carrying out 'Hitler's oft repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe'. His statement was followed by a one-minute silence in Parliament for the victims.⁵⁵ But there was increasing concern about the impact of such publicity on anti-Semitism at home. A Ministry of Information Home Intelligence Weekly Report in January 1943 commented that while such atrocities 'continue to be regarded with horror' one result of publicity for them was that 'people are more conscious of the Jews they do not like here'.⁵⁶ The BBC turned down suggestions for a series of programmes on anti-Semitism and a programme on Jews in the popular Postscript series as part of a wider decision to limit discussion of Jews. From 1943, following the advice of a deputation from the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the decision was made to limit coverage of Jews to 'occasional favourable notices' in news bulletins.⁵⁷ In April 1943 the final word was delivered by the Director General after discussion with the Chairman: 'the present time is not opportune for dealing with the Jewish problem in our programmes'.⁵⁸

In its exclusions — collaborators, Communists, Jews — the British wartime narrative not only foreshadowed post-war imagery produced in continental Europe, but also corresponded to the wartime narrative of a 'people's war'. Despite extensive

efforts to produce inclusive imagery, Jews were generally missing from the ‘people’s war’ and Communists entirely absent. British collaborators were sometimes shown, but it is significant that *Went The Day Well?* (1942), imagining the invasion of Britain, makes the Fifth Columnist the local squire while the ordinary people of the village are united in resistance.⁵⁹ The narrative of a ‘people’s war’ and a European ‘people’s resistance’ were generally separate, and the latter often showed autonomous movements on the continent engaged in a wide range of underground activities, with no reference to Britain. But ‘people’s war’ and ‘people’s resistance’ could sometimes merge.

Britain and Europe, 1942-1944

The first resistance film released in 1942 shows a group of downed British airmen who are diverse by class, age and region, encountering Dutch resisters who are similarly diverse, merging imagery of the ‘people’s war’ and the European ‘people’s resistance’. *One Of Our Aircraft Is Missing* reversed the roles played in early resistance films where Britons helped continental Europeans to escape from Germany. It showed Dutch resisters helping the British airmen to escape from occupied Holland with great resourcefulness and courage, and at considerable risk to their own lives. The Dutch provide for the airmen: a route to the sea, and shelter, hiding places, food and friendship on the way.

In the early stages of the war, the theme of British leadership of the European resistance had been much more prominent than any ‘we’ of cooperation and unity between British and resisters. Although the V campaign was initiated by Victor de

Laveleye, leadership was quickly taken over by the British . A BBC European Intelligence Report urged the need for ‘radio leadership’ in order to ‘to gain and keep the power of commanding action from disarmed and hungry peoples and to use that power exactly as and when it can most help the High Command’ . The Report suggested that Winston Churchill should proclaim himself Commander-in-Chief of the campaign.⁶⁰ Douglas Ritchie in his preliminary report made frequent reference to what the V army in Europe would be prepared to do ‘at a word from London’ and was immensely optimistic about the possibilities of broadcasting as a weapon of war. He stated: ‘We shall tell them what to do when the time comes. In the meantime they must listen to us’ . The language of ‘them’ and ‘us’ was extended in his view that ‘they must deserve our victory’ .⁶¹

Reporting on the V campaign in 1941, BBC European Intelligence paper also deployed the language of ‘them’ and ‘us’ suggesting that: ‘These people (of oppressed Europe) still need from us symbols, songs, slogans, jokes, rolls of honour, names of traitors’ .⁶² The language of ‘them’ and ‘us’ is also apparent in different versions of a slogan that was used a good deal in 1942, expressing confidence that Europe would rise again. As ‘We Shall Rise Again’, it appeared at the end of *Uncensored* printed on the bottom of *La Libre Belgique*, clutched by a Belgian who has just been shot by Germans. As ‘The Netherlands Will Rise Again!’ it was the final intertitle of *One Of Our Aircraft Is Missing*, shown first in Dutch — ‘Nederland Zal Herrijzen!’ — and then duly translated. But in the BBC series, broadcast in 1942, it became *They Shall Rise Again* — a title that identified the difference between British and continental European wartime experience. The ‘we’ of ‘we shall rise again’ is continental Europe

only. Britain, having escaped invasion, occupation and oppression by Germany had no need to 'rise again'.

The 'we' of British and Europeans united in resistance, however, was at least as prominent in resistance narratives in 1942-4 as a 'we' encompassing only continental Europe. Many documentaries showed continental European exiles continuing the anti-Nazi struggle, fighting alongside the British.⁶³ Feature films set in continental Europe showed British and resisters working together. In most narratives in this period, British leadership was much less apparent than close cooperation between British and continental Europeans in a common endeavour. Feature films often showed initial suspicion and mistrust on both sides. The theme of masquerade appears at the outset of *One Of Our Aircraft Is Missing* when the Dutch suspect the British are Nazi agents disguised in RAF uniform, and in their turn the British suspect the Dutch are masquerading as resisters. But a relationship of trust, friendship and mutual respect is quickly established. Such a relationship was also shown in films about British agents on missions to continental Europe — to organise a commando raid on a German submarine base in a Norwegian fjord (*The Day Will Dawn*), to locate a German installation in France that must be destroyed (*Secret Mission*) and to blow up a secret weapons factory in Czechoslovakia (*The Adventures of Tartu*).⁶⁴ All these films emphasise the dependence of British agents on their contacts in Europe and show Europeans helping Britons — providing local knowledge and equipment as well as food and hiding places. Europeans risk their lives through their involvement in these missions, and often die as a result of such involvement.

Solidarity in resistance even extended to support for British bombing raids on occupied countries — at least in media images. In fact there was a good deal of

anxiety about the impact of such raids on public opinion in continental Europe. A BBC European Intelligence Paper, drawing on letters received by the BBC and others, interviews with travellers, reports from neutral observers and admissions made by Paris and Vichy press and radio, charted reactions ranging from acceptance and even welcome, through the view that Britain should focus on bombing Germany, to sharply anti-British opinion.⁶⁵ But in resistance narratives RAF raids cement British-European unity rather than disrupting it. In *The Flemish Farm*, the Belgian airman's mother tells him that although she is afraid when the RAF come over, she is disappointed when they don't. The radio programme *Salute to Greece* begins with a dialogue between two Greek women who hear the drone of planes:

Penelope: God is good Lina. That is the RAF.

Lina: Come on in friends, come and drop your bombs on us. We don't mind, do we Penelope.

Penelope: Not if they kill some of our enemies ... Drop your bombs friends and may they be big ones.⁶⁶

In *One Of Our Aircraft is Missing* as a raid over Holland begins, Jo de Vries tells the downed airmen 'that's what you're doing for us', describing the RAF's 'steady hum, night after night' as 'that noise which is oil for the burning fire in our hearts'.

Female resisters are often foregrounded in resistance narratives, while the British, like Germans, are male. Gender is thus important in the construction of British-European relations as it is in the construction of German-European relations, but with entirely different meanings. German men's romantic attachments with

women in occupied countries are never shown, and there are no references to what the French called 'horizontal collaboration' between German men and European women, or to any heterosexual or homosexual relationships between Germans and nationals of occupied countries. Several films, however, do show German men forcing their attentions on female resisters who refuse them.⁶⁷ In contrast, many films feature cross-national romantic plots between British men and female resisters.⁶⁸ Early resistance films, through such romantic plots and their construction of national relations through gender relations, had reinforced an image of British benevolent paternalism, but in films made in 1942-4 the image is frequently one of British men's strong admiration for the courage of female resisters as well as their dependence on them for safety and survival.

One reviewer of *Undercover* noted that in its portrayal of Yugoslavian resistance 'the fierce patriots are lost under a calm English exterior'.⁶⁹ The qualities of temperate masculinity had characterised Pastor Hall and Doctor Roder in early resistance films, and to some extent continental European heroes, like their British counterparts, continued to be given these qualities. In *The New Lot* — a British Army training film made in 1943 — a group of five British conscripts, disparate by class and age and bound for their first experience of army life on a train, encounter a Czech soldier (Albert Lieven). While the conscripts are worried about leaving their families, the Czech soldier does not know whether his wife and two children are still alive. While they are reluctant to join the army, he tells them that 'if England collapses, then the whole of Europe will be a washout ... everything will be lost'. The British conscripts' grumbles and reluctance to play a part in resisting Hitler are explicitly juxtaposed against the Czech soldier's stoicism. His quiet and serious speech and his

pipe-smoking make this Czech into a version of the exemplary Englishman that the conscripts — at this stage in the film at any rate — conspicuously fail to match.⁷⁰

Continental masculinity however, was often distinguished from British masculinity through the particular determination attributed to resisters who desire revenge for oppression and atrocities experienced at first hand. British wartime productions endorsed violent revenge — as in the bayoneting of a German soldier by the hero of *Uncensored*. The documentary *Diary of a Polish Airman* (1942) traces the airman's wartime life before he is killed in action, through his diary entries, showing how, as the Germans surround Warsaw, he continues the fight initially from France and then from Britain.⁷¹ One entry declares that: 'The murderers of Warsaw women and children WILL be punished'. The film suggests a shared martial masculinity between Britons and Poles of mutual respect, sacrifice and effort, but one in which Polish desire for revenge is prominent. *Documentary Newsletter* commented that many would find it difficult to appreciate 'a type of person who carries on a vendetta sort of fight from one country to another' but thought that the film succeeded in 'making their [Poles'] hate of Hitler very real'.⁷² A survey of 36 British viewers found that nineteen of them 'strongly approved' of the film, which was thought to show not only 'the courage and patriotism of Poles', but also their 'hatred for the Germans and desire for revenge'.⁷³

Despite this distinction between continental and British masculinity, casting and linguistic practices domesticated the continental Europeans that resistance films portrayed. Jo Fox's work has demonstrated the pervasive role of linguistic methods — dialect, accent and scripting — in developing the idea of a 'people's war' where a

united effort against the enemy crosses differences of class.⁷⁴ In early resistance films like *Pastor Hall* and *Freedom Radio*, those resisting Hitler speak English, and accent is used in a similar way to films of the ‘people’s war’ to signify class difference — in this case among continental Europeans. But in later films accent increasingly becomes a national identifier rather than a social identifier to signify non-Britishness. While the roles offered to Europeans in exile in Britain were restricted by their accents and they usually played foreigners, no such restrictions applied to British actors who were cast in resistance films in roles representing a range of continental European nationalities.⁷⁵ Accent as national identifier therefore involves British actors in attempts to mimic French, Dutch or Belgian pronunciations of English, producing a type of broken English. Unusually in *One Of Our Aircraft Is Missing* a good deal of Dutch is spoken, so that British actors in the film not only speak in English with an attempted Dutch accent, but also in Dutch which they mispronounce.⁷⁶ The effect — especially when the British actors performing as continental Europeans are well-known to British audiences — is to suggest national identity as performance,

National difference as performance was also suggested by a prominent theme in many resistance films: masquerade. Resisters masquerade as collaborators, British agents travel under false identity papers and masquerade as German officers to enter German bases. In *One Of Our Aircraft Is Missing* the Dutch resisters assist the British airmen in such masquerade, providing them with Dutch names and addresses for their passes as well as clothes which will disguise them as Dutch civilians on their journey to the coast. A prominent Dutch female resister who hides them — Jo de Vries — is masquerading as a collaborator who hates the British. The theme of performance is emphasised particularly through the dialogue given to Frank Shelley (Hugh

Williams), one of the airmen who in pre-war life had been an actor. Shelley is disguised as a Dutch woman and relishes the part. 'Perfect little character sketches, real little cameos', he comments.

Hugh Williams was a British actor who served in the army in the Second World War as well as taking occasional film roles, and is playing a British actor turned airman who masquerades as a Dutch woman. Googie Withers who plays Joe de Vries was a British actress whose mother was Dutch and is acting the part of a Dutch woman masquerading as a collaborator who hates the British. In describing the British airmen disguised as Dutch civilians as 'perfect little character sketches', Frank Shelley/Hugh Williams implicitly praises his own performance in the film. In many ways *One Of Our Aircraft Is Missing* shows national difference as performance. But it is a performance that is also dominated by the British.

Michael Powell, reflecting on the production of *One Of Our Aircraft is Missing* recorded that:

One of Emeric [Pressburger]'s very best ideas was to hear Germans everywhere, but only to see them in the distance, if at all. We picked all the dozens of voices carefully, whether they were making jokes as they signed civilian passes, or barking orders. The audience saw military vehicles packed with soldiers careering along with their klaxons blaring, but we never got close to a German in the whole film except in the sequence in the church.⁷⁷

Powell's comment suggests the extent to which, while there was comparatively little interest in dramatising differences between British and resisters, attention was focused

on dramatising national difference between Germans and other Europeans — in this film Britons and Dutch. It also suggests the significance of sound tracks in establishing such differences. The first image of Germany in *Pimpernel Smith* as Professor Horatio Smith and his student party arrive at the border is a tourist sign — ‘Come to Romantic Germany’, and against this the sound track plays a ranting speech by Hitler followed by the sound of marching and machine gun fire. In *The Secret Mission* Nazis raid a French farm suspecting a French woman of hiding British agents and, failing to discover them, attempt to incriminate her by switching on her radio. The audience knows that it is tuned to the BBC. But the Nazis leave saluting the woman. Fortuitously, at the moment when they turn the radio on, the BBC, preparing to analyse a speech by Hitler, is broadcasting his ranting voice.

Voices barking orders in Germans and klaxons blaring were common to many resistance films. They contrast with the stealth and whisperings that — in films that show the British in continental Europe — are common to resisters and Britons. In *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*, the first stage of the journey to the coast, in which downed British airman are disguised as Dutch civilians, is shown as a long line of cyclists. The only noise on the sound track is the gentle tinkle of bicycle bells. Arriving at a cross-roads, the need to halt for the German military is announced by the aggressive clamour of their klaxons. In *The Silent Village*, as in *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*, the presence of Germans is registered on the sound track rather than visually, and Germans shown very fleetingly, and only from behind. A great deal of German is spoken in the film: orders, warnings, and threats broadcast by radio and loud-speakers in aggressive and highly oppressive sound. Other European languages are sometimes spoken in resistance films, but often mispronounced by British actors. British actors

and actresses usually play resisters, but exiled Europeans — including many Jews — are sometimes cast as Germans so that German is spoken in a wide range of voices.⁷⁸ Even so, German is mainly reserved for shouted orders and threats, often followed by the sound of machine-gun fire. Speaking German becomes a sign of brutality that is ‘not European’.

The British resistance narrative in 1942-4 came close to producing the idea of a common European identity which incorporated the British — suggesting European national difference as performance through the theme of masquerade, and showing a united endeavour by British and resisters, characterised by relationships of cooperation, mutuality and trust. This was always defined against Germans. The resistance narrative also domesticated imagery of the continent, translating its peoples and languages into English.

Post-war resistance narratives

In 1954, in the context of debates about the rearmament of West Germany, the British government considered censoring an episode of the BBC’s first television series on the Second World War — *War in the Air* — which showed Germany as a militaristic power. Winston Churchill, Prime Minister in 1954, minuting that he had watched the ‘offending film’, stated that: ‘compared to the harm done by Lord Russell of Liverpool’s book it is trivial’.⁷⁹ On the same day, apparently having difficulty in bringing himself to name the title of the book, Churchill informed the Foreign Office that: ‘Lord Russell of Liverpool’s book has already sold 60,000 copies and is being reprinted as fast as possible as the demand is very great’.⁸⁰ The title of the book was

The Scourge of the Swastika and, according to the preface, was ‘intended to provide the ordinary reader with a truthful and accurate account of many ... German war crimes’.⁸¹ The book was deemed ‘offensive’ by officials because ‘there is no doubt that many Germans would now be frightfully hurt by this book’ and because ‘it does little good to rake over the ashes of the past’.⁸²

The *Daily Express* reported the attempt to ban *The Scourge of the Swastika* under the headline ‘Monstrous Act of Censorship’ and proceeded to serialise the book.⁸³ The Cold War shift in official attitudes to West Germany was not always replicated in the media where the question of West Germany’s re-entry into a European family of nations remained contentious. The complex politics surrounding memories of the Second World War are apparent in the tension between Cold War imperatives and official concerns in the 1950s that the memory of wartime resistance in Europe neglected the British contribution. Christopher Murphy’s work demonstrates that such concerns were particularly about Britain’s former wartime allies taking credit: the US through publicity for the Office of Strategic Services and its role in organising resistance, but also the Soviet Union who were seen as spreading the impression that ‘the Communists alone amongst the allies had given real support to indigenous resistance movements’.⁸⁴ In line with Cold War imperatives, public memories of the Second World War in Britain, evoked most obviously through the prolific cycle of Second World War films, celebrated the national wartime record largely as a masculine military conflict with Germany, neglecting Nazi war crimes. The post-war resistance narrative, continuing to make audiences aware of what the *Monthly Film Bulletin* had thought ‘all too familiar’ in 1943 — ‘hostages, torture, raids and death’ — was, by the 1950s, an important exception to such neglect.

In wartime there had been considerable optimism about getting British propaganda into continental Europe when occupied countries were liberated. As early as 1943, the Ministry of Information reorganised the European section of its films division to plan for such propaganda, anticipating that, since ‘the continent has been starved of everything except Nazi controlled films and very old French ones’, liberation would mean ‘a thirsty market for both entertainment and propaganda films’.⁸⁵ By September 1945 it had produced a lengthy catalogue of films for distribution in liberated European territories.⁸⁶ Most of those listed were films made in wartime, including many from the cycle of resistance films made in 1942-3. But there were some still in the process of completion, including two made specially for distribution in France. *Jail Breakers* (1945) was described in the catalogue as a film that ‘told the story of how resistance men, under sentence of death in February 1944 in Amiens jail, were saved by the brilliant pin-point bombing attack of RAF Mosquitoes.’⁸⁷ *Presence au Combat* (1945) paid tribute to the Fighting French Movement.

Presence au Combat was never shown in France where there was speedy reconstruction of French cinema and production of a French resistance narrative after liberation.⁸⁸ Indeed a documentary on the Paris insurrection of August 1944 — *La Liberation de Paris* (1944) — was made during the liberation, with careful advance planning ‘to ensure that there were enough crews to cover the whole city, with enough equipment and films stock to complete the job’.⁸⁹ It was screened in Paris just five days after the city was finally freed. A cycle of French resistance films followed, peaking in 1946. As in General de Gaulle's speech in August 1944, on the day before

his triumphal march in Paris, which referred to ‘our beloved friends and admirable allies’ only at the end, the Allies in French resistance films were often, at best, an afterthought.⁹⁰ Suzanne Langlois observes that the editing of *La Liberation de Paris* ‘reinforces the notion that the internal insurrection had accomplished the essential fighting before the arrival of the Allied armed forces’.⁹¹ Pierre Sorlin, discussing *La Bataille du Rail* (1946) which shows a group of railway workers blowing up a German convoy on the eve of Liberation, notes that ‘the plot is reduced to a confrontation between the occupiers and the resisters. Although the film ends with the Liberation, it is portrayed as though it is a consequence of the successful sabotage of the German train convoy by the Resistance and there is no reference to the landings of US and British troops’.⁹²

There was little concern in Britain about the neglect of the Allied role in liberation in French films: they had relatively limited distribution in Britain. But some US productions with much wider distribution prompted considerable protests that the US gave little credit to the British contribution to the war – indeed claimed credit itself for British achievements. Objections to *Objective Burma* (1945), focused on its portrayal of the Burma campaign as led by Americans, not British, and led to its withdrawal from British cinemas.⁹³ When a US documentary series — *Victory at Sea* — was shown on BBC television in 1952, there were demands for a British series, and the eventual production of such a series by the BBC — *War in the Air*, shown in 1954 — was widely welcomed by reviewers as a challenge to the earlier US production.⁹⁴ Reviewing the first episode, *Reynolds News* hailed it as ‘Britain’s answer to ... *Victory at Sea* with its “alone-we-did-it” message to the world. *War in*

the Air will tell British viewers a different story to the narrative whose one-sidedness stirred up some resentment this side of the Atlantic'.⁹⁵

Within the complex politics surrounding memories of war, British cinema was no different from French and US cinemas in an increasingly narrow focus on national heroes and national victory dispensing with attention to its wartime Allies once the war was over. *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946) was one of the last films to celebrate the British-American alliance.⁹⁶ The Soviet Union — only sketchily shown in any case in wartime films — was also neglected and, with the onset of the Cold War, increasingly portrayed as enemy, not former Ally.⁹⁷ White Australians, Canadians and New Zealanders — always the main focus of wartime imagery of empire — continued to be shown from time to time, but the part played by Africans, Caribbeans, Indians and Maori was generally forgotten.⁹⁸ The enduring nature of the resistance narrative makes it a notable exception to these developments. Produced for domestic consumption on film and radio, and taken up by television, it remained a story that the British told themselves.⁹⁹

The resistance narrative, however, was substantially reworked in a post-war context to tell the story of 'Europe against the Germans' as a story of how Britain led Europe in ridding the continent of Nazis. These developments were signalled by the first British post-war resistance film — a documentary made by the RAF Film Unit. Given the prolific production of resistance narratives in wartime, its title — *Now It Can Be Told* — might seem a strange choice for any resistance story made as late as 1946, but it was also highly significant to the way in which resistance narratives were reworked once the war was over.¹⁰⁰ What could be told after 1945 was the story of the

Special Operations Executive (SOE) — a British organisation set up in 1940 which had remained such a closely guarded secret in wartime that its existence was not even acknowledged.

Now It Can Be Told rehearses the story of the SOE in considerable detail, beginning with a careful account of its organisation of resistance activities from Britain — the interview process through which agents are recruited; their training, including practice in parachuting and withstanding interrogation; the issue of equipment, including suicide pills; their journey to the aircraft which will take them on their mission to France; the parachute drop and reception after the drop. Harry Ree and Jacqueline Nearne, the agents recruited in the opening sequence, had both worked as wartime agents in the SOE, and in *Now it Can Be Told*, they act out their wartime roles in France for the camera. This sequence of events, beginning with SOE recruitment and training in Britain and moving on to the parachute drop into occupied Europe was taken up in a number of feature films which drew on documentary techniques. *Against The Wind* (1947) incorporates semi-documentary training sequences.¹⁰¹ In *Odette* (1950) the commanding officer — Colonel Maurice Buckman who was the head of the French section of the SOE — not only acts out his own role within the film but also appears at the outset to offer what he calls a ‘foreword’, his authority serving to authenticate the film’s realism as he assures the audience that ‘I know ... that this story is a true one’.¹⁰²

The increasing prominence given to the British role in European resistance movements through the focus on the SOE sometimes extended to a tendency to claim continental European heroism for the British, exemplified in the reception of *Odette*.

The premiere of the film, attended by the King and Queen, was something of a national event. Odette Marie-Celine Sansom, whose story was told in the film was a French woman living in Britain at the time of her recruitment to the SOE. In August 1946 she became the first woman to be awarded the George Cross and, like the award, the film paid tribute to her ‘courage, endurance and self sacrifice’.¹⁰³ A British actress, Anna Neagle, who was associated with pre-war roles that included Queen Victoria and the First World War British heroine, Edith Cavell — played Odette. She spoke English in the film with an attempt at a French accent. *The People* applauded the film as ‘one of our greatest stories’.¹⁰⁴ *Reynolds News* commented that ‘Anna Neagle with a French accent was still unmistakably British’.¹⁰⁵ When the *Sunday Graphic*, reviewing the film, acclaimed Odette’s ‘extraordinary heroism as a British agent’ which ‘earned her the George Cross’ and commented that ‘if we did not know that it was a true story, it would seem too incredible ... that a woman could endure so much suffering for her country’ it was not clear whether they meant France or Britain.¹⁰⁶

The persistence of women in the foreground of resistance imagery in British post-war films is notable, and not always confined to continental European women, however their nationality was understood. The BBC television play *Madeleine* (1955) which, like *Odette* took its title from the name of its heroine, celebrated a woman of American-Indian parentage — Noor Inayat Khan who was recruited by the SOE to work in France, and given the code-name Madeleine.¹⁰⁷ The French resistance narrative generally neglected women’s part in the resistance, crediting French masculinity with the honourable wartime roles portrayed in French post-war resistance films and other media.¹⁰⁸ In British films, at a time when women were

increasingly expelled from British imagery of the Second World War, and especially from active involvement in it, the continued portrayal of continental European women is notable.¹⁰⁹ The portrayal of female resisters may have contributed to the possibility of claiming continental European heroism for the British through the idea of transnational white femininity where differences of nationality are subsumed under a common defining womanhood. However, resistance films also developed a distinctive image of European femininity — in a narrative that told of their suffering as well as their strength and courage.

Christine Geraghty has demonstrated the extent to which, in 1950s British cinema, the figure of the European woman presented a particular configuration of sexuality and politics, combining sexual experience with a tragic knowledge of the war.¹¹⁰ As Geraghty notes, Simone Signoret's performance as Michelle in *Against The Wind* was amongst the first of such depictions. It was also a rare piece of casting: one where a heroine playing a Belgian SOE agent spoke English with an effortless French accent.¹¹¹ Michelle's sufferings are about her past love for a man who has turned collaborator. In *Odette*, the sufferings of the heroine are a key theme of the film which shows her undercover work in France and subsequent capture, interrogation and torture by the Gestapo, her death sentence which is never carried out, and her incarceration in Ravensbruck concentration camp where she is deported. In a wider narrative of a suffering and chaotic continent, British films about the Nazi legacy in Europe focusing on displaced persons camps — *Portrait From Life* (1948) and *The Lost People* (1949) — also developed themes about the sufferings of Europe through female figures.¹¹²

Nazi racial victims had little place within this narrative of female suffering, despite extensive newspaper, magazine and newsreel coverage of the liberation of the concentration camps in 1945. With some exceptions, like the *Manchester Guardian*, there had been few references in any case in such coverage to the Nazi racial ideology that informed practices in concentration camps, or to the victims of this ideology. Thus genocide against the Jews continued to be obscured in a narrative which focused on the sufferings of resisters, and especially female resisters. However, the post-war narrative gave much more attention to collaborators, as in Michelle's personal tragedy in *Against the Wind*, and in a recurrent theme of resisters' awareness of the risk of betrayal by their own compatriots.

British involvement in wartime continental Europe is at the heart of the post-war resistance narrative with its focus on the SOE, but the British are also set apart from the continental struggle. Britain, resistance films make clear, has furnished leadership to continental Europe, its moral authority enhanced by its wartime role. No questions arise about British wartime records: they are assumed to be honourable. Moreover British leadership — organising resistance from London or working alongside continental Europeans as SOE agents — is masculine, setting Britain apart from the narrative of continental female strength and suffering. The construction of national relations through gender relations positions Britain as masculine in relation to other European nationalities and as paternalistic — the leader, champion and protector of Nazi-occupied European nations and a place of stability in contrast to war-torn Europe.

Conclusion

The enduring nature of the resistance narrative suggests that the historiographical consensus about the impact of the Second World War on British-European relations needs some complication and revision. In wartime it told a stirring story of continental Europe as a place of danger but also a place of immense courage and very determined resistance. Early stories showed brave Europeans, including Germans, championing freedom. In the development of imagery of a 'people's resistance' in 1942-4, Europe was shown as united against Germany, and defined against Germany.

The resistance narrative produced a range of ideas about British-European relations. Early stories denied the insularity used to justify appeasement, producing an image of benevolent paternalism in which British men rescued Europeans from oppression. From 1941, Britain had considerable investment in the idea of a continent united in resistance to Germany — decent, civilised, valiant. Initially British leadership was a prominent feature of the idea of a united continent, but in 1942-4, despite a strong tendency to domesticate continental European characters for the consumption of a British audience, imagery increasingly shifted to cooperation, mutuality, trust and partnership. In these years the media came close to identifying Britons as part of a united continent — Europe against the Germans.

Tony Judt has written of the years 1945-8 as: 'the moment not only of the division of Europe and the first stages of its post-war reconstruction but also, and in an intimately related manner, the period during which Europe's post-war memory was

moulded'.¹¹³ Across much of continental Europe, as Judt demonstrates, such post-war memory produced prolific resistance narratives. Focusing on nations as united collectives that had spent the war valiantly resisting Germany, many of the stories produced in continental Europe when the war was over closely corresponded to those told in the British media in 1942-4. However, British post-war stories, with their focus on the SOE, provided a story of British moral authority: one in which Britain had led Europe against the Germans, ridding the continent of Nazi oppression. Reverting to early wartime imagery of British leadership and benevolent paternalism, they ended the brief wartime moment when the British media came close to identifying Britons as Europeans.

In the 1950s, as other Allies and the imperial war effort were expelled from imagery and the Second World War was increasingly portrayed as a masculine military conflict between Britain and Germany, the resistance narrative persisted, foregrounding the strength and suffering of female resisters. Britain was set apart from such suffering — a place of stability in contrast to the continent. Even so, the persistence of the resistance narrative meant that British wartime involvement in continental Europe, German war crimes, and the courage of European resisters continued to resonate in British memories of the Second World War.

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- ² Kenneth Morgan, 'The Second World War and British Culture' in Brian Brivati and Harriet Jones, eds., *From Reconstruction to Integration: Britain and Europe Since 1945* (London, Leicester University Press, 1993), pp. 42-3.
- ³ Malcolm Smith, *Britain and 1940: History, Myth and Popular Memory* (London, Routledge, 2000), p. 40.
- ⁴ European Intelligence Papers, Series 2, No. 2, 8 October 1941, Written Archives Centre (BBC WAC), E2/188/1
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ Michael Stenton, *Radio London and Resistance in Occupied Europe: British Political Warfare 1939-1943* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), p. vii.
- ⁷ See, for example, *Evening Standard*, 14 July 1941; *Daily Express*, 21 July 1941; *Daily Mail*, 22 July 1941.
- ⁸ *Punch*, 13 August 1941.
- ⁹ *The Day Will Dawn* (Harold French, 1942).
- ¹⁰ *The Times*, 10 September 1942.
- ¹¹ *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 10, 115 (31 July 1943): 74, my emphasis.
- ¹² Tony Judt, 'The Past is Another Country': Myths and Memory in Post-war Europe', in Jan-Werner Muller, ed., *Memory and Power in Post-war Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 163.
- ¹³ *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1942).
- ¹⁴ *Aventure Malgache* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1944); *Bon Voyage* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1944). Bret Wood, 'Foreign Correspondence: The Rediscovered War Films of Alfred Hitchcock', *Film Comment*, 29 (July 1993): 54-8. Michael Stenton observes that 'By 1944 MOI documentaries were being shown by the Danish resistance in Copenhagen cinemas, and to audiences of Yugoslav partisans' (Stenton, *Radio London*, p. 3).
- ¹⁵ See, for example, Henri Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy: De 1944 a Nos Jours* (Paris, Editions du Sueil, 1987); Pieter Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery*

in *Western Europe, 1945-1965* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000); Judt, 'The Past is Another Country'.

¹⁶ Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation*, p. 262.

¹⁷ James Chapman, *The British at War: Cinema, State and Propaganda, 1939-1945* (London, I.B. Tauris, 1998), Chapter 10; Robert Murphy, *British Cinema and the Second World War* (London, Continuum, 2000), Chapter 4.

¹⁸ For the 'people's empire' see Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005), Chapters 2 and 3.

¹⁹ The resistance narrative was taken up by television from the 1950s. Late twentieth-century examples include *Secret Army*, a 48-episode series shown on BBC1 from 1977-79 which was parodied as 'Allo 'Allo — an 83-episode series shown on BBC1 from 1984-1987; *Wish Me Luck* — a 23-episode series made by London Weekend Television and broadcast from 1988-1990.

²⁰ *Daily Express*, 26 June 1940.

²¹ See Terri Colpi, 'The Impact of the Second World War on the British Italian Community' in David Cesarini and Tony Kushner, eds., *The Internment of Aliens in Twentieth Century Britain* (London, Frank Cass, 1993) pp. 172-3.

²² Quoted in Sonya Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939-1945* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 94.

²³ *The Lady Vanishes* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1938).

²⁴ The British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) did not take exception to a 1938 proposal for *The Exiles* which featured people driven from their homes 'providing the producers carry out their intention of not making the country identifiable in any way'. They worried about a 1938 proposal for *In His Steps* even though 'the names of countries are entirely fictitious', but rejected a 1939 proposal to make *Pastor Hall* because 'even with the nationality disguised, it must be evident that the story is anti-Nazi propaganda'. BBFC Scenario Notes, 16 December 1938; 14 July 1939; 14 July 1939.

²⁵ *Night Train to Munich* (Carol Reed, 1940); *Crook's Tour* (John Baxter, 1941). *Crook's Tour* was broadcast on BBC radio between 16 August 1941 and 20 September 1941.

²⁶ See, for example, *Daily Mail*, 28 & 29 June 1940.

²⁷ Neville Chamberlain, broadcast to nation and empire, 27 September 1938.

²⁸ *Pimpernel Smith* (Leslie Howard, 1941).

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- ²⁹ Antonia Lant, *Blackout: Reinventing Women for Wartime British Cinema* (Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 111.
- ³⁰ Rose, *Which People's War?*, Chapter 5.
- ³¹ *Pastor Hall* (Roy Boulting, 1940); *Freedom Radio* (Anthony Asquith, 1941). For a discussion of *Pastor Hall*, see James Chapman, 'Why We Fight: *Pastor Hall* and *Thunder Rock*', in Alan Burton, Tim O'Shea and Paul Wells, eds., *The Family Way: The Boulting Brothers and British Film Culture* (Trowbridge, Flick Books, 2000), pp. 81-96.
- ³² British Board of Film Censors, Scenario Notes, 14 July 1939.
- ³³ British Board of Film Censors, Scenario Notes, 6 October 1939.
- ³⁴ There is little work on European exiles contribution to the British industry by comparison with Hollywood. But see Kevin Gough-Yates, 'The British Feature Film as a European Concern: Britain and the Emigré Film Maker 1933-45', in Günter Berghaus ed., *Theatre and Film in Exile: German Artists in Britain 1933-45* (London, Berg Publishers, 1989), pp. 135-166; Kevin Gough-Yates, 'Exiles and British Cinema', in Robert Murphy, ed., *The British Cinema Book* (London, BFI, 1997), pp.104-113.
- ³⁵ 'Good Germans' continued to feature in films directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger — *The 49th Parallel* (1941) and *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943).
- ³⁶ Jiri Weiss, 'An Allied Film Unit', *Documentary Newsletter*, 2, 1 (December 1941): 233.
- ³⁷ National Archives (NA) FO 371/8396.
- ³⁸ *They Shall Rise Again* was broadcast on BBC Radio Home Service in 1942 with episodes on Warsaw, 13 August; Louvain, 20 August; Prague, 27 August; Belgrade 10 September; Athens 17 September; Rotterdam, 24 September; Paris, 1 October.
- ³⁹ 'Midnight Edition', episode 2 of *The Silent Battle*, BBC Radio Home Service, 24 February 1944.
- ⁴⁰ 'Secret Radio', episode 6 of *The Silent Battle*, BBC Radio Home Service, 22 March 1944.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴² *Uncensored* (Anthony Asquith, 1942); *Secret Mission* (Harold French, 1942); *Tomorrow We Live* (George King, 1942).
- ⁴³ See for example the officers portrayed in *The Day Will Dawn* and *Uncensored*.
- ⁴⁴ European Intelligence Papers, Series 2, No. 2, 8 October 1941, BBC WAC, E2/188/1.

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- ⁴⁵ The *Salute To* series was broadcast on BBC Radio Home Service, in 1942-3. Salute to Greece, 22 March 1942; to Poland, 3 May 1942; to Holland, 10 May 1942; to Luxembourg, 7 June 1942; to the People of France, 12 July 1942; to Belgium, 19 July 1942; to Czechoslovakia, 1 November 1942.
- ⁴⁶ See, for example, *Daily Express*, 22 April 1942; 'Army of Shadows' episode 4 of *The Silent Battle*, BBC Radio Home Service, 15 March 1944; *Uncensored*.
- ⁴⁷ *The Flemish Farm* (Jeffrey Dell, 1943).
- ⁴⁸ For propaganda about the Soviet Union see Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II* (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1979), pp. 197-208.
- ⁴⁹ *Undercover* (Sergei Nolbandov, 1943).
- ⁵⁰ *Daily Mail*, 14 May 1942.
- ⁵¹ 'They Saw Him Die', episode 1 of *The Silent Battle*, BBC Radio Home Service, 16 February 1944.
- ⁵² Webster, *Englishness and Empire*, p. 33.
- ⁵³ Memorandum from G. R Barnes, 29 September 1942, BBC WAC R34/686.
- ⁵⁴ *The Silent Village* (Humphrey Jennings, 1943).
- ⁵⁵ Anthony Eden's speech was widely reported in the media on 17 and 18 December 1942.
- ⁵⁶ Home Intelligence Weekly Report, 7 January 1943, BBC WAC, R34/277.
- ⁵⁷ The decision to turn down the series on anti-Semitism was recorded by the BBC on 17 March 1943, The decision on the Postscript on Jews was recorded on 15 April 1943. BBC WAC, R34/277. For the intervention of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, see A. E. Barker, 'Visit of Jewish delegation', 1 May 1942, WAC. R28/20.
- ⁵⁸ Memorandum from Sir Richard Maconachie, 27 April 1943, BBC WAC, R34/277.
- ⁵⁹ *Went The Day Well?* (Alberto Cavalcanti, 1942).
- ⁶⁰ European Intelligence Papers, Series 2, No. 2, 8 October 1941, BBC WAC, E2/188/1.
- ⁶¹ NA, FO 371/8396.
- ⁶² European Intelligence Papers, Series 2, No. 2, 8 October 1941, BBC WAC E2/188/1.
- ⁶³ For a listing of these films see Frances Thorpe and Nicholas Pronay with Clive Coultass, *British Official Films in the Second World War: A Descriptive Catalogue* (Oxford, Clio Press, 1980).
- ⁶⁴ *Adventures of Tartu* (Harold Bucquet, 1943).
- ⁶⁵ European Intelligence Papers, Series 2, No. 10, 6 October 1942, BBC WAC, E2/188/2.
- ⁶⁶ Salute to Greece, BBC Radio Home Service, 22 March 1942.

⁶⁷ See for example *Pastor Hall* and *The Day Will Dawn*, where it is a collaborator who forces his attention on a female resister, but his collaboration is explained by the fact that he is of mixed parentage — Norwegian and German.

⁶⁸ See, for example, *The Day Will Dawn*; *Secret Mission*; *Adventures of Tartu*.

⁶⁹ *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 10,115 (31 July 1943): 74.

⁷⁰ *The New Lot* (Carol Reed, 1943).

⁷¹ *Diary of a Polish Airman* (Concanen, 1942).

⁷² *Documentary Newsletter*, 3, 4 (April 1942): 54.

⁷³ NA, INF 1/293, Home Intelligence Special Report No. 28, 22 August 1942.

⁷⁴ Jo Fox, Millions Like Us? Accented Language and the “Ordinary” in British Films of the Second World War’, *Journal of British Studies*, 45 (October 2006): 819-845.

⁷⁵ Gough-Yates, ‘Britain and the Émigré Film Maker’, pp. 152-8.

⁷⁶ In Michael Powell’s post-war film *Honeymoon* (1959) a great deal of Spanish is spoken.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Murphy, *British Cinema*, p. 143.

⁷⁸ German actors cast in resistance films included Carl Jaffé, Albert Lieven and Martin Miller.

⁷⁹ Minute from the Prime Minister to the Foreign Secretary, 1 November 1954, FO 371/190343

⁸⁰ Minute from Prime Minister’s Office, 1 November 1954, FO 371/109733

⁸¹ Lord Russell of Liverpool, *The Scourge of the Swastika* (London, Cassell, 1954) p. viii.

⁸² Minute, 12 August 1954, FO 371/109733; Memorandum, 30 July 1954, LCO 4/273.

⁸³ *Daily Express*, 11 August 1954.

⁸⁴ Christopher Murphy, ‘The Origins of *SOE in France*’, *Historical Journal*, 46, 4 (2003): 935-952.

⁸⁵ NA, INF 1/636.

⁸⁶ NA, INF 1/128.

⁸⁷ *Jail Breakers* (New Realm, 1945); *Presence Au Combat* (Ministry of Information, 1945).

⁸⁸ NA, INF 6/759.

⁸⁹ *La Liberation de Paris* (Comite de Liberation du Cinema Francais, 1944). Suzanne Langlois, ‘Images that Matter: The French Resistance in Film, 1944-1946’, *French History*, 11 (1997): 465. An edited version of *La Liberation de Paris*, retitled *Le Journal de la Resistance* was screened in Britain with a commentary by Noel Coward.

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- ⁹⁰ Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome*, p. 16.
- ⁹¹ Suzanne Langlois, 'Would the Allies Arrive in Time? The Liberation of Paris on ABC', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 26, 1 (1998): 3.
- ⁹² Pierre Sorlin, *European Cinemas, European Societies* (London, Routledge, 1991), p. 54.
- ⁹³ *Objective Burma* (Raoul Walsh, US, 1945); Stephen Guy, *After Victory: Projections of the Second World War and its Aftermath in British Feature Films*, Ph.D dissertation, University of London, 2002, p. 21.
- ⁹⁴ The first episode of *Victory at Sea* was screened on BBC television, on 27 October 1952. The first episode of *War in the Air*, a 15-part BBC documentary series, was screened on 8 November 1954.
- ⁹⁵ *Reynolds News*, 31 October 1954. See also *Daily Sketch*, 28 October 1954; *Evening Standard*, 30 October 1954.
- ⁹⁶ *A Matter of Life and Death* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1946).
- ⁹⁷ Wartime films celebrating the Soviet Union included *The Demi-Paradise* (Anthony Asquith, 1943); *Tawny Pipit* (Charles Saunders, 1944).
- ⁹⁸ Webster, *Englishness and Empire*, p. 88.
- ⁹⁹ 1950s BBC television dramas about the resistance included *The Liberators*, 24 May 1955; *Madeleine*, 14 June 1955.
- ¹⁰⁰ *Now It Can Be Told* (RAF Film Production Unit, 1946). The film was retitled *School for Danger* for theatrical release.
- ¹⁰¹ *Against the Wind* (Charles Crichton, 1947).
- ¹⁰² *Odette* (Herbert Wilcox, 1950).
- ¹⁰³ *London Gazette*, 16 August 1946, quoted in Anna Neagle, *Anna Neagle Says "There's Always Tomorrow: An Autobiography* (London, W.H. Allen, 1974), p. 161.
- ¹⁰⁴ *The People*, 11 June 1950.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Reynolds News*, 11 June 1950.
- ¹⁰⁶ *Sunday Graphic*, 11 June 1950.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Madeleine*, BBC television, 14 June 1955; *Carve Her Name With Pride* (Lewis Gilbert, 1958).
- ¹⁰⁸ For the gendering of French Resistance films of the late 1940s, see Noel Burch and Genevieve Sellier, *La Drole de Guerre des Sexes du Cinema Francais, 1930-1956* (Paris, Nathan, 1996), Chapter 5.

¹⁰⁹ Wendy Webster, 'Reconstructing Boundaries: Gender, War and Empire in British Cinema, 1945-1950', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 23, no. 1 (2003): 43-57.

¹¹⁰ Christine Geraghty, *British Cinema in the Fifties: Gender, Genre and the 'New Look'* (London, Routledge, 2000), Chapter 6.

¹¹¹ Odette's heroism might also have been less readily claimed for the nation had Ingrid Bergman or Michele Morgan accepted the part — it was only after they turned it down that Neagle was cast in the role. See Neagle, *Anna Neagle*, p. 162.

¹¹² *Carve Her Name With Pride* (Lewis Gilbert, 1958); *Portrait From Life* (Terence Fisher, 1948); *The Lost People* (Bernard Knowles, 1949).

¹¹³ Judt, 'The Past is Another Country', p. 160.