The Missing Link ?
Belgian Resistance in a Transnational Perspective (1936-1948)[1]

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In 2020, Manchester University Press published the book *Fighters across Frontiers*.[2] This is an important book because it examines the history of resistance during the Second World War from a transnational perspective. Transnational resistance is defined by Robert Gildea and Ismee Tames, the editors of the book, as the fight against Nazi Germany undertaken outside one's own country of origin. The authors try to explain why so many foreigners became actively involved in the activities of the resistance. The meaning given to transnational resistance is the following :

> "Transnational resistance meant three things. First, it meant trajectories taken by resisters which led them to resist outside their country of origin. Second, it involved transnational encounters – meeting and cooperating with people of different national origins. Third, at its most developed, it allowed experiences of transnational resistance which in some ways changed a resister's thinking, practice and identity."[3]

The study of transnational resistance, thus, does not focus on one nation, but examines the extent to which a transnational perspective can provide new insights to contextualize and understand resistance in Europe to Nazi Germany. Transnational resistance is examined through the theoretical concept of 'connected history', delineating the geographical space as Europe as an "interconnected space" (p. 240).

This transnational approach thus focuses on individuals and their networks rather than on institutions, organizations, political parties or nation-states. *Fighters across Frontiers* is the result of a collective research project. No fewer than twenty-three authors collaborated on this book, specialists on the history of the resistance in Europe.

In view of this broad scope coupled with the lack of information on Belgium, an uninitiated reader might assume that there was little to no transnational resistance in occupied Belgium. Needless to say, the limited references in the book to the Belgian case hardly provide any insights into how the transnational resistance took shape in Belgium. Gildea and Tames do not dispute that there was resistance in Belgium ; it is simply hardly mentioned or discussed. The question is : why ? Did the absence of Belgian historians on the research team lead to this void or was this omission more due to a lack of sources and/or scholarly historical research ? In the following sections, I will demonstrate that transnational resistance as a concept can also make (Belgian) historians think about looking at resistance in Belgium during the Second World War in a different way. After all, the question Gildea poses in *Fighters in the Shadows*[4] — "How French was the French resistance ?" — should in principle be asked for each country separately : How Belgian was the Belgian resistance ?

I. Trajectories

"Individuals were more likely to engage in transnational resistance if they were already people on the move, if not on the run, *before* the Second Word War" (p. 2). Foreigners certainly also partic-

1. The author would like to thank the following persons for their comments on earlier versions of the text : Maartje De Wilde, Ann Mares, Ismee Tames en Fiep Willems.
2. Robert Gildea & Ismee Tames (eds.), *Fighters across Frontiers. Transnational Resistance in Europe, 1936-1948,* Manchester, 2020.
3. Robert Gildea & Ismee Tames (eds.), *Fighters across Frontiers,* 5.
4. Robert Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows. A New History of the French Resistance,* London, 2016, 239.

ipated in the resistance *in* Belgium. For instance, the small country experienced significant migrations of Italians and Poles in the 1920s. When the Germans invaded Belgium in May 1940, about 60,000 Poles were living in the country, half of whom were Jewish. Most of the non-Jewish Poles worked in the coal mines or in the steel industry. An estimated 2,000 to 3,000 Poles engaged in resistance activities in Belgium during the war. They were especially active in the Liège region, Charleroi, Mons and Limburg, where the Polish presence was concentrated.[5] Most of them were members of the Polish Organization for the Independence Struggle (*Polska Organizacja Walki o Niepodległość,* POWN).[6]

Jewish migrants who settled in Belgium from the mid-1920s were mostly from economically disadvantaged regions in Eastern and Central Europe. Jewish Poles ended up mainly in Antwerp and Brussels, where they worked in small-scale, artisanal luxury industries such as the confection and diamond sectors in Antwerp or the leather sector in Brussels.[7] The Polish Jewish community was the largest of the foreign Jewish groups in Belgium. Them awaited the fate of the extermination camps, with deportations beginning in the summer of 1942. However, the Jewish minority did not simply resign itself to this situation. Resistance took shape, especially but not exclusively in Jewish communist circles. An important role was played by the left-wing Zionist party Linké Poalé Zion[8], where Abusz Werber was one of the leading figures. Werber was a Polish Jew who settled in Charleroi in 1929. He was also the representative for his party in the *Comité de Défense des Juifs* (CDJ). This hiding network played a key role in organizing resistance to the anti-Jewish measures of the German occupiers.[9]

According to Enrico Serra, Italian anti-fascists played an important role in the resistance in France as well as in Belgium.[10] After Mussolini seized power in 1922, many Italian socialists and, in particular, communists left the peninsula and moved to Belgium. For this reason, there were about 30,000 Italians living in Belgium at the time the Germans invaded the country in May 1940. Like the non-Jewish Poles, most of them worked as miners in the coal mines. After the fall of Mussolini in the summer of 1943, more and more Italian-Belgians joined resistance groups. Most Italians who engaged in resistance activities in Belgium were members of the Communist Party. Many of them had already earned their stripes during the Spanish Civil War.[11]

It is known that the 'dress rehearsal' for the armed resistance during the Second World War took place in the Spanish Civil War, which managed to mobilize anti-fascist volunteers from all corners of the European continent from 1936 onwards.

5. Alain Colignon, « Les réseaux polonais libres en Belgique », *Jours de Guerre*, vol. 11-12-13, Bruxelles, 1997, 198-211 ; Jan Kohbacher, « Kroniek van 'n oorlog : Eisdense Polen in het verzet », *Eisden,* 24, 2007, 3, 29-40 ; Fabrice-Maerten, « Les Polonais dans les mouvements de résistance en Belgique occupée : entre intégration et particularisme », in Waldemar Grabowski (ed.), *L'Europe occupée. Similitudes et différences*, Varsovie, 2014, 223-243 ; Przemvsław Gasztold-Seń, « Décorations polonaises attribuées aux Belges », in Waldemar Grabowski (ed.), *L'Europe occupée,* 244-267 ; Emmanuel Debruyne, « Les tentatives de coopération belgo-polonaise en matière de renseignement en Belgique occupée (1940-1944) », in Waldemar Grabowski (ed.), *L'Europe occupée,* 207-222.
6. Przemvsław Gasztold-Seń, « Décorations polonaises attribuées aux Belges », 245-246 ; Gabriel Garçon, *La résistance polonaise POWN. Nord, Pas-de-Calais, Belgique, Hollande,* Bouvignies, 2024.
7. Rudi Van Doorslaer, "Het Belgisch Jiddischland. Een politieke geschiedenis van de joodse gemeenschappen in België tussen de twee wereldoorlogen", *Cahiers de la Mémoire contemporaine,* 11, 2014, 44-46.
8. Jeannine Levana Frenk, « Le Linké Poalé Zion et la Resistance en Belgique durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale », *Cahiers de la Mémoire contemporaine,* 12, 2016, 63-98.
9. Lucien Steinberg, *Le Comité de Défense des Juifs en Belgique,* Brussel, 1973.
10. Enrico Serra, *La diplomazia in Italia,* Milan, 1984, 114.
11. Anne Morelli, *La participation des émigrés italiens à la Résistance belge,* Rome, 1983 (Italian translation : *La partecipazione degli emigrati italiani nella Resistanza belga,* Brussels, 2017) ; Francesca Giuffredi & Fabrice Maerten « Emigrés italiens dans la Résistance belge (Les) », *Belgium WWII,* website of the Rijksarchief-CegeSoma, < https://www.belgiumwwii.be/belgique-en-guerre/articles/emigres-italiens-dans-la-resistance-belge-les.html >, consulted on 12 December 2023.

These International Brigades, who included many Belgians, fought General Franco in Spain.[12] As the example of Bulgarian Théodore Angheloff shows, many former International Brigaders did have a leading role in the armed partisan struggle in occupied Belgium, especially in the Brussels region and the southern part of the country.[13] In many ways, the Spanish Civil War marked the starting point of international resistance to fascism and, by extension, Nazism.

The redrawing and/or closing of the national borders of the German-occupied countries naturally made movements between the occupied and 'free' zones more difficult. Because of this various resistance groups organized escape routes, which often relied on contacts that had already existed before the war. The nature of these contacts were, for example, diplomatic, religious or came from previous commercial relations. In Belgium, the experience, skills and know-how of the First World War were used for this purpose in some cases. The goal was to get Allied pilots who had been shot down to neutral Spain or Switzerland. The need for escape routes became even more urgent after the summer of 1942, when the Nazis intensified the persecution and extermination of Jews.

Numerous Belgian intelligence and escape lines branched far beyond the country's own borders. For example, the Belgian 'Wim' network was established in the Netherlands. It was active from September 1942 to July 1943. The initiative came from the Dutch Queen Wilhelmina, because deployments of Dutch Special Operations Executive (SOE) agents to the Netherlands had ended in failure as a result of the German Abwehr's 'Englandspiel'.[14]

An important part of the resistance in France was composed of Belgian networks led by Belgians. In fact, many networks can be located entirely in France.[15] Especially during the first two years of the occupation, the absence of French networks in France was striking. According to the French historian Emilienne Eychenne, it was Belgians in the Languedoc-Roussillon region of southern France who were the first to set up intelligence networks and escape lines.[16]

II. Encounters

Fighters across Frontiers shows that transnational resistance took embryonic shape where like-minded people met. Not infrequently, such encounters occurred in places of confinement such as prisons, prisoner of war camps or internment camps — "crucibles of transnational resistance", as Gildea and Tames call them (p. 245).

The story of the Russian prisoners of war who took part in the resistance in Belgium is exemplary in this respect, but it also demonstrates the limits of research on this topic. We are only informed about the fate of the members of the Russian partisan brigade through indirect testimonies and a historical novel by the Russian author Abram Wolf, *V tsjoezjoj stranje*[17].

12. Based on archives of Belgian members of the International Brigades kept in Salamanca, supplemented by data from files kept in Moscow, Rudi Van Doorslaer and François Van Pelt compiled a 'Database of brigadists from Belgium'. See also the theme issue of *Revue Belge d'Histoire Contemporaine,* 18, 1987, 1-2, devoted to Belgian volunteers in the Spanish Civil War.
13. See for example Maxime Steinberg & José Gotovitch, *Otages de la terreur nazi. Le Bulgare Angheloff et son groupe de Partisans juifs Bruxelles, 1940-1943,* Bruxelles, 2007.
14. Fernand Strubbe, *Geheime oorlog 40/45. De Inlichtings- en Actiediensten in België,* Tielt, 1992, 340-353.
15. Etienne Verhoeyen, « Adolphe doit rester » : l'extraordinaire histoire de Pat O'Leary », *Jours de guerre,* vol. 16/18, Bruxelles, 2000, 171-189 ; Jean Fosty, « Les réseaux belges en France », *Cahiers d'Histoire de la Seconde Guerre mondiale,* Bruxelles, 1972, 2, 187-222 ; 3, 79-111.
16. Emilienne Eychenne, *Les Pyrénées de la Liberté. Les Evasions par l'Espagne,* Paris, 1983, 237-241 ; Emilienne Eychenne, *Les Portes de la Liberté. Le Franchissement clandestin de la Frontière espagnole dans les Pyrénées-Orientales de 1939 à 1945,* Toulouse, 1985, 98.
17. Abram Wolf, *V tsjoezjoj stranje,* Saratov, 1960 ; Arthur Wollants & Jos Bouveroux, *Russische partizanen. WOII – Limburg,* Leuven, 1994.

Some escaped Russian prisoners of war formed their own partisan brigade in Belgium, called *Za Rodinu* (For the Fatherland). This partisan group had four detachments, together consisting of about 40 members. They operated in the province of Limburg in the region of Bree, Peer and Neeroeteren. Escape, survival and joining the resistance were only possible for the prisoners of war with the help of local resistance fighters. Organized communism was a marginal phenomenon in rural Limburg, but communist (resistance) cores did exist in the coal mining areas, mainly among the foreigners who had migrated to Belgium from Eastern Europe in the 1930s. Starting in the spring of 1943, more and more Russian prisoners of war tried to flee the mining camps where they were forced to work in deplorable conditions. The first months after Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, the Soviets suffered major defeats, with the Germans taking hundreds of thousands of prisoners of war.[18]

Those captured soldiers, along with deported Soviet citizens, the so-called *Ostarbeiter,* were used as forced labourers in, for instance, the coal mines in Limburg. This was a practice that the Germans were already using in the heavy industry in the Ruhr region. As a result, starting in late 1941, first (very young) Soviet civilians ended up in the camps of the Limburg mines, followed in the second half of 1942 by captured soldiers from the Soviet Union. Together, these camps formed Stalag 304 and were called 'Russian camps' by the local population. In August 1944, the camps held 1,078 *Ostarbeiter* and 5,774 prisoners of war.[19] Not infrequently, if the internees managed to escape, they stayed in a so-called 'zemlyanka', an underground shelter in the woods of Limburg, or went into hiding with local resistance fighters or sympathetic farmers. Although by no means all escaped Russian prisoners of war ended up in the resistance, some would thus continue the fight against Nazi Germany in Belgium. They did so by joining resistance actions of the partisans or the Secret Army in the Ardennes, in Limburg or in the region around Leuven.[20]

Escape lines were an important site for transnational encounters. The extraordinary story of Andrée de Jongh,[21] who was in charge of the *Comète* escape line from 1941, deserves attention.[22] *Comète* was the only escape line in Belgium that had a complete infrastructure extending as far as Spain to accompany civilians or Allied soldiers wishing to flee the occupied territories. For this purpose, *Comète* was able to call on some two thousand collaborators in different countries.[23] Between August 1941 and June 1944, *Comète* managed to help a total of about seven hundred Allied soldiers, including 288 pilots, who travelled the entire route from Belgium to Spain. Andrée de Jongh herself would cross the Pyrenees more than twenty times until her arrest in January 1943. Despite all precautions, a high price was paid. No fewer than 800 of the 2,000 members of the network were arrested. Of these, 155 would not survive the war, including Andrée de Jongh's father, who was arrested in Paris on 7 January 1944 and was eventually executed on Mont Valérien.

III. Armies

In addition to places of confinement, and intelligence and escape lines, national armies also formed places where — contradictory as it may sound — people of different nationalities met and worked together, and from which transnational resistance could then grow.

18. Jean Put, *Russische krijgsgevangenen in Limburg, 1942-1945 : leven en werken in oorlogstijd,* Beringen/Leuven, 2002.
19. Jan Kohlbacher, *Het Russisch kamp. De kampen bij de Limburgse mijnen 1942-1965,* Eisden, 1998, 19-27, 50 ; Arthur Wollants & Jos Bouveroux, *Russische partizanen,* 19.
20. Read Vasili Beryukov's story in : Arthur Wollants & Jos Bouveroux, *Russische partizanen,* 224-227.
21. Marie-Pierre d'Udekem d'Acoz, *Andrée de Jongh : une vie de résistante,* Bruxelles, 2016.
22. Etienne Verhoeyen, « La ligne d'évasion Comète (août 1941-février 1943) », *Jours de Guerre – Jours mêlés,* 14, 1997, 161-179.
23. Adeline Remy, « Comète, une mémoire européenne. Anthropologie de la commemoration d'un passé résistant », in Robin Liefferinckx, Emmanuel Debruyne, Robin Libert e.a. (eds.), *L'Armée de l'ombre. De la clandestinité à la mémoire,* Oud-Turnhout/'s-Hertogenbosch, 2020, 266.

Many soldiers and civilians fled to England after the Belgian capitulation on 28 May 1940 in order to continue the fight against Nazi Germany from there. In total, about 20,000 Belgian soldiers, sailors, pilots and civilians would reach Britain. About 1,000 died in the process.[24] A significant proportion of the Belgian troops in Britain (about 15%) consisted of Belgians from the diaspora, including people from the United States, Canada, Turkey, Egypt, Iran, the Dutch East Indies, Hong Kong and Shanghai. In addition, Belgians and Luxembourgers were recruited from the French Foreign Legion. Nearly three-quarters of the Belgian soldiers who fled to Britain had previously been held in a Spanish concentration camp in Miranda. Other escape routes passed through Sweden or Switzerland, which served as escape routes for Jews.[25]

After the capitulation of Belgium many pilots crossed the Channel to join the Belgian government in exile. These pilots were the first Belgian soldiers to resume the fight against Nazi Germany, by participating in the Battle of Britain during the months of July to October 1940. During 1942, two Squadrons (349 and 350) were created within the British Royal Air Force (RAF) consisting solely of Belgian pilots. In addition, many Belgian pilots were part of Squadron 609.[26] One of them was Jean de Selys Longchamps, who as recently as 2017 was on a shortlist compiled by the Royal Air Force Museum of pilots from RAF history with a special and memorable story.[27] A second example is Remy Van Lierde (1915-1990). He was also a pilot in RAF service. In fact, he received the Distinguished Flying Cross three times, an honour bestowed on very few pilots. It made him one of the RAF's most decorated pilots.[28] After training in Canada, dozens Belgian pilots were deployed in major military operations such as D-Day and Operation Market Garden, as well as serving in the Mediterranean and in Africa. The balance of Belgian pilots' deployment on the side of the Allies by the end of the war was 161 confirmed victories, but at the cost of 201 deaths.[29]

In addition to Belgians serving in the Belgian Army in Britain, about 100 Belgian commandos and some 150 paratroopers operated under British command. In 1942, at the express request of Winston Churchill, military volunteers from occupied Europe were brought together in the 10th (Inter-Allied) Command, which was divided by nationality.[30] Troop No. 4 was an all-Belgian unit and from August 1942 on it was under the command of Captain Georges 'Chesty' Danloy.[31] It consisted of seven officers and 85 volunteers.[32] After almost a year's training, the Belgian commandos were deployed alongside the British Army in the winter of 1943 during the fighting along the Sangro River in Italy. From March 1944, they fought on the Dalmatian coast in Yugoslavia, before playing an important role in the liberation of the Scheldt estuary.[33]

24. Luc De Vos, "The Reconstruction of Belgian Military Forces in Britain, 1940-1945", in Martin Conway & José Gotovitch (eds.), *Europe in exile : European exile communities in Britain 1940-45,* New York, 2001, 81-99 ; Robert Tabary, *Belgian Forces in United Kingdom,* Brussels, 1994.
25. Luc De Vos, *De Tweede Wereldoorlog,* 272.
26. Mike Donnet, *Les Aviateurs Belges dans la Royal Air Force,* Bruxelles, 2007.
27. *The Telegraph,* 12 September, 2017 ; Louis Robyns de Schneidauer, « L'extraordinaire exploit de Jean de Selys de Longchamp », *Bulletin de l'Association de la Noblesse dur Royaume de Belgique,* 73, 1963, 99-112 ; Robert Antoine & Jean-Louis Roba, *Les Belges de la RAF : 1940-1945,* Brussel, 1989, 65-90.
28. Peter Celis & Cynrik De Decker, *Momy Van Lierde – DFC & 2 Bars – Van Volksjongen tot Volksheld,* Erembodegem, 2007 ; Ch. Shores & C. Williams, *Aces High. A Tribute to the Most Notable Fighter Pilots of the British and Commonwealth Forces in WWII,* Londen, 1994. Belgians in the British Army Royal Airforce see : < https://www.rateone.be/luchtvaartgeschiedenis-database/ >, consulted on 4 June 2024.
29. Luc De Vos, *De Tweede Wereldoorlog,* Leuven, 2004, 263-264, 373-375.
30. Zdenko Maršálek & Diego Gaspar Celaya, "From regular armies to irregular resistance (and back)", in Robert Gildea & Ismee Tames (eds.), *Fighters across Frontiers,* 83. The National Archives, Kew, DEFE 2/977, Activities of 10th Inter-Allied Commando, June 1942- October 1945.
31. Nick van der Bijl, *Commandos in Exile. The story of 10 (Inter-Allied) Commando 1942-1945,* 2008, 15.
32. Luc De Vos, *De Tweede Wereldoorlog,* 267.
33. Nick van der Bijl, *Commandos in Exile* Idem, 57-58, 68-69.

Belgian commandos were involved in the landing on the island of Walcheren in the Netherlands during Operation Infatuate on 1 November 1944. Starting in Ostend, they fought alongside Norwegian, British and Dutch commandos to liberate Domburg via Westkapelle. On 6 November, the Germans surrendered.[34] Subsequently, the Belgian commandos were also deployed in the liberation of Germany. The current state of academic research does not allow definitive statements to be made about who these volunteers were who operated under British command and what lasting impact this transnational resistance had on their subsequent careers and lives.[35]

The recent BBC television series *Rogue Heroes* tells the story of the British Special Air Service (SAS) and is based on the book by Ben Macintyre.[36] Both the book and the series solely focus on the British regiments, but when the Belgian Independent Parachute Company was integrated into the SAS as the Belgian Special Air Services Squadron in February 1944, it became better known as the '5th SAS'. On 8 May 1942, a first Belgian company of paratroopers was formed, composed of Belgian volunteers who reported from all over the world to Ringway in the UK where they received their training.[37] At the beginning of 1943, the unit consisted of 210 volunteers. After two years of intensive training, first under Commander Jules Thise, then under Edouard Blondeel, the unit was operational and, as a Belgian Squadron, was part of the SAS Brigade. The paratroopers were trained to operate behind enemy lines to gather intelligence, disrupt connections and establish contacts and to cooperate with the resistance in occupied territory. In July 1944, the Belgian Squadron was parachuted into France, east of Falaise, to carry out intelligence missions and hinder the enemy by jamming fire. Further drops were made in France, Belgium and the Netherlands. These actions served to support the advance of Allied troops northwards. During the von Rundstedt offensive in the Belgian Ardennes, the Belgian paratroopers were equipped with armoured jeeps.

Fighters across Frontiers highlights the importance of special units within the Allied armies that operated at the interface between conventional and unconventional warfare. These so-called 'irregulars in regular armies' were volunteers recruited specifically to organize (transnational) resistance. This includes the foreign volunteers of the SOE.[38] Civilians could volunteer, or they were recruited by the British secret services. During a special training programme, would-be agents learned weapon handling, and received combat training, parachute training and, depending on their specific mission, training in Morse Code communications. A transnational perspective on the history of the SOE can provide insight into the stratification and scope of this secret organization. Indeed, for clandestine operations in enemy territory, knowledge of the terrain, local language and customs were important assets. Many, but by no means all, SOE agents operating in Belgium were Belgians.[39]

IV. Experiences

"In what ways was transnational resistance transformative?", Gildea and Tames ask (p. 6). In this question, they see the most challenging aspect of the transnational approach. To what extent did transna-

34. *Idem,* 63. Archives about 'Operation Infatuate': The National Archives, Kew, DEFE 2/307-311.
35. For a list of command names, see: < http://www.commandoveterans.org/10Cdo_4tp_June_1944 >, consulted on 29 November 2023.
36. Ben Macintyre, *SAS Rogue Heroes,* London, 2016.
37. A brief English-language history of 5th SAS can be read on the website of Commandovereniging Gelderland: < https://covgelderland.nl/files/20200227_Short_History_of_BEL_SAS_in_WW_II.pdf >, consulted on 28 November 2023. This is a summary of the book: *Van SAS tot 'Special Forces Group'. 75 jaar Belgische Special Forces,* Ieper, 2017; Guy Pierpont & André Lefèvre, *Historique des régiments Parachutiste S.A.S., Commando et Para-Commando belges, de 1942 à nos jours,* Brussel, 1978; Jean Temmerman, *Acrobates sans importance. Les paras belges,* s.l., 1984. Many thanks to Dimitri Roden for the literature tips.
38. W.J.M. Mackenzie, *The Secret History of SOE: Special Operations Executive 1940-1945,* London, 2000.
39. Michael Richard Daniell Foot, *SOE in the Low Countries,* Gloucestershire, 2017, 168.

tional resistance experiences have a lasting impact on the individual level? After all, the war confronted people with radically new circumstances: (forced) relocations, imprisonment, personal losses, or just the establishment of new connections, the strengthening or fading of old enmities. How did people involved in transnational resistance manage to adapt? What skills did they learn during their journey and to what extent did this influence and/or change their ideas and identities?

But transnational encounters do not automatically lead to changing ideas, personalities or identities. The example of the *Comète* escape line shows that national narratives and frameworks can be persistent. Even after the war, the transnational character of *Comète* remained intact. Associations were founded in three different countries with the aim of keeping the memory of the 'Belgian' escape line alive. The first was the *Comète Kinship Association* in Belgium, which became the *Ligne Comète Line - Remembrance* in 2012; the second *Les Amis du Réseau Comète* in the Basque Country; and finally *The Escaping Lines Memorial Society* in Great Britain. However, this transnational nature of the common struggle against Nazi Germany has not led to a shared practice of remembrance of that struggle. Anthropologist Adeline Remy looked at how the three societies keep the memory of *Comète* alive. She notes that national particularities continue to play a role in remembrance practices, which clashes with the objective of cohesion that the different associations say they want to pursue. Moreover, this also raises questions about the durability of the transnational character of resistance. In other words, a shared transnational experience of resistance did not automatically lead to a shared transnational memory of resistance.[40]

V. Gaps in the collective memory

Starting from a void in Gildea and Tames' book, this article sums up many examples of transnational resistance in Belgium and by Belgians elsewhere. After the preceding — non-exhaustive — overview, it is clear that the evidence based on the existing literature is sufficient to conclude that there was indeed transnational resistance in Belgium during 1940-45. That resistance was undertaken by migrants who had immigrated to Belgium during the 1920s and especially the 1930s, but equally by Belgians who fought alongside the Allies, especially the British army, for the liberation of Nazi-occupied Western Europe.

Greater attention to transnational experiences can change our current assumptions about the resistance in Belgium during the Second World War. Traditionally, resistance has often been viewed in national terms, focusing on Belgian resistance groups that fought against the German occupation. However, by looking at the transnational dimension of resistance, we can gain some new insights. Transnational experiences would help us see resistance history not only as a national story, but as part of a globalizing struggle against Nazism and fascism. By focusing on international networks and cooperation, it becomes clear that resistance in Belgium was not isolated. There were many connections with other countries, such as France, Britain and with the rest of Europe. Thus, Belgian resistance groups often collaborated with groups in other occupied countries. This can change the image of a "local" resistance and help us understand how strong the transnational network was that supported and directed the resistance. Moreover, by paying attention to migrants and refugees in the resistance, this transnational experience adds an additional dimension to the resistance, where the personal and collective motivations of these individuals were often influenced by their own experiences with other countries and occupation regimes. This can enrich the story of resistance by highlighting, for example, how the wartime experiences of these groups influenced resistance in Belgium. By adding a transnational perspective, we can also better understand how anti-fascist struggles took shape in other occupied countries.

40. *Idem*, 282.

Attention to transnational experiences could also contribute to a broader understanding of the legacy of resistance. The way resistance groups organized themselves, their contacts with the Allies and other international entities, and the role of war refugees and other foreigners may have influenced the postwar period, including how Belgium dealt with the trauma of war, the integration of refugees, and the construction of a postwar Europe.

In short, by studying resistance in Belgium during the Second World War from a transnational perspective, we can understand resistance not only as a national event, but also as part of a larger picture of European and global struggles. This can lead to a more complex and layered view of Belgium's role in the war and the dynamics of resistance in occupied countries.

Moreover, these are crucial questions that are now rarely addressed in academic research on the history of the resistance in Belgium. This is a subject that is less embedded in the collective memory of the general public in Belgium than, for example, the history of collaboration.[41] The lack of recognition of resistance fighters is symptomatic of the way the Second World War is dealt with in Belgium. Only in recent years has more attention been paid to the resistance and the victims of the Nazi regime. The old narrative, which condoned collaboration, has given way to a tribute to resistance fighters. In doing so, however, it is important not to present those resistance fighters purely as 'heroes of the resistance', because one-dimensional people do not exist, heroes also have dark sides and the past is too complex and layered.

The difficulty of historical research on transnational resistance during the period 1936-48 lies in the fact that resistance fighters left few traces, for obvious reasons — and such traces as they did leave got dispersed over archives in Europe, and as far away as the United States and Israel. Or to put it another way, "The history of War and mass violence especially leaves us with sources as shattered and damaged as the people who lived through them" (p. 242). Research is therefore best served by a collective approach to collecting the fragmentary and disparately preserved source material. To achieve this, the development of a digital research infrastructure on a European scale is an important prerequisite.

While the history of the resistance in Belgium remained for a long time a subject that was far from at the top of Belgian historians' agendas, the future is hopeful. A Resistance History Network[42] and a wikibase 'Resistance in Belgium'[43], a central database of all resistance fighters in Belgium were recently set up to coordinate academic research on the history of the resistance in Belgium during the Second World War. It marks an important step towards mapping individual trajectories of foreign resistance fighters who were active in Belgium.

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41. As an introduction to the memory of the resistance in Belgium, see: Nico Wouters, "La Résistance: un passé oublié?", in Fabrice Maerten (ed.), *Papy* était-*il un héros? Sur les traces des hommes et des femmes dans la Résistance pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale,* Bruxelles, 2020, 25-38.
42. Website *CegeSoma*, < https://www.cegesoma.be/en/resistance-history-network >, consulted on 8 November 2024.
43. Website State Archives Belgium, < https://data.arch.be/?lang=en >, consulted on 8 November 2024.