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## RESTORING THE IMAGE OF FRANCE IN BRITAIN, 1944–1947\*

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**ABSTRACT.** *At the end of the Second World War, British society's hostility and resentment towards France's military defeat and the French state's collaboration with Germany were strong. In order to deflate this enmity and thus prepare the ground to forge western European co-operation, the French and British governments co-operated and developed gendered public and media strategies within which citizens, and, in particular, former female resistance fighters, were central to the dissemination of positive images of France. This article takes seriously these strategies and adds nuance to understandings of modern foreign policy in terms of methods and actors. The article elaborates on neglected agents of diplomacy, such as female members of civil society, and the significance of rhetoric, gendered performance, and appearances that contributed to the restoration of the image of France in Britain. By doing so, the article also sheds light on the efforts of French and British authorities to construct a narrative of binational unity that disrupted the tenacious idea that Britain had fought alone during the war.*

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At the end of the Second World War, France and Britain were weakened powers which had suffered economically and materially from years of conflict. While they concentrated on repairing the economic and physical cost of the war, calls emerged from British authorities to ‘restore ... the greatness of France’ and ‘build up France’.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, British society’s hostility and resentment towards France’s military defeat in 1940 and the French state’s subsequent collaboration with Germany were strong.<sup>2</sup> In order to deflate this enmity and thus prepare the ground to forge western European co-operation, the French and British governments co-operated and developed gendered public and media strategies within which citizens, and, in particular, former female resistance fighters, were central to the dissemination of positive images of France. As historians of ‘new diplomacy’ have recently highlighted, paying attention to how citizens contributed to diplomatic strategies is a significant scholarly step towards writing a richer history of international relations.<sup>3</sup> Not only does this approach reveal a hitherto neglected cast of foreign policy actors, but it also allows us to appreciate how governments understood that public diplomacy was integral to their national power and how prestige was a real source of concern for states.

This article examines Franco-British media strategies that centred around female resistance fighters who paraded in the streets of Britain, attended ceremonies, and delivered lectures at the end of the war. While women as subjects of international relations are too often relegated to studies of ‘public opinion’ or analysed as the targets of policies, this article stresses that they were also central pawns on the diplomatic and media chessboard.<sup>4</sup> Drawing on recent works that have called for a more careful consideration of diplomatic culture and performativity,<sup>5</sup> I consider how diplomatic strategies in post-war Britain relied on the

<sup>1</sup> Anthony Eden, *Freedom and order* (London, 1947), p. 255 (Apr.–May 1944); Anthony Eden, *The Eden memoirs: the reckoning* (London, 1965), p. 494.

<sup>2</sup> This goes against the arguments formulated in past studies which have suggested that the allied victory of the Second World War erased negative images of wartime France in the world. See Robert Frank, ‘The Second World War through French and British eyes’, in Emile Chabal and Robert Tombs, eds., *Britain and France in two world wars: truth, myth and memory* (London, 2013), pp. 179–91, at p. 183; Claire Sanderson, *L’impossible alliance? France, Grande-Bretagne, et défense de l’Europe, 1945–1958* (Paris, 2003), pp. 39–48.

<sup>3</sup> Giacomo Giudici, ‘From new diplomatic history to new political history: the rise of the holistic approach’, *European History Quarterly*, 48 (2018), pp. 314–24; Giles Scott-Smith, ‘Introduction: private diplomacy, making the citizen visible’, *New Global Studies*, 8 (2014), pp. 1–7.

<sup>4</sup> Cynthia H. Enloe, *The curious feminist: searching for women in a new age of empire* (Berkeley, CA, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Kaya Şahin, ‘Staging an empire: an Ottoman circumcision ceremony as cultural performance’, *American Historical Review*, 123 (2018), pp. 463–92; Christian Goeschel, ‘Staging friendship: Mussolini and Hitler in Germany 1937’, *Historical Journal*, 60 (2017), pp. 149–72; Frank Mort, ‘On tour with the prince: monarchy, imperial politics and publicity in the Prince of Wales’s Dominion tours 1919–20’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 29 (2018), pp. 25–57; Edward Owens, ‘All the world loves a lover: monarchy, mass media and the 1934 royal wedding of Prince George and Princess Marina’, *English Historical Review*, 133 (2018), pp. 597–633; Naoko Shimazu, ‘Diplomacy as theatre: staging the Bandung Conference of 1955’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 48 (2014), pp. 225–52.

gender, age, and bodily appearance of female members of the French resistance who visited Britain in late 1944. These women appeared to be familiar figures of French middle-class femininity to the British audiences. Thus, they disrupted conventional images of the masculine, military, or political resistance which existed in Britain. Their femininity and their relationship to a fighting movement—a combination which had proved effective in other contexts during the war, such as with female members of the Special Operations Executive<sup>6</sup>—turned out to be a unique mobilizing force that diplomats used in their efforts to restore the prestige of France in 1944. This article also considers the ideas about France that these women disseminated, and it argues that for a brief moment they were significant in the production of one body of knowledge about the resistance among British audiences. This stood in contrast to practices of the 1950s and 1960s, when discourses about resisting France were chiefly designed by former male figures of the resistance, while women were relegated to minor public roles in the gathering and generating of information.<sup>7</sup>

The women's war and post-war trajectories are largely absent from official repositories, first because most of the archives for the years 1944 and 1945 of the Ministry of Information (MOI), which organized one of the lecture tours discussed in this article, have not been preserved at The National Archives. This explains in part why most of the scholarship on the MOI focuses on its early organization and planning in 1939–40, but there are fewer publications on the years leading up to its closure in 1946. This case study thus contributes to revising this approach by identifying evidence of the MOI's activities at the end of the war.<sup>8</sup> Second, the individuals studied in this article elude the conventional typology of women in the resistance. They do not fit into the category of well-known women resistance members in metropolitan France who left oral testimonies, memoirs, and personal documents.<sup>9</sup> Nor do they belong to the group of French women who joined the Free French female military auxiliary service or worked as nurses and medics in Britain, North Africa, and the US, and who are beginning to attract the attention of scholars.<sup>10</sup> Finally, although

<sup>6</sup> Juliette Pattinson, *Behind enemy lines: gender, passing and the Special Operations Executive in the Second World War* (Manchester, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> For example, only a handful of women were members of the History Committee of the Second World War in its first years. Laurent Douzou, *La résistance française. Une histoire périlleuse. Essai d'historiographie* (Paris, 2005), pp. 173–5. See also Emily Hooke, 'Feminist solidarity in the archive: Marie Granet, the resistance, and me', *Women's History Network*, 16 Dec. 2019, <https://womenshistorynetwork.org/feminist-solidarity-in-the-archive-marie-granet-the-resistance-and-me-emily-hooke/>.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Speaight (Foreign Office) to J.-C. Paris, 10 Nov. 1944, Centre des archives diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN), 378 PO/6 247. No files about lecture series about France have been selected by the Ministry of Information (MOI) archivists for transfer to The National Archives, which only took a small proportion of all the files produced by the MOI.

<sup>9</sup> Mechthild Gilzmer, Stefan Martens, and Christine Levisse-Touzé, eds., *Les femmes dans la résistance en France* (Paris, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Sébastien Albertelli, *Elles ont suivi de Gaulle. Histoire du Corps des volontaires françaises* (Paris, 2020); Elodie Jauneau, 'Des femmes dans la France combattante pendant la Deuxième Guerre

historians have started to examine the women who produced work in the media to promote Charles de Gaulle's resistance movement, Free France, they have so far mostly focused on famous women such as Eve Curie, the daughter of the Nobel prizewinners and scientists, who toured the US between 1940 and 1943, and Elisabeth de Miribel, who famously typed de Gaulle's Appeal of 18 June, before travelling to Canada to undertake propaganda activities.<sup>11</sup>

The women discussed in this article conducted wartime resistance activities in mainland France, such as hosting Allied pilots, distributing clandestine newspapers, and working for the resistance's intelligence service; they went abroad after the liberation of Paris. Following the war, they did not become well-known leading figures of the metropolitan resistance, nor did they engage in the cultural tradition of publishing war memoirs that could have given some exposure to their activities. The notability they acquired during their trips abroad was short-lived. And yet their visits were carefully crafted by the French and British governments and well monitored by national and international media, which is a testament to the political and diplomatic significance of their mission and of the impact they made on the British news cycle.

While researching this article, I not only analysed French and British government archives and newspapers, but I also interviewed one of these women, Hedwige Morris (née Gillet). Together with official records and Morris's private archives (including MOI mission orders and reports which had been weeded from The National Archives at Kew), her interview constitutes a precious source that allowed me to correct the literal exclusion of these French women from the MOI archives. This approach is very much in tune with the ideals of the first oral historians and it also allows the article to consider the fragility of oral interviews.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the multiplicity and variety of sources which were produced allow me to discuss the gendered workings of soft power, flesh out tensions between women as objects, subjects, and agents of international relations, and revise conventional studies of Franco-British relations at the end of the war.

This article reaches conclusions that have broader significance for our understanding of post-war French diplomacy and British history. First, whereas Robert Frank has suggested that French power after 1945 was mostly economic in

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mondiale: le Corps des volontaires françaises et le Groupe Rochambeau', *Genre & Histoire* (2008), <http://journals.openedition.org/genrehistoire/373>. See also Laure Humbert's AHRC-funded project on 'Colonial and transnational intimacies: medical humanitarianism in the French external resistance, 1940–1945', <https://colonialandtransnationalintimacies.com/about>.

<sup>11</sup> Claudine Monteil, *Ève Curie. L'autre fille de Pierre et Marie Curie* (Paris, 2016); Patricia E. Prestwich and Ken J. Munro, 'A wartime partnership: establishing the Free French movement in Canada, 1940–42', *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire*, 25 (2018), pp. 242–62.

<sup>12</sup> Joanna Bornat and Hanna Diamond, 'Women's history and oral history: developments and debates', *Women's History Review*, 16 (2007), pp. 19–39, at p. 21.

nature,<sup>13</sup> it is clear that media strategies and public diplomacy were two indispensable strands at the service of France's power both within the country and abroad. This argument also adds nuance to studies emphasizing that Britain's support in rebuilding the prestige of France after the war occurred through military, material, and economic backing.<sup>14</sup> Second, contrary to dominant studies of cultural diplomacy and prestige that tend to consider a nation's prestige as the result of unilateral efforts, this article argues that, in the context of post-war Europe, prestige was the product of binational and reciprocal discussion and co-operation. This matters not only for the methodology of international relations but also for our understanding of post-war Britain. Indeed, despite the persistence during and after the war of the myth that Britain had fought alone,<sup>15</sup> this article shows that, at the liberation, French and British authorities joined forces to construct a narrative that French resistance fighters had co-operated with Britons throughout the war. Behind this façade of unity, there were certainly strong disagreements and diplomatic tensions between French and British representatives, but examining French soft power in Britain adds nuance to our understanding of how nations constructed and projected accounts about themselves.

The argument unfolds in three parts. The first section considers how and why the British government intervened to restore the image of France in Britain. As British diplomats opened negotiations with their French counterparts to design a Franco-British alliance, staff at lower levels of the MOI and the Foreign Office also co-operated with their French peers to rebuild the 'greatness' of France, as discussed in the second section. In particular, they designed and organized the visits of several groups of French men and women who had taken part in the resistance, and invited them to showcase their wartime stories. However, this focus on the war period was short-lived, and the third section examines why a consensus emerged among diplomats in 1947 that discussions pertaining to the war period ought to be avoided. The years between June 1944 and 1947 therefore constitute a brief parenthesis that allowed the French government to achieve a 'cultural demobilization' before resuming a public diplomacy that resembled strategies that had developed during the interwar period.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Robert Frank, 'Conclusion', in René Girault and Robert Frank, eds., *La puissance française en question (1945-1949)* (Paris, 1989), pp. 465-8.

<sup>14</sup> John W. Young, *Britain, France and the unity of Europe, 1945-1951* (Leicester, 1984); Elisabeth du Réau, 'Les origines et la portée du traité de Dunkerque vers une nouvelle "entente cordiale"?' (4 mars 1947)', *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*, 18 (1990), pp. 23-6; David Dilks, *Rights, wrongs and rivalries: Britain and France in 1945* (Hull, 1995), p. 8; Sanderson, *L'impossible alliance?*; Sean Greenwood, *The alternative alliance: Anglo-French relations before the coming of NATO, 1944-1948* (London, 1996); J.-R. Bézias, *Georges Bidault et la politique étrangère de la France. Europe, États-Unis, Proche-Orient, 1944-1948* (Paris, 2006), pp. 172-4.

<sup>15</sup> Sonya O. Rose, *Which people's war? National identity and citizenship in Britain 1939-1945* (Oxford, 2003); Penny Summerfield, 'Dunkirk and the popular memory of Britain at war, 1940-58', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 45 (2010), pp. 788-811.

<sup>16</sup> John Horne, 'Introduction', *Démobilisations culturelles après la grande guerre, 14-18 Aujourd'hui/Today/Heute*, 5 (2002), pp. 45-53.

## I

During the months of the liberation of France, British politicians and diplomats established that it was their duty to help restore the image of France in Britain because France was their main partner for engaging in discussion about the creation of a western bloc. This attitude drew on ideas and practices elaborated during the Second World War when the British government had employed political campaigning to explain to Britons why it was strategically astute for the nation to support Free France militarily, politically, and financially.<sup>17</sup> As early as 1940, British civil servants were also motivated to boost British prestige on the back of French greatness. As *The Economist* noted in 1940, '[Britons] lose part of [themselves] when France's liberties are trampled underfoot.'<sup>18</sup> The idea that the 'eclipse' of France and its civilization would have serious consequences for Britain fits in with the pattern identified by the political scientist Jonathan Mercer: 'A state is most likely to obtain prestige from its allies. ... the more admirable my ally is, the more admirable I am.'<sup>19</sup>

This framework continued to guide British policies towards the Provisional Government of the French Republic (GPRF) after the liberation of Paris in August 1944. For example, in late September 1944, the prime minister, Winston Churchill, declared in the House of Commons that 'the aim, policy and interest of H.M. government ... [was] to see erected, once more, at the earliest possible moment, a strong, independent and friendly France'.<sup>20</sup> Two months later, the foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, promised the House of Commons that 'France ... can be assured that in her endeavour [to recover] she will have the constant friendship, understanding and help of the British peoples everywhere'.<sup>21</sup> The Labour government, elected in July 1945, expressed similar hopes for France and highlighted the notion that culture was a key tool that could increase France's capital of esteem in Britain. Ernest Bevin, the foreign secretary, spoke movingly in the House of Commons at the end of that year, declaring that 'in the case of France there is a great history, and I am convinced that there is a great future'.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, Charles de Gaulle and his foreign minister, Georges Bidault, also publicly acknowledged

<sup>17</sup> Charlotte Faucher, 'Transnational cultural propaganda: French cultural policies in Britain during the Second World War', *French Politics, Culture and Society*, 37 (2019), pp. 48–69; Rachel Chin, 'After the fall: British strategy and the preservation of the Franco-British alliance in 1940', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 55 (2020), pp. 297–315; Janet R. Horne, 'Global culture fronts: the Alliance française and the cultural propaganda of the Free French', *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire*, 25 (2018), pp. 222–41. On rhetorical use of the 'eclipse' of France and its culture, see 'France and Britain', *Economist*, 18 Dec. 1943; 'The fate of France', *Economist*, 22 June 1940.

<sup>18</sup> 'Fate of France'; Katharine Munro, *France, yesterday and today* (London, 1945), pp. 8–9.

<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Mercer, 'The illusion of international prestige', *International Security*, 41 (2017), pp. 133–68, at p. 142.

<sup>20</sup> *Hansard*, House of Commons debates, 28 Sept. 1944, vol. 403, col. 495.

<sup>21</sup> Eden, *Freedom and order*, p. 279.

<sup>22</sup> *Hansard*, House of Commons debates, 23 Nov. 1945, vol. 416, col. 762.

the role that Britain had played in supporting France during the war and in contributing to the victory of the Allies.<sup>23</sup>

These ostentatious public declarations about Franco-British rapprochement notwithstanding, tense negotiations between the two governments went on behind closed doors. In particular, issues of military power, security, and political alliance impaired Franco-British relations in late 1944. It is on those aspects that the historiography of post-war Franco-British relations has largely concentrated. First, the status of the Levant (under French mandate) caused much irritation to the British government, which was pursuing a policy of Arab unity in the area. The situation would only be partly resolved in 1946 when both Britain and France agreed to withdraw their forces.<sup>24</sup> Second, French and British diplomats failed to find common ground concerning European policy because of security fears regarding Germany.<sup>25</sup> Third, while de Gaulle, in the context of the early part of the Cold War, hoped that a Franco-British alliance could constitute a counter-power to the US and the USSR, Churchill remained committed to his own involvement as part of the Great Alliance.<sup>26</sup>

While the scholarship has insisted that in 1944 and 1945 these colonial and geopolitical disagreements meant that diplomats were not yet ready for a Franco-British alliance,<sup>27</sup> we know far less about British society's views regarding the idea that Britain and France might move closer together in the near future. Since French and British diplomats paid attention to Britons' opinion on France when designing binational policies, it is crucial to integrate this element into any post-war history of France and Britain.<sup>28</sup> In a survey conducted from mid-1943 to mid-1945 and published later in 1945, a Chatham House study group found that public opinion was largely averse to France and was not ready to support a Franco-British alliance.<sup>29</sup> Studies led by the independent social research organization Mass Observation<sup>30</sup> and by the MOI placed the poor reputation of France in Britain at the centre of their questions about contemporary and post-war Franco-British relations. They found that France's military record and its collaboration with Nazi Germany meant that France and its people ranked low in Britons' esteem. An MOI document also stressed that the

<sup>23</sup> Philipp M. H. Bell, *France and Britain, 1940–1994: the long separation* (London and New York, NY, 1997), pp. 56–7.

<sup>24</sup> Meir Zamir, 'The "missing dimension": Britain's secret war against France in Syria and Lebanon, 1942–45. Part II', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 46 (2010), pp. 791–899; Bézias, *Georges Bidault*, pp. 145–8.

<sup>25</sup> Dilks, *Rights, wrongs and rivalries*, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 59.

<sup>27</sup> Sanderson, *L'impossible alliance?*, p. 38; Raphaële Ulrich-Pier, *René Massigli (1888–1988). Une vie de diplomate* (Brussels, 2006), pp. 1010–15.

<sup>28</sup> B. S. Townroe, 'Franco-British relations in the north of England' (confidential), 6 Oct. 1944, The National Archives (TNA), FO 371/41928.

<sup>29</sup> *France and Britain: a report by a Chatham House study group* (London, 1945), pp. 35, 47–50.

<sup>30</sup> Directive questionnaire, February 1945, respondents 3642 and 3659, Mass Observation Archive, University of Sussex Special Collections.

resentment among British society was sustained by pictures of ‘well-fed and well-dressed people in Paris’ during the liberation and anecdotes spread by British soldiers returning from continental Europe that ‘You can buy anything you like in Paris or Brussels; no shortage there.’<sup>31</sup> Such an idealized vision of liberated France, which was partly built on rumours,<sup>32</sup> contrasted with how large sections of British society perceived their own plight, and encouraged British and French authorities to design a large-scale diplomacy of esteem that was directed at Britons.<sup>33</sup>

In the summer of 1944, Anthony Eden and Lord Bessborough, the head of French welfare (a branch of the Foreign Office that oversaw French interests in Britain during the war), instigated the creation of the Franco-British Society with the aim of improving the image of France in Britain.<sup>34</sup> By appearing to be a civil society offshoot rather than a government arm, the society organized private gatherings, ceremonies, and charity events aimed to restore the prestige of France in Britain. It also had its own magazine, in which writers such as David Scott, the former correspondent for *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*, published pieces with self-explanatory titles such as ‘We must think well of France’. In this piece, Scott rejected the widespread British opinion that France had let its closest ally down in 1940 and urged Britons to cease to ‘look down’ on France for its military failure.<sup>35</sup>

Members of the Franco-British Society shaped policy-making decisions at the level of the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Take, for example, the Francophile, journalist, and former civil servant B. S. Townroe, who, under the auspices of the Franco-British Society, undertook a lecture series and organized private meetings with clergymen, mayors, trade unionists, and academics in the north of England in late September 1944. At the end of his tour, Townroe concluded that the British public was ignorant and prejudiced towards France. The knowledge he had gathered on the matter led him to encourage the Foreign Office to organize the visit of ‘a Frenchman who is not a political speaker in outlook and who has real experience of conditions in France and who understands British audiences to make a tour of the provinces’.<sup>36</sup> The practice of organizing lectures was certainly not new: in

<sup>31</sup> MOI home intelligence weekly report (secret), no. 196, 6 July 1944; no. 209, 5 Oct. 1944; no. 208, 28 Sept. 1944, <http://www.moidigital.ac.uk/reports/>.

<sup>32</sup> Jo Fox, ‘Careless talk: tensions within British domestic propaganda during the Second World War’, *Journal of British Studies*, 51 (2012), pp. 936–66; Marc Argemi and Gary Alan Fine, ‘Faked news: the politics of rumour in British World War II propaganda’, *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 12 (2019), pp. 176–93.

<sup>33</sup> Townroe, ‘Franco-British relations’.

<sup>34</sup> On Lord Bessborough’s French welfare, see Nicholas Atkin, *The forgotten French: exiles in the British Isles, 1940–44* (Manchester, 2003), p. 57; Bessborough to Eden, 20 July 1944, TNA, FO 924/106.

<sup>35</sup> David Scott, ‘We must think well of France’, *Britain–France, Journal of Franco-British Society*, Nov. 1945, CADN, 378 PO/6 262.

<sup>36</sup> Townroe, ‘Franco-British relations’.



co-operation with Free France, the Foreign Office and the MOI had overseen talks by Free French officials during the war. But now that the German army was withdrawing from France, it was possible to invite individuals who had lived in German-occupied France. Townroe's report reached London and Paris at a moment when civil servants were actively rethinking their methods of promoting France in Britain, in light of the liberation and the growing suspicion of British audiences towards France. Following Townroe's suggestions, in the autumn of 1944 both governments turned their discussions to how they might use citizens with 'real experience of conditions in France' to signal that France was a country of resistance fighters.<sup>37</sup>

## II

To correct what Bessborough described as the 'under-currents of ill-formulated and unfounded criticism of our French neighbours, due almost entirely to lack of knowledge', he and Richard Langford Speaight, acting counsellor at the Foreign Office, co-operated with René Massigli, the French ambassador, who was a renowned anglophile and former Free French member.<sup>38</sup> They co-ordinated a carefully crafted programme of visits from the French Forces of the Interior (FFI) to Britain. Such ceremonies, which took place in France and Britain at the same time, allowed military and civil personnel to be celebrated in public and civic spaces.<sup>39</sup>

In early November 1944, 150 men and 50 women from the FFI paraded in London and a dozen cities in Wales, Scotland, and England.<sup>40</sup> The choreography of these events did not solely celebrate the metropolitan resistance but also Franco-British wartime co-operation, something that Massigli stressed in his speech welcoming the FFI to Britain.<sup>41</sup> When twenty FFI members visited Manchester, they paraded through the streets in a double-decker bus lent by the city corporation. The vehicle had been decorated with the French and British flags, a large cross of Lorraine (the insignia of the Free French Forces), and red, white, and blue bunting.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, two other FFI members, Marguerite Demanges and Henriette Durand, who had looked after the tombs of fallen Royal Air Force (RAF) soldiers near Paris between 1940 and 1944, were invited by the RAF to Britain, where they were received

<sup>37</sup> 'Suggestions for visits to stimulate good relations with France', 27 Sept. 1944; 'Suggestions arising from Mr Townroe's tour', 7 Nov. 1944, TNA, FO 371/41928.

<sup>38</sup> René Massigli to Georges Bidault, 29 Nov. 1944; Lord Bessborough's address at the General meeting of the United Associations, 12 Oct. 1944, CADN, 378 PO/6 262.

<sup>39</sup> Henri Rousso, *The Vichy syndrome: history and memory in France since 1944* (Cambridge, MA, 1991), p. 24. On Richard Speaight, see *The Foreign Office list and diplomatic and consular year book for 1949* (London, 1949).

<sup>40</sup> 'F.F.I. visitors to Britain', *Times*, 16 Nov. 1944. Fontaine to Borel, 23 Feb. 1945, CADN, 378 PO/6 247.

<sup>41</sup> 'FFI helped 2,000 RAF men to get back', *Daily Mail*, 18 Nov. 1944.

<sup>42</sup> 'FFI visitors in London', *Times*, 15 Nov. 1944.

by British civil and military dignitaries. These visits served as a reminder to British audiences that their armed forces had not fought alone against Germany and that French men and women had taken risks to look after living and dead British soldiers.<sup>43</sup>

The Foreign Office and the RAF services in charge of co-organizing the FFI visits aimed to publicize these events through the press using the well-oiled network of political communication that had existed since the interwar period.<sup>44</sup> This was not always a success: the archives of the Imperial War Museum contain a dozen photographs of Demanges and Durand's tour taken and captioned by the RAF, but the only articles about these two women that were published in the press were those without photographs.<sup>45</sup> In contrast, pictures of the 200 FFI who paraded through Britain were widely reported in the national and regional press, as well as in the US and Palestine.<sup>46</sup> These resistance fighters thus became powerful diplomatic intermediaries whose performance stressed the military skills and restraint of France, signalling that the country had not lost its greatness. Articles and photographs published in national newspapers, such as *The Times* and *The Manchester Guardian*, emphasized the masculinity of FFI members and the orderly fashion in which these 'disciplined' soldiers marched in the streets of London.<sup>47</sup> In a country where the narrative of the 'people's war' had been an important propaganda message,<sup>48</sup> these publications also stressed that many of these French resistance fighters had had very little military training prior to the war.<sup>49</sup> While photographs of FFI troops chiefly pictured men, some pieces focused on small groups or individual female FFI members. A series of *Daily Mail* articles, for example, chronicled the visit of Jacqueline Darcy, mentioning that she had made false identity papers for RAF soldiers during the war, and insisting on her 'normal' tastes: three pictures of Darcy's visit to London, captioned 'she buys gloves', 'she takes tea', and 'she dances', were featured in the piece.<sup>50</sup>

High political events relied on similar public displays of Franco-British friendship, erasing evidence of the aforementioned colonial and strategic cross-

<sup>43</sup> 'FFI visit to Manchester', *Manchester Guardian*, 16 Nov. 1944. See also 'Manchester's FFI visitors: a civic reception', *Manchester Guardian*, 17 Nov. 1944.

<sup>44</sup> Henry Irving, 'The Ministry of Information on the British home front', in Simon Eliot and Marc Wiggam, eds., *Allied communication to the public during the Second World War: national and transnational networks* (London, 2019), pp. 21–38.

<sup>45</sup> TNA, FO 660/316; Imperial War Museum, London, CH 14240, CH 14242, CH 14244, CH 14245, CH 14253; 'Marguerite, 17, was one-woman resistance movement', *Evening Telegraph: Dundee*, 18 Dec. 1944; 'Brave French girl', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 18 Dec. 1944.

<sup>46</sup> 'Notes of the day', *Western Daily Press*, 15 Nov. 1944; 'FFI parade in London', *New York Times*, 16 Nov. 1944; 'FFI visit England', *Palestine Post*, 14 Nov. 1944.

<sup>47</sup> 'F.F.I. visitors to Britain', *Times*, 16 Nov. 1944, pp. 4 and 6.

<sup>48</sup> Jonathan Fennell, *Fighting the people's war: the British and Commonwealth armies and the Second World War* (Cambridge, 2019); Rose, *Which people's war?*

<sup>49</sup> 'FFI party in Scotland', *Evening Telegraph*, 16 Nov. 1944; 'Woman's story of the FFI', *Aberdeen Journal*, 22 Nov. 1944; 'Gilded misery', *Hull Daily Mail*, 17 Nov. 1944.

<sup>50</sup> 'Paris girls would love London's clothes', *Daily Mail*, 16 Nov. 1944.

channel tensions.<sup>51</sup> On Armistice Day in 1944, Churchill attended ceremonies in Paris, making a strong impression on the public opinion of both nations.<sup>52</sup> As Eden noted in his memoirs, this trip had a clear ‘political consequence’: the Foreign Office and Churchill were now ready to examine the ‘so-called western bloc’.<sup>53</sup> By the end of November, the MOI reported that ‘People [were] pleased by signs of more settled conditions in France and have growing faith in her powers of recovery ... However, minority distrust of the French continues.’<sup>54</sup>

It was at this point that the French and British governments co-ordinated a unique lecture series on occupied France delivered by French women. The scholarship on British propaganda during and after the war has largely emphasized that the Foreign Office and the MOI employed modern communication techniques, including colour posters, radio programmes, and, increasingly, films.<sup>55</sup> Although the British government used these media to target audiences in metropolitan and imperial France,<sup>56</sup> it also invested time, money, and energy in organizing public events that constituted spaces of contact between British audiences and French private citizens. Between November and December 1944, ten French women who had lived in occupied France and had been part of the resistance toured Britain and gave 35-minute talks on their wartime experiences to various audiences, from members of women’s institutes to workers in arms factories. These women were in their early twenties and all came from well-to-do families. They spoke English and had been recruited for this mission in Paris through a mutual acquaintance, the well-known resistance member Claire Chevrillon, a teacher of English and the niece of André Chevrillon, a celebrated member of the Académie française.<sup>57</sup> Among the ten women were Hedwige Gillet, the daughter of an American woman and a French engineer who ran an international aero-component-manufacturing company (Gillet’s uncle was the renowned scholar of English literature Louis Gillet); Ginette Delmas (born into a wealthy protestant family); Sabine Wormser (whose relatives ran the eponymous bank); Adrienne ‘Nono’ Dukas, the daughter of the composer Paul Dukas; and a relative of Lucien Herr, a former librarian of France’s most competitive higher education institution, the Ecole normale supérieure (ENS). Some of these women had attended the ENS, while others, like Gillet, had studied at the prestigious Sorbonne.

<sup>51</sup> ‘La France et l’Angleterre se sont retrouvées’, *France*, 24 Nov. 1944.

<sup>52</sup> MOI, home intelligence weekly report (secret), no. 216, 23 Nov. 1944.

<sup>53</sup> Eden, *Eden memoirs*, p. 494.

<sup>54</sup> MOI home intelligence weekly report (secret), no. 217, 30 Nov. 1944.

<sup>55</sup> Jo Fox, ‘John Grierson, his “documentary boys” and the British Ministry of Information, 1939–1942’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 25 (2005), pp. 345–69; Philip M. Taylor, ‘Techniques of persuasion: basic ground rules of British propaganda during the Second World War’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 1 (1981), pp. 57–66.

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, ‘Film presence au combat (history of Fighting French Movement)’, 1945, TNA, INF 6/759.

<sup>57</sup> Claire Chevrillon, *Une résistance ordinaire, septembre 1939–août 1944* (Paris, 1999).

During the war, the women had had several typically 'feminine' roles in the resistance,<sup>58</sup> from coding for the Bureau central de renseignements et d'action (BCRA, the resistance's intelligence service) and its successor, to posting clandestine underground bulletins.<sup>59</sup> By selecting these middle-class, socially privileged, and anglophone women, the British and French governments were assured that the women's home-grown accounts would intertwine narratives of suffering in occupied Paris with descriptions of involvement in the resistance.

Gillet and her nine counterparts were unpaid; their lecture series was sponsored by the French government while practical matters were overseen by the MOI, which had set up numerous such lecture tours for British speakers on the home front and abroad since 1939, and was thus relying on an efficient circuit.<sup>60</sup> The visit of the ten French women had been designed between September and October 1944 by one French woman and two British women. Suzanne Borel was the first woman to have passed the entrance exam for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in 1930. She had spent her career working for the office for cultural diplomacy in Paris and would leave her position in 1946 following her marriage to Bidault.<sup>61</sup> Overseeing the details of the project was Natalie Hogg, who had divorced her husband, Quintin Hogg, a member of parliament (later known as Lord Hailsham), to continue her relationship with François Coulet, Charles de Gaulle's chief of cabinet.<sup>62</sup> The final member of the design team was an MOI staff member, Enid McLeod.<sup>63</sup>

While Borel, Hogg, and McLeod did not comment on the gender of the ten lecturers (who themselves did not consider this to be a feature worthy of remark<sup>64</sup>) to male French and British diplomats, these 'girls' were mostly a means to help address the surge in requests by private British groups to host French speakers who had been involved in the resistance.<sup>65</sup> Since the end of the First World War, and throughout the Second World War, the French government had chiefly commissioned middle-aged French men who had

<sup>58</sup> Paula Schwartz, 'Résistance et différence des sexes: bilan et perspectives', *Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire*, 1 (1995), <https://doi.org/10.4000/cli0.516>.

<sup>59</sup> Speaight (FO) to Paris, 10 Nov. 1944, CADN, 378 PO/6 247. Interview between the author and Hedwige Morris (née Gillet), who took part in the Nov.–Dec. 1944 lecture tour, 16 June 2019. Emails from Vincent Morris (Morris's son) to the author, 2 and 3 July 2020.

<sup>60</sup> Eliot and Wiggam, eds., *Allied communication to the public*.

<sup>61</sup> Elodie Lejeune, 'Suzanne Bidault une pionnière oubliée: essai biographique sur la première femme diplomate française (1930–1962)' (mémoire de maîtrise, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2002).

<sup>62</sup> Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (MAE) to Massigli, 30 Oct. 1944, CADN, 378 PO/6 247.

<sup>63</sup> Helen McCarthy, *Women of the world: the rise of the female diplomat* (London, 2014), p. 165; Speaight (FO) to Paris, 10 Nov. 1944, CADN, 378 PO/6 247.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Morris.

<sup>65</sup> Suzanne Borel to Massigli, 17 Oct. 1944, and Bertrand, 'Note pour M. Camille Paris', 24 Oct. 1944, CADN, 378 PO/6 247. The term 'girls' was used by Richard Speaight in his letter to J-C. Paris, 17 Nov. 1944 CADN, 378 PO/6 247.

established careers in academia, politics, or the military to give public lectures about France around the world.<sup>66</sup> But the liberation of France brought about a change in the gender and age of French guest lecturers. This was necessary in part because, in November 1944, many French men were still involved in military liberation battles and were therefore unavailable. Still, the gender of these lecturers offered much more than a way to make up for numbers: it contributed to making them ideal agents to sustain the international prestige of France, conceptualized in feminine and resistance terms.

In 2019, I interviewed one of these female resistance members, Hedwige Morris, née Gillet, who had lectured in Britain in 1944 and was selected the following year to conduct the same sort of work in Canada before returning to England, where she joined the French embassy's lecture office as a paid member of staff for a few months. In 1946, following her wedding to a British man, she moved away from London to start a family in Britain (she returned to France after the death of her husband). This humble and spirited ninety-eight-year-old French woman who had distributed the resistance paper *Témoignage chrétien*, hosted Allied pilots, and worked for the BCRA stressed that her role in the resistance was minor compared to that of famous figures. She explained to me in French that the MOI had provided her with a booklet of photographs of the liberation of Paris entitled 'The rising of the Parisians' to illustrate the talks she delivered throughout Britain.<sup>67</sup> As she flicked through the pages of the album, I noticed scenes of fighting, pictures featuring barricades, and images of wounded and dead FFI fighters.

Scholars have rightly underlined the importance of photographs in contributing to the making of the history and memory of the liberation.<sup>68</sup> However, Morris remarked that the audiences who attended her talks showed little interest in these documents and their captions in English. Attendees' attention chiefly turned to her. She explained that this was because she and her nine colleagues appeared to be 'young, innocent, untrained women who had gone through the occupation' and could answer endless questions about daily life in wartime Paris. Morris's daughter, Anne Oates, sat with us during our meeting and intervened at this point:

[*in French to her mother*] You remember you told us how shocked the audience was when they saw you walking on the stage: a young, fresh-looking woman, [*in English to her mother*] as you said, innocent; you almost heard them gasp. They were expecting to see someone who was ill perhaps, who looked grey and pale, damaged. [*In French, looking at me*] But mum was young, alive, and elegant.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>66</sup> C. Faucher, 'The "French intellectual consulate to Great Britain"? The Institut français du Royaume-Uni, 1910–1959' (Ph.D. thesis, Queen Mary University of London, 2016).

<sup>67</sup> 'The rising of the Parisians' (booklet of photographs taken at the liberation of Paris), private archives of Hedwige Morris.

<sup>68</sup> Catherine E. Clark, 'Capturing the moment, picturing history: photographs of the liberation of Paris', *American Historical Review*, 121 (2016), pp. 824–60.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Morris.

The language choice is significant here.<sup>70</sup> The interview was conducted in French and it is noteworthy that Oates joined in in French but then switched to English when she spoke to her mother. Oates grew up in a Franco-British household in England and her use of English suggests closeness with her mother. She reverted to French when she wanted to convey a point to me because, although I understand English well, she had interiorized that my mother tongue is French and that we were conducting the interview in French.

These white, young, well-educated, healthy-looking French women sporting the Lorraine cross and speaking, in good English and without notes, to British audiences contrasted with those audiences' images of masculine resistance. They therefore embodied an essentialist reading of French middle-class identity which had been so central to the promotion of France in Edwardian Britain and had normalized the idea that ordinary French women were intrinsically chic and sophisticated.<sup>71</sup> Gillet herself had grown up in a socially successful family and had been educated by an English governess and later in prestigious Parisian schools, where she mingled with illustrious families such as the Chevillons. The lecturers' appearances and class notwithstanding, the women spoke at length about everyday difficulties in Paris in obtaining food and sources for heating, offering a strong verbal rebuttal of the aforementioned opinions of wartime prosperity in France.<sup>72</sup>

Between 22 November and 1 December 1944, these women gave an average of fifteen lectures each. Hedwige Gillet's tour started at the Women's Section of the Royal British Legion in the London suburb of Epping and finished at the University of Nottingham in central England. In total she spoke to 16,170 individuals, with audience sizes varying from 30 at the Women's Club in Loughborough to 4,500 people at the Rolls Royce Factory in Derby. The nature of the audiences points to civil servants' aim of reaching multiple groups within society, including women, industrial workers, and Francophiles.<sup>73</sup> Lecturers received many letters of thanks from the committees of the societies and factories they had visited. After Gillet's talk at the Derby factory, employees sent her the following note, which stressed the significance of gender and perceived normalcy as powerful tools of prestige:

It was indeed a pleasure to hear and meet such a charming representative of the people of France, and we hope it will be only the first of many such visits both to us and to you, for we believe that it is only by the cooperation of ordinary people everywhere that we can avoid a repetition of the misery of the last few years.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>70</sup> On issues of cross-cultural oral history interviews, see Susan K. Burton, 'Issues in cross-cultural interviewing: Japanese women in England', *Oral History*, 31 (2003), pp. 38–46.

<sup>71</sup> Faucher, 'Institut français du Royaume-Uni'.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Morris.

<sup>73</sup> 'Rapport de fin de mission pour le MOI', Dec. 1944, private archives of Hedwige Morris.

<sup>74</sup> J. Scarborough (Rolls Royce Shop Stewards Committee) to Gillet, c/o Mr Banner, MOI, Nottingham, 3 Dec. 1944, private archives of Hedwige Morris.

Although Gillet's social background disqualified her from firmly belonging to the category of 'ordinary citizen', this note reveals how far this trope infused British society by the time of the liberation; it also echoed the public relations theory of the time that the historian Deborah Cohen has outlined in her article 'The geopolitical is personal'.<sup>75</sup> The title of this article chimes with Gillet's impression, which she penned in a mission report in 1944: 'one feels that what the audiences want and desire are details and narrations about lived experiences'. The scepticism about France which existed among the public subsided as her talks went on: she felt 'that a personal contact is enough to dispel this uneasiness' towards France.<sup>76</sup>

The lecture series reached well beyond the audiences in attendance. The female lecturers spoke to the Anglo-French parliamentary committee at the House of Commons and recorded a programme for the domestic service of the BBC, which had been an important supporter of the French resistance.<sup>77</sup> These women were also featured in the BBC *Yearbook* for 1945: a photograph showing four of them in uniform was captioned 'Young Frenchwomen who had worked in the underground movement in France visited England in December 1944'.<sup>78</sup> Finally, the lectures were discussed in the national and local press, with articles stressing the youth of the women and praising their university education. Aside from a couple of instances when the full names of Colette Dubuisson and Andrée Cheutin were given, journalists referred to them by their first name only, a demeaning practice that nonetheless did not completely discredit the importance of their clandestine activities and the content of their lectures, which were reported in great detail.

The series of lectures also supported France's aim of altering the British view that France had not been materially damaged by the war. For example, one journalist noted that these women were 'sorry to see, in the British papers, reports of well-being and plenty of food in France. If it were so it could only be so due to the using up of supplies left by the Germans in their hasty retreat.'<sup>79</sup> Other French cultural events organized in Britain at the time were curated to stress economic hardship and urban destruction. In November 1944, Massigli had declared that it was 'important that the British public

<sup>75</sup> Townroe, 'Franco-British relations'; Deborah Cohen, 'The geopolitical is personal: India, Britain, and American foreign correspondents in the 1930s and 1940s', *Twentieth Century British History*, 29 (2018), pp. 388–410.

<sup>76</sup> Hedwige Gillet's report to the MOI following fifteen lectures delivered in England between Nov. and Dec. 1944, n.d., private archives of Hedwige Morris.

<sup>77</sup> Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac, ed., *Ici Londres 1940–1944. Les voix de la liberté*, vol. 5 (Paris, 1976).

<sup>78</sup> *BBC yearbook 1945* (London, 1945).

<sup>79</sup> 'France's epic fight for liberty', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 21 Dec. 1944. On the content of the lectures given by the ten French women, see also 'Friends of French volunteers', *Hull Daily Mail*, 18 Dec. 1944; 'Frenchwomen tour Britain', *Manchester Guardian*, 9 Dec. 1944; 'French women coming here', *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 20 Nov. 1944; 'Helped to make secret arms', *Bath Chronicle*, 9 Dec. 1944.

realize, visually, the sufferings experienced in France and the gigantic reconstruction and reorganization effort that the government must undertake'.<sup>80</sup> To support this line, the French government oversaw the screening of *La libération de Strasbourg* (one of the last cities to have been freed from German occupation by the Allies) throughout Britain in 1945.<sup>81</sup>

The rhetoric that stressed post-war hardship and economic and material difficulties aligned with the negotiations that Massigli was conducting to obtain food supplies and British material help, including coal, to assist with reconstruction.<sup>82</sup> During a press conference in Scotland in May 1945, he spoke at length of France's economic suffering, making detailed references to the lack of coal. He was pleased to report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the information he had given had largely been published in the Scottish local press.<sup>83</sup>

The focus on the recent past, especially the role of the metropolitan resistance and life under the occupation, which saturated discourses on France at the end of the war, was not solely the doing of the French and British authorities.<sup>84</sup> There was a real desire on the part of some British people to hear, read, and see testimonies about occupied France, all the more so as limited news had circulated between the two countries during the war. This interest in France was conspicuous in the question-and-answer sessions that followed lectures and which Massigli had asked lecturers to report on to gain a better understanding of the 'spirit of the audiences and its current preoccupation'.<sup>85</sup> Meticulously put into tables by the office staff dealing with the lecture series, audiences' questions focused on life under German occupation and the resistance, rather than on collaboration. This might suggest that lecturers had spoken little about this topic and therefore had not sparked the interest of their audience in it. Morris explained to me that, because she gave personal accounts of life in Paris and had had no encounters with public collaborators, she instinctively did not mention this topic in her talk but willingly answered questions if they were asked.<sup>86</sup> We can also posit that, as was the case throughout France and the world, there was little awareness in Britain of the extent to which

<sup>80</sup> Massigli to Bidault, 8 Nov. 1944, Archives du Ministère des affaires étrangères (AMAE), 241 QO31.

<sup>81</sup> Note, 'Actualités de la France libre', 1947, AMAE, 241 QO31.

<sup>82</sup> 'La France demande à la Grande-Bretagne du charbon et des corps gras', *France*, 17 Nov. 1944; Ulrich-Pier, *René Massigli*, p. 1008; Bell, *France and Britain*, pp. 74–5.

<sup>83</sup> Massigli to Bidault, 12 May 1945, AMAE, 241 QO31.

<sup>84</sup> For a broader discussion of the role of the past in Franco-British history, see the AHRC project led by P. Jackson, R. Pastor-Castro, R. Utley, and R. Chin, 'The weight of the past in Franco-British relations since 1815', <https://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/humanities/research/historyresearch/researchprojects/weightofthepast/>.

<sup>85</sup> Minute of the meeting organized by Massigli with French cultural and information organizations in London, 27 Mar. 1945, CADN, 378 PO/6 247.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Morris.



lower levels of French society had engaged in collaboration, a view that would prove long-lasting.<sup>87</sup>

While there was a great deal of co-operation between France and Britain in the area of public diplomacy, the GPRF also developed a policy of its own that blended culture and information. By 1944 it had at its disposal a vast network of cultural groups that criss-crossed Britain and offered suitable platforms from which to promote ideas about France. Nowhere was the intricate entanglement between cultural policy and information more visible than within the French Institute in London.<sup>88</sup> Massigli clearly situated the institute's work within the framework of the national effort to regain France's prestige and explained that this organization aimed to promote 'the various forms of intellectual and cultural renaissance'.<sup>89</sup> A brief overview of the programme of the institute reveals what Massigli meant: in late 1944, a talk on 'The spirit of the resistance' was scheduled.<sup>90</sup> In the spring term of 1945, T. S. Eliot presided over a lecture on 'The rebirth of French poetry during the war'. A lecture on French musicians in the resistance and a much-anticipated talk on clandestine publishing houses by Vercors (the pseudonym under which Jean Bruller wrote), who had gained fame as a resistance writer at the end of the war, also took place. Vercors delivered a similar lecture in a dozen English and Scottish cities in April and May 1945.<sup>91</sup> These events, in French and English, were part of the invention of a language of renewal and rebuilding that infused the French public sphere at the time<sup>92</sup> and also crossed the Channel through the intermediation of French cultural institutions in Britain.

The visits of FFI members, the lecture tour by the ten French women, and cultural gatherings that focused on the resistance reproduced aspects of the narrative about resisting France that was being churned out in metropolitan France at the same time.<sup>93</sup> Both the content and the personnel of these events were central in the production of light-hearted propaganda that skirted around well-known stories of wartime valour and instead stressed the universalism of resistance among French people while concomitantly exploiting the intellectual

<sup>87</sup> Rouso, *Vichy syndrome*, pp. 98–131; 'Conférences faites en Angleterre 22 Novembre–21 Décembre 1944 par 10 membres de la Résistance Française' (based on 300 talks), CADN, 378 PO/6 247.

<sup>88</sup> On the French Institute during the war, see C. Faucher, 'From Gaullism to anti-Gaullism: Denis Saurat and the French Cultural Institute in wartime London', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 54 (2019), pp. 60–81.

<sup>89</sup> Draft of a speech delivered by Massigli in May 1945 during a ceremony to mark the French Institute's handover from British to French authorities, CADN, 378 C2/253.

<sup>90</sup> 'A l'Institut français', *France*, 1 Dec. 1944.

<sup>91</sup> 'Programme des cours publics', Apr.–June 1945, CADN, 378 C2/253; 'Alliance Française: liste des conférences d'Avril 1945', CADN, 378 PO/6 247.

<sup>92</sup> Michael Kelly, *The cultural and intellectual rebuilding of France after the Second World War* (Basingstoke, 2004), ch. 2.

<sup>93</sup> Simon Kitson, 'Creating a "nation of resisters"? Improving French self-image, 1944–1946', in Monica Riera and Gavin Schaffer, eds., *The lasting war: society and identity in Britain, France and Germany after 1945* (Basingstoke, 2008), pp. 67–85.

curiosity of British audiences. Resistance was understood as a broad spectrum of practices, from intelligence-gathering and assistance for Allied soldiers to military action and publishing activities. In both France and Britain, public strategies overlooked the contribution of colonial troops to the point of reaching what historians would later call the ‘whitening’ of wartime narratives, although this claim has been complicated by recent research that shows the process of forgetting these resistance fighters accelerated during the period of decolonization.<sup>94</sup>

At the same time, there were striking differences between the narratives in metropolitan France and the one which developed in Britain. First, French public diplomacy in Britain stressed the co-operation between white French citizens and British soldiers in the fight against a common enemy. This was not done through showcasing members of Free France, however – perhaps because French authorities felt that, by now, Britons were familiar with this group. They thought that the emphasis ought to be put on the less well-known phenomenon of metropolitan resistance. Second, public celebrations of the liberation in mainland France mostly excluded female fighters; however, the nation was gendered and turned into a ‘woman victim’, which benefited the country because it demonized Germany (which continued to be a source of diplomatic insecurity for France).<sup>95</sup> In Britain this narrative developed alongside the idea that ‘ordinary people’, including women, had engaged in everyday resistance activities as well as military combat. This confusion over gendered roles in the resistance indicated the universalism of the resistance among the French people, but also nodded to the growing importance of women in French public life: in April 1944, they had gained the right to vote.<sup>96</sup>

Third, discourses in Britain de-ideologized the resistance because very little distinction between resisting political groups emerged from events organized as part of Franco-British media strategies to restore the prestige of France. Certainly, Britons were aware of the role that socialists and communists had played in the resistance; they were also familiar with domestic political tensions in France.<sup>97</sup> However, by overlooking these wartime and post-war political divisions, the British-based production of knowledge about France could define the war as chiefly an apolitical fight against the German enemy. In many ways, this was what the Gaullists had set out to achieve in metropolitan France, but they were soon tested by the communist and socialist parties.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Eric T. Jennings, *Free French Africa in World War II: the African resistance* (Cambridge, 2015), p. 273.

<sup>95</sup> Kelly Ricciardi Colvin, *Gender and French identity after the Second World War, 1944–1954: engendering Frenchness* (London, 2017), pp. 9–10.

<sup>96</sup> Sylvie Chaperon, ‘The difficult struggle for women’s political rights in France’, in Blanca Rodríguez Ruiz and Ruth Rubio Marín, eds., *The struggle for female suffrage in Europe* (Leiden, 2012), pp. 305–19.

<sup>97</sup> Munro, *France*, p. 93; ‘The rebuilding of France’, *Times*, 17 Oct. 1946.

<sup>98</sup> Olivier Wieviorka, *La mémoire désunie. Le souvenir politique des années sombres de la libération à nos jours* (Paris, 2010), pp. 42–8.

## III

In contrast with the growth of narratives about the resistance in the public sphere in France throughout the 1940s,<sup>99</sup> official discourses about this topic began to recede in Britain following the liberation of all French territories in mid-1945.<sup>100</sup> This was strengthened in 1947 by Massigli, who judged that the resistance was an inappropriate topic to be discussed at public events: Britons had heard so much about it over the last three years that French agents ran the risk of making audiences feel tired of it and of France. Mentions of the past, unless they helped to analyse the present, were best left out of talks on France, he suggested.<sup>101</sup> As a result, civil servants altered the content of public and cultural policy. In 1947, executives at the French Institute in London scheduled mainly literary and artistic events, from which any references to current issues and politics were absent, which was very much in tune with its interwar programme.<sup>102</sup> For example, Michel Saint Denis and Jean Paulhan, who were invited to the institute in late 1947, did not discuss their involvement in the resistance (the former had been a leading speaker on the BBC's French programmes and the latter had been active within clandestine publishing). Instead they each gave a lecture about the French classical playwrights Molière and Corneille.<sup>103</sup>

Massigli had been right in his analysis of Britons' interest in the resistance and the war. After 1947, the topics for talks requested from the French lecture office and indeed questions from audiences firmly shifted towards current issues. Two of the French lecturers who had toured women's institutes in January 1948 reported that audiences primarily asked about 'living conditions in France (about which the audience knows nothing)'. The same month, the audiences of the United Nations association branches in the south-east of England asked French lecturers about contemporary international relations. When attendees referred to the past in their questions, they did not evoke the war but rather specific historical periods to which they drew comparisons to illuminate a point about the present. For example, one audience member likened the 1875 constitution of the Third Republic to France's constitution instigated in 1946.<sup>104</sup>

As the aforementioned Chatham House report had pointed out, in 1944 and 1945 British public opinion was not ready to support the creation of an alliance with France. By 1947, opinions on France remained divided: while some circles

<sup>99</sup> Rouso, *Vichy syndrome*, pp. 15–59.

<sup>100</sup> 'Bureau des conférences, conférences faites entre le 1<sup>er</sup> décembre et 31 décembre 1945', CADN, 378 PO6 247.

<sup>101</sup> Massigli to Blum, 16 Jan. 1947, CADN, 378 PO544.

<sup>102</sup> Faucher, 'Institut français du Royaume-Uni'.

<sup>103</sup> H. Jourdan, director of the French Institute in London, to the director of cultural relations (Quai d'Orsay), 20 Oct. 1947, CADN, 378 PO544.

<sup>104</sup> 'Bureau des conférences (conférences faites en anglais) 1–31 Jan. 1948', CADN, 378 PO6 807.

of British society had come around to thinking of France as a great country and praised French citizens' resistance achievements,<sup>105</sup> others continued to believe that France had lost its greatness for good.<sup>106</sup> Certainly, public diplomacy strategies to restore the image of France had limited effect upon British audiences, and negative associations between France and the 1940 military defeat endure in British popular memory to this day.<sup>107</sup> Still, such policies matter to our understanding of foreign affairs because they underline that forms of diplomatic power were diverse, and that the prestige of France was important to diplomats of both nations, who considered it necessary to resolve various issues at the level of society in order to further Franco-British co-operation. By 1947, France had once again become a valued partner in the eyes of British diplomats and some members of civil society. Along with the US, France could counterbalance the growing Soviet preponderance in the east, as well as offer a potential stepping stone towards creating a western union in which Britain would have a central position. This co-operation was made official with the signing of the Franco-British Alliance (also known as the treaty of Dunkirk).<sup>108</sup> While Bidault hoped that, in the context of the nascent Cold War, this treaty would contribute to form a middle way between the US and the USSR, as well as consolidate the alliance of France and Britain against Germany, the Franco-British partnership never formed a third force, and, after 1947, cross-channel relations were increasingly influenced by European and Cold War politics.<sup>109</sup>

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As the war was coming to an end, a reciprocal process involving the French and British governments emerged to enhance France's image in Britain. During the liberation and in the ensuing months, the heroic actions of the resistance became the dominant state-led representation of wartime France, with the suffering inflicted by German occupation and the liberation close behind. Lower-level Franco-German collaboration and political tensions among resistance movements were largely kept out of state-led discourses. By 1947, the French ambassador had put an end to this strategy based on narratives of the resistance and was instead focusing on current issues and French classical culture.

Analysing strategies of soft power conjointly with high political negotiation is an important approach to methodologies of international relations because this allows the better appreciation of how policy-makers might employ multiple forms of power in the service of a nation's diplomacy. Britain and France's

<sup>105</sup> 'Bureau des conférences, sections des associations féminines et des écoles', 1–26 July 1946, CADN, 378 PO6 374.

<sup>106</sup> A special correspondent, 'France after adversity', *Times*, 20 July 1946.

<sup>107</sup> Martin S. Alexander, 'Dunkirk in military operation, myths and memory', in Chabal and Toms, eds., *Britain and France*, pp. 93–112.

<sup>108</sup> Du Réau, 'Les origines et la portée du traité de Dunkerque'; Yann Lamézec, *Le traité franco-britannique de Dunkerque. Un traité oublié* (Paris, 2007).

<sup>109</sup> Bell, *France and Britain*, pp. 84–5.

long-term policies of building up France through a gendered public diplomatic strategy must be integrated into the story of the restoration of Franco-British relations that developed in a discrete period, between the liberation of Paris and the emergence of new geopolitical questions that would further destabilize the Franco-British partnership after 1947, including European integration and the growth of the USSR and the US on the international stage.<sup>110</sup> Culture and political information mattered to the French and British governments because it was through these means that they judged they could best project images of a France worthy of British friendship and compassion at a time when France's prestige and the country's material and economic power were weak. These strategies required new personnel to become actors in international relations, such as well-educated, upper-middle-class, and anglophone French women who had worked for the metropolitan resistance. The messages that these individuals disseminated to British audiences, as well as their gendered performance and appearances, made them priceless champions of France's prestige in Britain. In order to capture the complexity of diplomacy, we need to pay more attention to how countries framed narratives about themselves overseas and to the diversity of the individuals who produced and disseminated these stories.

<sup>110</sup> Sanderson, *L'impossible alliance?*; Bell, *France and Britain*.