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**A Special Relationship: The British Empire in British and American
Cinema, 1930-1960**

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Declaration by Candidate

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and effort and that it has not been submitted anywhere for any award. Where other sources of information have been used, they have been acknowledged.

Sara Johnstone

April 2013

Thesis Abstract

This project sets out to scrutinize three decades of feature length fiction films about the British Empire produced by American and British filmmakers beginning in the 1930s through to the end of the 1950s. It compares British and American film in these three decades because such a comparative study has yet to be done and situating such a study within the changing historical contexts is important to chart shifting patterns in filmmaking in these two cultures. Focusing on film narratives that favour sites of modern colonial conflict as setting, namely India, the African colonies and Ireland, the project will chart how American and British filmmakers started from significantly different positions regarding the British imperial project but came to share increasing homogeneity of approach during and after the Second World War. This thesis shows that the relationship of American and British filmmakers to the British Empire changed dramatically after the Second World War and followed political developments. The new special relationship which grew strong after the war had far reaching consequences to the colonial and former colonial nations: the way in which American and British filmmakers portrayed this transition has important implications within film history.

Introduction

Imperial Film Scholarship: A Critical Review

In a scene from the 1935 Hollywood film *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, set on the Northwest Frontier of British India, a group of officers discuss their Colonel's refusal to make an exception to regimental orders, even though his strict obedience will likely result in the death of his own son (captured by a group of rebel natives). One of them, a Scottish-Canadian Lieutenant, is critical of his English superior's stance – 'Why can't he be a little less of a soldier and more of a man? Why can't he forget his blasted duty for once' - but another staunchly defends him with more powerful rhetoric:

Man, you *are* blind! Have you never thought how, for generation after generation here, a handful of men have ordered the lives of 300 million people? It's because he's here, and a few more like him! Men of his breed have *made* British India. Men who put their jobs above everything. He wouldn't let death move him from it. But he won't let love move him from it. When his breed of man dies out – that's the end. And it's a better breed of man than any of us will ever make. Good night, gentlemen.

There are numerous other Hollywood films made in the 1930s, '40s and '50s which feature similarly stirring speeches presenting an eloquent defence of British imperialism and the values and sacrifices of the men (and, very occasionally, women) who helped to found or protect the British Empire. As the review of scholarly literature in this introduction will show, such manifestations of apparently vicarious pro-Empire patriotism on the part of American filmmakers have led many scholars investigating the representation of the British Empire in the cinema to make little distinction between Hollywood productions and relevant films made by the British film industry. There is an assumption that the ideological contours are practically identical.

The main premise of this thesis is that there is a pressing need to carefully distinguish, compare and contrast the representations of the history of British imperialism which appear in British and American feature-length fiction films. Hollywood productions did not by any means constitute a natural and obvious source of pro-imperial propaganda. The first piece of government legislation introduced to stimulate and protect the British film industry from foreign competition, the 1927 Cinematograph Act, was born of discussions which actually identified Hollywood as a major threat to Britain's political authority over its colonies and dominions. As Margaret Dickinson and Sarah Street have shown, various branches of British government and industry saw Hollywood's almost monopolistic stranglehold on the international film trade as an all-too-likely means by which American values and products would ultimately completely displace British ideals and exports in the colonies. The 1926 Imperial Conference debated this issue at length and reported that 'It is a matter of most serious concern that the films shown in the various parts of the Empire should be to such an overwhelming extent the product of foreign countries'.¹ In the same year the Federation of British Industries passed a resolution declaring that they viewed

with great alarm the practical monopoly which has been obtained by foreign film production concerns of the kinema programmes of the British Empire. They consider that this must have a most detrimental effect on British prestige and must be seriously prejudicial to the best interests of the Empire, especially in those parts of the overseas Dominions which contain large coloured populations.²

¹ Imperial Economic Conference, General Economic Sub-Committee, 18 November 1926, National Archives, CAB 32/59.

² *Kinematograph Weekly*, 22 April 1926, 42; quoted in Margaret Dickinson and Sarah Street, *Cinema and State: The Film Industry and the British Government 1927-84* (London: BFI, 1985), 27.

Indeed, it is common in this period to find Hollywood characterised as a rival imperial force, threatening to colonise the hearts and minds of British subjects throughout the colonies.

The research conducted for this thesis has not identified any kind of ‘smoking gun’ document which can tell us if the Hollywood production cycle of tales of the British Empire like *The Lives of Bengal Lancer*, which started to proliferate from the mid-1930s onwards, were intended in part to assuage British fears about the negative impact of American films on the task of colonial governance, and thus to maintain cordial Anglo-American film industry trade relations – the latter being a key priority for Hollywood studios, given the commercial importance of overseas English-speaking territories in generating profits. But the thesis will show that the ideological content of such Hollywood imports was not always in synch with official British colonial policy, and their potential value as imperial propaganda was not necessarily gratefully received. (In fact, as will be seen, *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, for example, was the subject of hostile debate and denouncement in the House of Commons.) It will be further argued that close comparison with British-made films concerned with past and present imperial tribulations reveals that a number of home-grown productions clearly defined themselves in opposition to certain qualities of their American counterparts.

A second key aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that valuable insights can be derived from a comparative study of British and American films about the British Empire over an extended period of time. The choice of three decades for scrutiny – the 1930s, ’40s and ’50s – means that this comparison can be undertaken across a momentous period of flux in the history of the British Empire: the era of decolonization. It will be a central contention of the thesis that the relationship and

degree of similarity between British and American imperial-themed films was subject to considerable change and evolution and that these changes can be directly related to geo-political developments in Anglo-American diplomatic relationships, from the establishment of a wartime alliance to the development of a new kind of peacetime ‘special relationship’ in the decade after the war. This will be evident in both overt and indirect ways. Each country produced films about imperialism during and after the war which are patently concerned to justify the increasingly aligned goals of British and American foreign policy in an era defined by historians as both post-colonial and neo-colonial. Despite these increasing instances of complementarity and synergy, the process of direct comparison will also reveal that Hollywood’s investment in certain types of stories about the British Empire (and its careful avoidance of others) was also partly motivated by the way in which they could function as a lens through which issues of racial hegemony much closer to home could be brought into focus.

A number of the claims made thus far about the direct relationship between the Anglo-American cinema of Empire and the geo-politics of the three decades under consideration are contentious, and whilst there is existing critical work which gives them credence, some of these ideas about determining ideological contexts have not been universally adopted. The following review of relevant scholarship on this subject is like the rest of the thesis, primarily organised around historical chronology and so the work of film scholars, historians and postcolonial theorists will be discussed together.

Critical Interpretations of British Imperialism on Film

Broken up mainly by geographical and cultural distinctions, the patterns which emerge in British Empire cinema scholarship show a highly concentrated focus of

research on the films made in the 1930s, particularly those in the high adventure genre. This simply reflects the fact that the largest number of Empire films were produced in the 1930s. These films are often compared to the Western genre. Of such films, many focus on settings in India and Africa, generally to the neglect of other former colonies, such as Australia, Canada and East Asia. Most of the scholarship on Empire films includes discussions on thematic content, which often goes into character personas as well as depictions of colonial settings, people and plots. Within this research, some scholars address the perspective of the coloniser, others the colonised peoples. There are also considerations as to the economic, censorship, policy, race or cultural implications. However, it remains difficult to find a consensus about what Empire cinema is and how to contextualise it. The various scholars have taken different routes based on audience viewpoint, textual perception or sometimes from analysing the film market itself in an effort to contextualise Empire film and its historical role. When examining the texts that endeavour to explain Empire cinema, the field appears disjointed at first glance. It is clear that scholars endeavour to historicise these films, often with great success. However, there is an important gap in this scholarship; production location is frequently overlooked. Specifically, scholars have a tendency to conduct their analysis without regard to whether the film was made in Hollywood or Britain.

Borrowing heavily from the theories of Edward Said, the concept that the West constructed the image of their colonised subjects is apparent in many scholarly discussions about Empire film and, when entering the realm of colonial discourse, it is impossible not to recognize the value of Said's groundbreaking work *Orientalism*.³ Taking a Marxist approach, Said's argument demonstrates the manner in which the

³ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

West invented a history and culture for the East that centres on its own self-interest in Eastern culture: this creation is rooted in the foundation of commercial interests. Furthermore, according to Said, the West always defines the East with the underlying assumption that the West is superior. Said asserts that by creating an “other,” the West defines it, holds authority over it and builds on their own identity by setting it apart from the alternative. The colonised culture turns into a mode of production, merely a material resource. The colonised peoples are left with a convoluted identity and an imposed stereotype ascribed to their character, for the purpose of establishing a form of cultural hegemony. It is this cultural hegemony aspect that many scholars discussing Empire film have investigated most thoroughly and while there is still a great deal of discussion about the level of political impact intended or achieved by Empire films, it is this Said centred approach which many Empire film scholars employ.

Prem Chowdhry is one such scholar heavily influenced by Said. Chowdhry examines imperial films and their response to international changes. She discusses empire films textually as well as with regard to policies surrounding the making of the films, including censorship issues. Her study itemises the many nuanced stereotypes that occur primarily in films about India and also includes discussion on other Empire films. These stock characters include fundamentalist natives, the friendly native (who is often compared to a child) and the military boyish adventurer type as personified in the Western hero. Her monograph, *Colonial India and the Making of Empire Cinema*, analyses three films *The Drum* (1938), *Gunga Din* (1939), and *The Rains Came* (1939) in an effort to trace the changing policies and attitudes of Britain toward colonial India. She states that British policy was “compelled to change its response to new social and political pressures, both colonial and international” at this time and

that films “had emerged in the 1930s as an arena for debate and discussion on matters of imperialist concern and thus [were] a new site for the formation of public opinion.”⁴ She also vehemently maintains that such films upheld colonial rule as legitimate. In her analysis of the first two films she shows that they constitute typical imperial adventure films akin to the Hollywood Western, while *The Rains Came* represents a shift in the “well established popular, market-tested high military adventure genre.”⁵ She identifies a reworking of otherness, stereotypical representations and images in this film, as gender relations were foregrounded and the typical oriental ruler made a switch from depraved lecher to a figure modelled on the Western educated elite. She manages to touch on not just thematic issues in Empire cinema, but also on issues surrounding censorship as well. However, it is important to note that Chowdhry analyses these films without regard to where they were made, Britain or Hollywood. While *The Drum* is a British made film, the other two are Hollywood made, and Chowdhry places no emphasis on this important fact in her analysis.

Priya Jaikumar, in her monograph, *Cinema at the End of Empire* neglects this same aspect in her analysis of certain films. While this work undoubtedly constitutes one of the most detailed and sophisticated studies of the commercial and cultural policies that shaped Empire films, as well as providing discerning analyses of the common themes and ideologies, she overlooks this important point in her discussion.⁶ Examining the British Empire Marketing Board (BEMB) created in 1926 as well as the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act (CFA), often referred to as the Quota Act, her

⁴ Prem Chowdhry, *Colonial India and the Making of Empire Cinema: Image, Ideology and Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000). 45.

⁵ Ibid. 246.

⁶ Priya Jaikumar. *Cinema at the End of Empire*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006).

work is valuable in considering economic factors that shaped the development of British films of Empire.⁷ The Quota Act regulated how films were identified as British with the aim of enforcing a quota of British films to be shown in theatres. The goal was to promote the British film industry, and protect it from the severe commercial competition provided by imported Hollywood films. Influential commentators also believed that British citizens and the subjects of the Empire were not seeing enough British films. Moreover, they felt their imperial authority in the colonies was being undermined by Hollywood productions. Peter Limbrick aptly demonstrates what is important about Jaikumar's discussion: Jaikumar "shows that the quota legislation attempted to mobilize the empire as a domain that could benefit Britain even in a time of decolonisation."⁸ An interesting point that scholars, including Jaikumar, explain is that a film would be labelled 'British' if it was made anywhere within the Empire.⁹ While Hollywood had the Western, Imperial epics were a way of "reinvigorating an exclusive national resource."¹⁰ However, she neglects a fundamental point in her analysis: that many imperial films were made in Hollywood, including *Gunga Din*. In fact, the vast majority of films which made up the imperial adventure drama genre set in India were a product of Hollywood and the impact of this fact on the level of political impact which they made is not directly considered.

One of the leading scholars on the subject is Jeffrey Richards who traces common themes and images in imperial films. His strength lies in the scope of his

⁷ For a more detailed discussion on the Quota Act see, Margaret Dickinson and Sarah Street, *Cinema and State: The Film Industry and the Government, 1927-84* (London: BFI Publications, 1985).

⁸ Peter Limbrick, *Making Settler Cinemas: Film and Colonial Encounters in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand* (New York, N.Y. and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). 68.

⁹ Priya Jaikumar, "An Act of Transition: Empire and the Making of a National British Film Industry, 1927," *Screen* XLIII, no. 2 (2002). 122.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 23.

analysis and his ability to draw parallels between a wide range of films. His work relies on a high level of knowledge, not only of the films themselves, but also of the production work involved. Richards makes several broad claims regarding the corpus of imperial film and they are somewhat at odds with the Said-influenced analysis of Chowdry and Jaikumar. A key point he establishes is that Empire films were profitable both for British and Hollywood filmmakers.¹¹ Filmmakers such as Michael Balcon and Alexander Korda, were particularly interested in making Empire films largely because, according to Richards they were aware of the potential revenue brought in by such films.¹²

Regarding these films, Richards asserts that not only was the Empire an ideal setting for the high grossing adventure film, but also that such films present the opportunity to project the Empire as benevolent and rooted in moral convictions. As such, they offer a simplistic ideological agenda. He points out that Korda's films in particular:

...offer[ed] no concrete political, economical or constitutional justification for the Empire's existence. There is no indication of the state of flux that the Empire actually found itself in during the interwar years, when it seemed to be evolving into something rather different – the Commonwealth. The Empire is justified in the apparent moral superiority of the British...¹³

Richards is one of the few scholars to address the motivations of Hollywood studios in producing Empire films. Hollywood filmmakers lost much of their foreign revenue in the 1930s due to Germany and Italy banning American films. *Motion Picture*

¹¹ Jeffrey Richards, "Patriotism with Profit: British Imperial Cinema in the 1930s," in *British Cinema History*, ed. Vincent Porter and James Curran (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1983). 249-50.

¹² As Richards explains Korda and Balcon also felt it was patriotic to make Empire films.

Ibid. 250.

¹³ Jeffrey Richards, "Boy's Own Empire," in *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, ed. John M. MacKenzie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986). 150.

Herald reported on Hollywood's diminishing market attributing it not just to the bans but the closing of theatres in war torn zones.¹⁴ Moreover, the dwindling market in Asia contributed to their desire to produce films that would do well in English speaking markets.¹⁵ For this reason, Richards asserts, the British market became very important to Hollywood from the 1930s onward.¹⁶ This fact has been even more extensively demonstrated in Mark Glancy's book *When Hollywood Loved Britain*. Glancy points out that the English speaking market was of the utmost importance to Hollywood, not just because of the diminishing foreign speaking markets, but for the simple fact that these countries provided fewer obstacles and no language barriers in film production and exportation. This may help to explain the interest in imperial themes, since the market includes not just England but Canada, Australia together with the colonies and former colonies. Richards notices the commonalities between the two country's films. He points out similar stereotypes shared by British and American Empire films. For instance, he notes the Hollywood stereotypes that emerge in cinema are not so much of the colonised peoples, but of the British officers. This shows that Hollywood cinema became saturated with typical colonial stereotypes. Ideas of self-sacrifice, duty and honour are present both in Hollywood and British

¹⁴ "War Halts Hollywood's Last Big European Mart," *Motion Picture Herald* 136, no. 11 (1939). Quoted in *Ibid.* 150.

¹⁵ Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (London and New York: Free Press; Collier Macmillan, 1987). 70.

¹⁶ Richards, "Boy's Own Empire." 157-8.

See also, Sarah Street, "The Hays Office and the Defence of the British Market in the 1930s," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 5, no. 1 (1985). She asserts that, "Between 1925 and 1938 many countries, including Germany, France, Italy and Britain introduced protective legislation for native film industries." 37.

See also, Ruth Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood, 1918-1939* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997).

See also, Kristin Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market, 1907-34* (London: BFI Publishing, 1985). They both assert how America aggressively sought after the British foreign market, making it 30% of Hollywood's foreign income.

Empire epics and the appearance of the British officer in such films is unchanging: the same pipe-smoking gentleman with a moustache dominates the characterisations of the Empire soldiers. Richards does not analyse the women in such films, but notes that their lack of presence in the early Empire films emphasises the military nature and high adventure content of the genre. Many scholars echo this point, but elaborate further. For example, speaking of British Empire films Davinia Thornley points out that, "The extent to which women are accepted within the colonial structure is directly related to how heroically they suffer for the sake of their husband's career duties..."¹⁷ Marcia Landy describes two types of female characters present in Empire films: the British woman typically attached to the protagonist, whether daughter or wife, and the native woman who typically acts in the interests of the protagonists, making most female characters in 1930s Empire films "overemphasised with the goals of the protagonist."¹⁸ Along this line of discussion, are perceptions of the female body on screen and what the implications are for colonialism's ideology, as well as sexuality under colonial rule. Sue Harper argues that the female body in the Empire setting is strictly decorative and does not undergo character development.¹⁹ Given that scholars have chosen to characterise the Empire film as a "phallogentric genre" it is not surprising that Richards, along with many other scholars, makes the common analogy

¹⁷ Davinia Thornley, "Conceptions of Empire: Three Colonial War Films," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* XXI, no. 2 (2004). 112.

¹⁸ Marcia Landy, *British Genres: Cinema and Society, 1930-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). 99.

¹⁹ Sue Harper, "From Difficult Wholesome Girls to Difficult Dowagers: Actresses in the 1930s British Cinema," in *British Cinema, Past and Present*, ed. Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson (London: Routledge, 2000). 139.

regarding imperial films being akin to the cowboy Westerns of Hollywood.²⁰ This analogy is made in passing by many scholars.²¹

Peter Limbrick explores this further by analysing the Western alongside what he calls *settler* films. He defines the settler films as films which are made in and about countries colonised by white settlers and which have since gained independence. He successfully demonstrates that the Western is not only worthy of being compared to imperial film but is itself a form of Empire cinema.

However, much a tradition of American frontier adventure sought to legitimize itself in contradistinction to the Old World that had preceded it, it was nonetheless implicated within the wider context of settler societies forged through empire; similar pioneering narratives appeared in other settler societies too.²²

He shows how the Western and imperial film interact, borrowing themes and visual imagery so that the two are essentially two permutations of the same genre: “transgressing the borders of each settler nation-state, settler cinemas have taken shape with the interwoven colonial histories and politics of Britain, the United States, Australia and New Zealand.”²³ Tom O’Regan echoes this point in his work on

²⁰ Ella Shohat, "Gender and Culture of Empire: Toward a Feminist Ethnography of the Cinema," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* XIII, no. 1-3 (1991). 46.

²¹ Jeffrey Richards, *Visions of Yesterday* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973). 68.

See also Chowdhry.

Jaikumar, *Cinema at the End of Empire: A Politics of Transition in Britain and India*.

Rosaleen Smyth, "Movies and Mandarins: The Official Film and British Colonial Africa," in *British Cinema History*, ed. James Curran and Vincent Porter (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1983).

James Burns, *Flickering Shadows: Cinema and Identity in Colonial Zimbabwe*, Research in International Studies, African Series, vol. 77 (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002).

These are just a few of the scholars who make the comparison of Empire films to Westerns.

²² Peter Limbrick, *Making Settler Cinemas: Film and Colonial Encounters in the United States, Australia and New Zealand* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). 31.

²³ *Ibid.* 4.

Australian cinema.²⁴ The importance of Limbrick's work in conjunction with this study is that he recognises that imperial cinema is a transnational genre. His analysis of Ealing's Australian-set films of the 1940s and 50s shows how they sought to simultaneously emulate and offer a distinct alternative to Hollywood westerns. His study offers a particularly useful template for this kind of analysis.

Like the Western, the high adventure tone of the British Empire film shows a marked penchant to make the native culture look primitive. As Rosaleen Smyth demonstrates, the British coloniser represents ideals not only of the adventurer, but of enlightened cultural beacons for the native people.²⁵ Smyth is speaking solely of British films with an African setting and hence only refers to the African people. However, her assertion can be applied to films made in Hollywood portraying not only African, but also Asian and Middle Eastern settings.²⁶ Hollywood film historian Thomas Cripps has underscored just how much British and American cinema and society had in common in this regard. More from the perspective of analysing the career of American born actor Paul Robeson, who appeared in several British imperial films, Cripps makes interesting observations regarding the parallels between Hollywood and British Imperial films: "If any European cinema tradition offered Afro-Americans a substantive departure from Hollywood, it was the British. Their colonial system resembled American racial arrangements in the way in which it

²⁴ See discussions in Tom O'Regan, *Australian National Cinema*, National Cinemas Series (London: Routledge, 1996).

²⁵ Rosaleen Smyth, "The Central African Film Unit's Images of Empire, 1948-1963," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 3, no. 2 (1983). 139.

See also, Smyth, "Movies and Mandarins: The Official Film and British Colonial Africa."

²⁶ See essays in Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar, *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film* (London: Tauris, 1997).

encouraged cultural assimilation while denying social integration.”²⁷ Predicating the ingenuity of the British characters at the expense of the African native in these films, is a defining feature of the 1930s imperial films.

Such representations of the Empire, Richards asserts, came out of late nineteenth century ideas.²⁸ He believes the empire being portrayed is more in line with Victorian views of the colonies and points to the fact that many imperial films are set in the past as confirmation of this.²⁹ He asserts that such an approach may show a certain nostalgia for the glory days of Queen Victoria, regardless of the reality of the portrayal. He cites Martin Green’s monograph for support, which analyses in detail the literature which shaped the colonial imagination.³⁰ Kipling, Richards argues, was ever present in both British and Hollywood cinema, and often provided direct source material, such as in *Gunga Din* (1939), *The Jungle Book* (1942), *Wee Willie Winkie* (1937), and *The Light that Failed* (1939). Richards maintains that while British society was embracing the idea of the Commonwealth, the films remained in a static 19th century ideology, not just in Britain but also in Hollywood. He argues that “the similarity of the British and American films in terms of content and visual imagery is a strong indicator of the extent to which popular culture on both sides of the Atlantic had become saturated with myths and images of British Imperialism.”³¹ This is an important point that Richards reinforces in almost every essay or monograph in which he discusses Empire film. However, Richards also argues that within Empire films, filmmakers “sought deliberately to stress the virtues of the

²⁷ Thomas Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900-1942* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977). 313.

²⁸ Richards, *Visions of Yesterday*. 7.

²⁹ Richards, "Boy's Own Empire." 146.

³⁰ The entire work discusses literature that influenced cinematic representations of Empire. See Martin Burgess Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980).

³¹ Richards, "Patriotism with Profit: British Imperial Cinema in the 1930s." 251.

British imperial system, the doctrines of fair play and moral authority at a time when the rise of fascism was threatening those ideals and offering a different sort of world government.”³² This observation does appear to concede that contemporary concerns found meaningful expression in Empire narratives. Moreover, since he observes that a more contemporary style, the Western, was emulated to portray the Empire, the idea that the films are straightforwardly modelled on Victorian frameworks is problematic. While discussing the marginalisation of women and the native population in British imperial films, Ella Shohat also makes a point which inherently contradicts Richards’ assertion that Empire films are predominantly occupied with the Victorian past, asserting that while the Orient is often represented by projecting into the past, it is intrinsically occupied with present ideologies: “This rescue of the past, in other words, suppresses the voice of the present and thus legitimates by default the availability of the space of the Orient for the geopolitical manoeuvres of the Western powers.”³³ Hence, it seems reasonable to suggest more forcefully that the Empire film is centrally concerned with contemporary political concerns.

Other scholars have attempted to show how, despite their Victorian roots, British Empire films were a product of their contemporary moment. John Mackenzie has produced an interesting analysis of how Victorian imagery, which saw a return to a celebration of the military after the First World War in Britain, found its way into British Empire films. He asserts that at this time the Empire came under threat, but with an interest in gaining economic significance in the world the imagery of Empire turned to the high adventure genre to gain grounding, especially in competition with the Hollywood market: “It was in such an atmosphere that popular imperialism

³² Richards, "Boy's Own Empire." 149.

³³ Shohat. 26.

seemed to secure dramatic new cultural and institutional expression.”³⁴ In line with Richards’ reasoning, Mackenzie states that, while film technology increased, “old traditions survived.”³⁵ He points to members of the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) being comprised of men who had received training during the First World War in counter-propaganda, particularly Edward Shortt and Lord Tyrrell whose goal it was to ensure that only positive images of the British Empire would be made public.³⁶ However, he also notes that the Victorian traditions were reinvented to address the contemporary world of the 1930s and hence comment on new and old ideologies alike. He further asserts that attitudes present in 1930s films spilled over to Second World War propaganda, which may, in part, account for the Empire films which emerged during the war.

Expanding on Richards’ and Mackenzie’s ideas, James Chapman and Nicolas Cull have produced a monograph on Empire film that surveys British and American films from the 1930s to the end of the 20th century. Using a case study format, they use thirteen films in eleven chapters to survey the Empire imagery contained in each. One significant issue the book raises is the comparison between the American and British representations of Empire. Drawing upon the work of John Fraser, it concludes that the reason imperial imagery surfaces in both cultures’ films in a parallel manner is due to a shared ideological investment in chivalry.³⁷ In many respects their conclusions agree with theories postulated by Richards: that the Empire film is invested more in old and outdated ideas. While Chapman and Cull underscore

³⁴ John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984). 10.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 68.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 78.

³⁷ See, James Chapman and Nicholas J. Cull, *Projecting Empire: Imperialism in Popular Cinema* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009). 6-7. See also, John Fraser, *America and the Patterns of Chivalry* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

the fact that British imperialism presented a problem for propagandists during the war, they contend that Empire films came to an “abrupt halt” altogether at this time.³⁸ This thesis will demonstrate that although typical high adventure style Empire films did disappear during the war, a new type of imperial film emerged to confront the issues of the day. Overall the monograph offers an insightful survey into imperial imagery within its cultural milieu. This project will make use of the analysis in this monograph while placing greater emphasis on the many differences between British and American Empire films and their various attempts to respond to contemporary political issues.

Many scholars have paid particular attention to censorship records and Jeffrey Richards in particular has highlighted some important characteristics of censorship policy in relation to imperial-themed films. Richards asserts that the censors had four main concerns. These are consistent with what other scholars have noted, mainly that the content might inflame the native population, represent miscegenation, or show a poor interpretation of the British military or white race.³⁹ However, Richards explains that the censors were also concerned to avoid offending foreign countries with the material by being perceived as racist. He makes a very important point which contradicts an assumption upon which Priya Jaikumar predicates some of her arguments on: mainly that many Empire films did not make it past the censor in the 1930s. Interestingly, “British producers submitted more Imperial projects than their Hollywood counterparts...but only a handful reached the screen.”⁴⁰ Moreover, more

³⁸ Chapman and Cull. 52.

³⁹ Jaikumar, *Cinema at the End of Empire: A Politics of Transition in Britain and India*.

Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain, 1930-1939*, Cinema and Society (London: Routledge, 1989). 136.

⁴⁰ Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain, 1930-1939*. 143.

Hollywood Empire films passed the censors than British films. Richards notes that, “the British projects which got through the censors’ net...came closest to their Hollywood counterparts in substance and approach, that is, they concerned themselves with myth rather than with reality.”⁴¹ In this vein, Jon Burrows argues that when interracial communities were represented in the Limehouse district of London, the Hollywood version was more acceptable to British audiences than a British made film, because it made the setting seem further from reality. Moreover, the more a place was fictionalised the more acceptable it was, regardless of the racism it may portray.⁴² Although not specifically concerning Empire films this observation is applicable as it deals with a parallel issue, inter-racial relationships. Dealing with inter-racial relationships on film in another manifestation, Sue Harper demonstrates that female characters in British films who raised issues of race were often played by American instead of British actresses, stating that this intended to bring a distance from reality around the character. Her example of this is Nina Mae McKinney in *Sanders of the River*.⁴³ These examples point to a complex relationship between Hollywood and Britain surrounding the issue of Empire and inter-racial relationships. This, moreover, demonstrates that Imperial themes were problematic to represent in British film. Overall, there are really not as many imperial films in the 1930s as appears at first glance, as Richards notes. However, for all the persuasive factual data Richards produces to demonstrate this point, the reasons for this discrepancy in BBFC attitudes do not receive any expansive attention. This thesis will seek to prioritise further investigation of this issue.

⁴¹ Ibid. 151.

⁴² Jon Burrows, "'A Vague Chinese Quarter Elsewhere': Limehouse in the Cinema 1914-36," *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 6, no. 2 (2009).

⁴³ Harper. 141

Frederic Cople Jaher and Blair King have written one of the very few attempts to explore the ideological aims and consequences of American representations of the British Empire and they posit a thesis that late 1930s Hollywood Empire films consciously strove to provide good imperial propaganda as part of a united Anglo-American effort against Germany.⁴⁴ In this effort, there was much collaboration between Hollywood and censors in London. These included colonial advisors that would help Hollywood filmmakers produce projects that would paint a positive view of the Empire. The British government “provided an institutional conduit for official colonial policy and recommended technical advisers, retired colonial civil servants, or British-Indian army officers” to advise all areas during all stages of the project.⁴⁵ However, while the special relationship was being fostered, Jaher and King also make an important observation about American sentiments at this time; they assert that Americans “sympathized with subordinate nations yearning for self-determination.”⁴⁶ In an analysis of films such as *The Rains Came* (1939) they argue that Indian self-determinism is promoted implicitly in the plot. This is at odds with Chowdhry’s work, as she traces a change in the representation of Indian characters but one which remains squarely within the confines of residual colonial sentiments. She acknowledges a changing trend in film regarding stereotypes, but does not consider this development in relation to the fact that this is not a film produced by the colonising nation. While Jaher and King, perceive that the colonised peoples portrayed in these films solicit American sympathies for India’s independence, they also maintain that there are sympathies for Britain in the face of fascism due to anxieties about the war, moving filmmakers to make the Empire seem more

⁴⁴ Frederic Cople Jaher and Blair King, "Hollywood's India: The Meaning of RKO's *Gunga Din*," *Film & History* XXXVIII, no. 2 (2008). 33.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 36.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 34.

admirable. This sentiment carries two important, though convoluted, ideas. The first is a genuine desire for other countries to have the ability to follow their own cultural self-governance. However, it also demonstrates the imperial ideology imposing self-governance only within the restrictions of the Western model. Essentially, it imposes democratic ideals on a country that may or may not have these interests: a sentiment more in keeping with the political aims of British colonial policy. The main point Jaher and King make is that there was an active exchange of ideas regarding plot and censorship issues between Hollywood and Britain as the war began. They are two of only a handful of scholars that take into account the way in which shifting Anglo-American relationships impacted upon the production of Empire films. Furthermore, they posit reasons other than market logic as to why imperial themes may have been of interest to both British and Hollywood filmmakers.

Mark Glancy also offers further insight into this, as he explores reasons why the British market was important to Hollywood during the war. Glancy's work on American filmmakers' portrayal of the British exposes how the Office of War Information (OWI) wanted to make Britain look more egalitarian in order to curtail American isolationist sentiments. As a result many pro-British films were made. Glancy does his best to prove this was not just the result of a small presence of British actors and filmmakers in Hollywood as well as directors with Anglophile tendencies. In his work, Glancy includes surveys taken to gather information about what the American public thought about the British during the war. According to a survey conducted by the OWI many Americans believed that while they were fighting for democracy Britain was fighting for reasons motivated by their Empire. It concluded

that, “some Americans believed that Britain was not a democracy at all.”⁴⁷ This study refers primarily to Britain’s imperial status, though it also refers to the rigid class system many Americans perceived in British culture. Many Americans felt that Britain was simply an Empire fighting for its possessions. What Glancy shows is how carefully filmmakers and the OWI tried to dispel this notion during the war. Filmmakers shelved many imperial themed projects deemed inappropriate. A decision taken to shelve the reissue of *Gunga Din* is a testament to the fact that the OWI was trying to reshape ideas about the British and minimise the negative connotations of Empire.⁴⁸ Overall Glancy’s work shows that Hollywood was unable to continue its pre-war production instincts when it came to Empire films while remaining sensitive to Britain’s concerns. Britain did not want to be seen in any way comparable to Nazi Germany, so in this effort filmmakers reshaped ideas of British Empire into a more democratic ideology.

Scholarship on Empire films after the 1930s is not as prevalent as that which focuses on the pre-war films. While some scholars note that after the war there was an increased preference toward the idea of educating the colonies and former colonies, many do not investigate the role of the Second World War or how this change from cowboy imperial racism to stewardship happened. Moreover, it is further curious that the *majority* of Second World War film scholars do not even address the subject of Empire at any great length. Major names in the field of British Second World War film, such as Roger Manvell, Robert Murphy, James Chapman, Sue Harper and Andrew Higson do not address this topic in much detail.⁴⁹ Scholars of wartime British

⁴⁷ H. Mark Glancy, *When Hollywood Loved Britain: The Hollywood "British" Film 1939-1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999). 187.

⁴⁸ Studios did not reissue the film at the behest of the British government. Ibid. 191.

⁴⁹ See Roger Manvell, *Films and the Second World War* (South Brunswick: A. S. Barnes, 1974).

cinema engage with issues of class and gender directly but neglect issues of Empire by comparison. Some old colonial issues are taken note of: the “token Scotsman” for instance, is commented on by many of the scholars to an extent. Scholars have noted that a Scotsman typically makes an appearance to give the perception of a united Britain, as it pertains to the war effort.⁵⁰

Toby Haggith argues that within wartime British film the concept of Empire underwent significant changes: “challenged by more egalitarian and democratic ideas of interdependence and cooperation” the films showed a more co-operative relationship between England and the colonies rather than the traditional, colonial stance adopted previously.⁵¹ He also comments that the new style of films portraying the ordinary commonwealth citizen represented a reality of democracy that did not challenge the Empire but reinvented its image. A good example of this lies in the portrayal of the various communities and individuals in *49th Parallel* (1941). Rosaleen Smyth, with a series of essays, traces the development of the Colonial Film Unit. She gives a concise history of the film unit from its creation as part of the war effort in

Robert Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel: Cinema and Society in Britain, 1939-1948*, Cinema and Society (London: Routledge, 1989).

Robert Murphy, *British Cinema and the Second World War* (London and New York: Continuum, 2000).

James Chapman, *The British at War: Cinema, State and Propaganda 1939-1945* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris 1998).

Sue Harper, "The Representation of Women in British Feature Films, 1939-45," in *Britain and the Cinema in the Second World War*, ed. Philip M. Taylor (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1988).

Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

⁵⁰ See discussions in chapter four in Neil Rattigan, *This Is England: British Film and the People's War, 1939-1945* (Madison N.J. and London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press and Associated University Presses, 2001).

⁵¹ Toby Haggith, "Citizenship, Nationhood and Empire in British Official Film Propaganda, 1939-45," in *The Right to Belong: Citizenship and National Identity in Britain, 1930-1960*, ed. Richard Weight and Abigail Beach (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998). 77.

1939 under the Ministry of Information to its post war continuations.⁵² Important figures such as Julian Huxley, John Grierson, George Pearson and Merle Davis (the founder of BEKE) promoted the idea that film should be a primary tool for a Western style education. John Grierson spoke on the benefits of this on behalf of UNESCO on many occasions.⁵³ It is important to note this field of imperial film studies demonstrates shifting trends in the representation of the colonies, but the main focus is on documentaries.⁵⁴

It is with US based scholars that most talk of wartime feature films and the British Empire arises. K.R.M. Short addresses this concern in several works and sums up what the Americans were feeling at this time: "the question of whether Great Britain was a democracy was a question of some importance in the period between 1937 and 1945."⁵⁵ Susan Brewer highlights the close relationship Britain and America had in producing propaganda during the war years.⁵⁶ Both British and American

⁵² See Rosaleen Smyth, "The British Colonial Film Unit and Sub-Saharan Africa, 1939-1945," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* VIII, no. 3 (1988). Smyth, "The Central African Film Unit's Images of Empire, 1948-1963."; Rosaleen Smyth, "The Post-War Career of the Colonial Film Unit in Africa: 1946-1955," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* XII, no. 2 (1992).

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. UNESCO emerged after the war and took an aggressive stance against racism in many manifestations during the 1950s

⁵³ John Grierson, "The Film in British Colonial Development," *Sight & Sound* XVII, no. 65 (1948).

⁵⁴ I will not be discussing the AHRC research funded project anthologies Lee Grieveson and Colin McCabe eds. *Empire and Film*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). And Lee Grieveson and Colin McCabe eds. *Film and the End of the Empire*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) because most of the work is focused on documentary cinema.

⁵⁵ K. R. M. Short, "Cinematic Support for the Anglo-American Détente, 1939-43," in *Britain and the Cinema in the Second World War*, ed. Philip M. Taylor (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1988). 121.

The late K.R.M. Short was a British born scholar working in the United States.

⁵⁶ See Nicholas John Cull, *Selling War: The British Propaganda Campaign against American "Neutrality" in World War II* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Anglophile film made an effort to redefine the concept of Empire and to make it fit in with a more democratic model, a fact which speaks to the importance of contextualising representations of empire with close reference to circumstances of production.

Marcia Landy summarises the main transition affecting empire films after the Second World War:

While associated primarily with the 1930s, the empire film continued to be produced well into the 1950s, though the treatment of conflicts, the presentation of native life, and the blatant expansionism were altered to suit the exigencies of the changing times, introducing a liberal slant in the guise of benevolent interventionism...⁵⁷

She gives an account of the common stereotypes that emerge, summarizing the British protagonists as representatives of law, and “purveyor[s] of reason, justice and peace.”⁵⁸ She points out that the common themes present in these films seem to emphasise a conflict “between savagery and civilisation” a theme, which she argues is borrowed from the American Western and which persists in a different form after the war years.⁵⁹

Several feminist scholars identify important shifts in the role of women in imperial films after the war. Caren Kaplan makes an insightful observation by demonstrating that with their new found freedom after the war, women found that travel meant self-determination. This being the case, other cultures became commodities facilitating a woman’s self-exploration.⁶⁰ In analysing *Anna and the*

Susan A. Brewer, *To Win the Peace: British Propaganda in the United States During World War II* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997).

⁵⁷ Landy. 98.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 98.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 98.

⁶⁰ Caren Kaplan, "Getting to Know You: Travel, Gender, and the Politics of Representation in 'Anna and the King of Siam' and 'the King and I,'" in *Late Imperial*

King of Siam (1946) and *The King and I* (1956) she argues that the films' characterisation of Anna exemplifies the modern liberated woman in "its own form of imperialist objectification through the mystification of historical inequalities. The celebrations of individualism, modernization, romance, and sisterhood that mark all the versions of Anna Leonowen's sojourn in Thailand are a crucial part of the reproduction of colonial discourse in modernity..."⁶¹ Hence as imperialism moves into a new era, where women are more liberated, some Empire films engage with a discourse of modernity which no longer excludes women, but which foregrounds female identity, but still at the cost of the native identity.

While analysing *Black Narcissus* (1947), Jaikumar observes that in later Empire films, female characters are employed to expose the weaknesses of the Empire. Whilst in the earlier Empire films, male military officer characters are used to validate the Empire, female characters stationed at colonial outposts are subsequently used to expose the vulnerabilities of empire. Jaikumar attributes this to Britain's need to feel a "continuity with its colonial past coupled with the necessity to comprehend that loss..."⁶² She also notes something curious in films after the Second World War, that British women disappeared from screen representations of the war. Wendy Webster makes a similar observation concerning *I See a Dark Stranger* (1946).⁶³ She argues that while war films increasingly excluded women, imperial films included more British female characters "in which British women could symbolise a modernised imperial identity or attract blame for loss of imperial power, and the

Culture, ed. E. Ann Kaplan, Româan De la Campa, and Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1995). 35.

⁶¹ Ibid. 35.

⁶² Priya Jaikumar, "'Place' and the Modernist Redemption of Empire in *Black Narcissus* (1947)," *Cinema Journal* XL, no. 2 (2001). 73.

⁶³ Wendy Webster, "Reconstructing Boundaries: Gender, War and Empire in British Cinema, 1945-1950," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* XXIII, no. 1 (2003). 43.

collapse of imperial boundaries.” She claims this made British-ness a racial identity with “its modernity emphasised though the idea of an emancipated woman...”⁶⁴

Webster has discussed in detail the role the Second World War had in changing conceptions of the Empire.⁶⁵ Her monograph, *Englishness and Empire*, is not specifically devoted to fiction film as it scrutinizes several forms of media including television, documentaries and newspapers. Her research is especially valuable in evaluating the importance of the Anglo-American special relationship which developed after the war and its political impact upon ideas about, and representations of, Empire, a perceptive angle not captured in as much detail by any other scholar. “Close relationships between Britain and America were as widely represented as close relationships with the Dominions, and on the same terms – as white friendships characterised by common culture, ancestry, heritage, language.”⁶⁶ She discusses the trafficking of imagery between American and British media, including Hollywood and British feature film, including what she calls the “Americanisation” of British characters. She argues that certain imperial stereotypes in film during and after the war undergo a change. During the war, colonised peoples are portrayed as being part of British identity. After the war while the white populations of dominion nations like Australia and New Zealand retained this identity but the African and Asian peoples were excluded, marking a racial barrier between white and non-white.⁶⁷ She consequently asserts that imperialism in the post war

⁶⁴ Ibid. 44.

⁶⁵ Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁶⁶ Ibid. 52.

⁶⁷ Using Benedict Anderson’s theories to postulate that a camaraderie was forged between the white members of colonised peoples, changing the identity of colonialism to have highly racial implications, this is what she contends emerged after the war. Ibid. 24.

world is now a broader white phenomenon in which Britain and America have an equal interest.

Webster suggests that imperial themes were transposed onto other narratives, such as the Second World War films.⁶⁸ She argues that such narratives gave credence to the further divide of races with the rise of public figures endorsing ideological divides. For example, Churchill emphasised the special relationship by drawing the parallels between the two cultures (such as common heritage) while simultaneously expressing the need to be strong in the face of foreign threats. By citing terrorism as the enemy of the Anglo-American alliance, he is enforcing a global neo-colonialism, Western powers over third world terrorists.⁶⁹ Webster also develops an argument that certain public figures came to represent the vestiges of old imperialism. The ceremonial gestures associated with the Empire remained and took on new meanings, closer to nationalism than colonialism. Her example is the 1953 crowning of Queen Elizabeth. The pomp of events like this one prioritises imperialism as the symbol of the nation rather than of colonialism. Her scholarship shows that by removing imperialism from the forefront of public thought and locating it within the national history of England, imperialism could no longer be the cause of global discord in the public eye. This allowed the continuation of imperialistic thought to shape political policy, while disconnecting it from its past connotations.

It is worthy of note that certain geographical areas receive disproportionately more attention than others in this area of film scholarship. While not wishing to dismiss the attention Indian and African colonial film studies deserve, it is curious

See also, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1991).

⁶⁸ Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965*. 4.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 75 and 91.

that Asia and Canada, for instance, get considerably less attention.⁷⁰ It is further interesting that films such as *Anna and the King of Siam* and *The King and I* warrant an analysis in the context of imperial identity, despite the fact that Thailand has never been a colony.⁷¹ However, it is evident from their content that the discussions are merited. Only one scholar makes mention of Ireland in connection with Empire films. It may be problematic to include or exclude Ireland from this discussion as it gained independence in 1921 and can henceforth no longer be included amongst the colonies. However, Ireland was part of the Commonwealth until 1948. Moreover, Landy's suggestion that early IRA films use Empire images of the fanatical savage to describe members of the IRA problematises leaving the Irish out of Empire film scholarship.⁷² This is important in demonstrating that imperialism has never gone away, instead the colonisers have ascribed themselves the role of steward over their former colonised nations, in an effort to guide those who they still portray as fanatical, underdeveloped and uncivilised. The idea of exploitation has given way from blatant political control to indirect economic control, with elements of cultural control still intact.⁷³ As Jaikumar points out, "The twentieth century marked the emergence of a neo-colonial morality among old imperial states, abetted by international organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund..." These formed after the War and

⁷⁰ Richards is an exception, in Richards, *Visions of Yesterday*., he discusses the role Shirley Temple plays in Canadian films with regard to Empire imagery.

For discussions of colonial Canadian cinema which discusses Canadian cinema in more recent times see, E. W. Cameron, "Filmmaking, Teaching, and the Colonial Experience: An Immigrant's Account from 'English' Canada of a Story of American Success," *Journal of Film and Video* XLIV, no. 1-2 (1992).

⁷¹ See, Kaplan. Also see, L. Donaldson, "The King and I in Uncle Tom's Cabin, or on the Border of the Women's Room," *Cinema Journal* XXIX, no. 3 (1990).

⁷² Landy. 117.

⁷³ Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). 194-5.

served as a new form of imperialism, one of debt, loans and international standards reinforcing Western control.⁷⁴

Existing scholarship has examined Empire films produced in all three decades surveyed by this thesis, but rarely investigated the transition between the 1930s imperial epics and the post war 1950s. In the 1930s, there was a disjunction between what Hollywood represented as Empire and how the British filmmakers viewed their own Empire. It is during the war that there is a development in Hollywood and British film that attempts to re-brand imperialism, and in fact a synchronisation of ideas between British and American filmmakers emerges. A desire to change the role of coloniser to that of global custodian is present in the international discourse. "How mass communication contributes to this process of transition and democratization depends on the form and function of the media in a given society, shaped by cultural, socioeconomic, and political factors."⁷⁵ Policy-making and economic factors do not demonstrate how the public understands transitions in ideologies. It lies with media outlets to relay ideologies to the public.

From the interwar period to the decade after the Second World War, there is a growing transatlantic discourse and transformation regarding the definition of Empire. There is room for further discussion about how global political developments relate to international film industry politics. Film scholars in this area have largely ignored this development as well as the transition of imperial film from its highly popular days from the 1930s to the 1950s when imperialism became a tainted word. A study of the Anglo-American imperial films which address what becomes of imperial ideologies

⁷⁴ Jaikumar, *Cinema at the End of Empire: A Politics of Transition in Britain and India*. 26.

⁷⁵ Patrick H. O'Neil, "Democratization and Mass Communication: What Is the Link?," in *Communicating Democracy: The Media and Political Transitions*, ed. Patrick H. O'Neil (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 1998). 7.

should bear in mind the important distinctions that go into their production, as many scholars neglect to do, but also with a mind for understanding the relationship between the two. This project seeks to understand how fiction films identified and transformed the idea of Empire and how the changing relationship between the British and American governments affected this process.

Structure

The project will employ a combination of methodologies. Textual analysis plays a very prominent role, but always with a firm grounding in historical context. Patterns of critical reception will be explored as well as censorship records, government files, and press materials. Political policy and reports from the Dominions Office files, War Office Papers and the Colonial Office files from the National Archives in London are examined for the light they cast upon the historical moment in which the films were produced. The Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Beverly Hills and the British Film Institute (BFI) Library in London have provided press books, production notes and clippings files collating film reviews. The former offer insight into the intentions of filmmakers and the latter constitute a particularly important and influential form of reception. The BFI and Margaret Herrick Libraries have also supplied censorship information. Breen Office reports and BBFC scenario reports have been scrutinised to try and discover how much political propaganda value or liability was perceived in films about the British Empire. It must be noted here that original expectations that the records of the BBFC would prove particularly valuable for this project were largely disappointed, on account of the fact that very few BBFC records before the 1960s have been preserved. The one notable exception to this is the fact that several volumes of BBFC Scenario Reports from the 1930s were deposited with the BFI. But even this is a severely

compromised resource. The leading historian of the BBFC, James C. Robertson, explains that the BBFC scenario reports filed with the BFI were selectively preserved and represent roughly only a third of the reports produced during this period.⁷⁶ For some of the most significant films of the era studied within this thesis – e.g. Alexander Korda's 1930s films set in India – there seems to be no surviving documentation as to how they were perceived and shaped by the censors. The BFI holds scenario reports for some 1930s and 1940s films but not beyond. The BBFC, by its own admission, only holds records from the late 1950s onward.⁷⁷ Therefore, the latter part of this thesis must postulate theories utilising other resources, and a key method consists of drawing parallels between textual patterns and contemporaneous historical developments.

This thesis is mainly organised along the lines of historical chronology and geography. That is to say, it is divided into three sections dealing respectively with imperial-themed cinema of the 1930s, the Second World War, and the post-war era up to 1960. And within the first and third sections (the two largest parts of the thesis), individual chapters concentrate upon the contrasting representations of particular colonial territories. In covering such a broad timeframe it has been impossible to discuss all relevant feature films about the long and varied history of the British Empire. The decision has been taken to focus mainly upon the representation of regions which were associated with the most bitter and prolonged contemporaneous conflicts and controversies: i.e. India, Africa and Ireland. Because of its prominence amongst screen treatments of the Empire during the Second World War, there is some discussion of films about Canada in Section Two, but otherwise films concerned with New World settler colonies (all self-governing 'Dominions' by the Edwardian era) are

⁷⁶ Personal communication with the author, 21 January 2013.

⁷⁷ <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/education-resources/book-visit-bbfc-archives>

not examined.⁷⁸ Even with this delimitation, it was not possible to cover in detail every feature film dealing with these territories, so case study selections have been made, focusing on particularly typical and prominent examples.⁷⁹

Section One is divided into two chapters examining 1930s films about India and Africa, respectively. Chapter One will show that current political controversies concerning the British Raj helped to create a situation in which Hollywood filmmakers took a dominant role in the cinematic treatment of India, to which British filmmakers only attempted a limited albeit highly distinctive response. It will be argued that Hollywood's Indian-set films of this period offered awkward and insensitive approximations of official imperial ideology, but that their designation as 'fantasy' allowed them to avoid much of the tight scrutiny and controversy which the few British films on this subject attracted. Chapter Two will show that the reverse situation applies to the screen treatment of African colonies under British control. The prominence of the émigré black American actor Paul Robeson in British films about Africa and the complex political allegory presented in the 20th Century Fox film *Stanley and Livingstone* will be used as evidence to suggest that American filmmakers recognised all too clearly (and warily) the parallels to be found in British Africa with their own domestic racial politics and foreign policy hesitations.

Section Two will show that, contrary to received wisdom, the subject of Britain's Empire did not completely disappear from British and American feature films during the Second World War. It will be argued that British imperialism

⁷⁸ Although conflict over the British governance of East India after the war was responded to by American and British filmmakers, this territory has also been overlooked in favour of colonies which have received a prominent representation in fiction films across all three decades under consideration.

⁷⁹ Some films have been excluded due to the fact that they have been studied by other scholars in great depth (i.e. *Gunga Din* (1939), *Black Narcissus* (1947)), and other films with less scholarly attention have been given priority.

constituted a vitally important terrain for propaganda aimed at fostering strong Anglo-American bonds and gave rise to a surprisingly varied array of politically reactionary and progressive defences of Empire. Crucially, it will show that the wartime alliance created the first significant ideological synergies between the two countries' screen representations of imperialism.

Section Three focuses on post-war films about the British Empire produced up to 1960 and is divided into three chapters dealing, respectively, with films about India, Africa and Ireland. It will argue that British and American films on these subjects came to mostly demonstrate striking resemblances in terms of their ideological messages, and that this marked synchronicity – a striking contrast from Empire films made before the war – can be linked to an intensification of the political alliance between Britain and America, and is clearly responding to American anxieties about the place of communism in a postcolonial world order and increasing racial conflict on the domestic front. Even though one might expect a greater diversity of opinion from British and American filmmakers on the subject of Ireland, given the size and influence of the Irish-American community, it will be shown that the IRA were equally demonised as terrorists without a valid cause across both sets of films.

Chapter One

The Jewel in the Crown in Cinema of the 1930s

The colony that particularly captured the British public's imagination was the Jewel in the Crown of the Empire: India. Given this, one may expect to find many British examples of the Indian imperial epic film in the 1930s. In fact, most of these dramas actually came from Hollywood.⁸⁰ This is partially due to the policy adopted by the BBFC at the time. The BBFC, while it had no legal recourse to ban a film, still effectively held the power to determine if a film project would make it to the cinemas, since many local councils made BBFC approval a requirement for exhibition. Jeffrey Richards points out that the BBFC records indicate some major policy trends in the 1930s pertaining to imperial themes. Specifically, films could not show a British soldier in a dishonourable manner, films could not offend foreign countries or, inflame native populations, and the on-screen representation of miscegenation was strictly forbidden.⁸¹ However, as Richards has demonstrated, restrictions were considerably more lax for American representations of colonial rule as compared to British imperial dramas. He suggests that, "British projects which got through the censors' net...came closest to their Hollywood counterparts in substance and approach, that is, they concerned themselves with myth rather than with reality." The clear implication here is that Hollywood films of Empire were deemed to be relatively harmless because they were understood as having only a slim connection to reality. This chapter will present evidence supporting Richards' contention that British films treating similar themes received tighter scrutiny because of implicit expectations that they would offer a more reliable representation. However, it will also argue that

⁸⁰ Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain, 1930-1939*, Cinema and Society (London: Routledge, 1989). 138.

⁸¹ Ibid. 136.

whilst British films emulated some aspects of Hollywood treatments of India they also consciously strove to offer more distinctive, responsible and authentic representations to negotiate the complex position they occupied in the eyes of the censors.

These considerations more than likely played a part in the fact that only *two* major British imperial dramas concerning India were made in the 1930s, *Elephant Boy* (1937) and *The Drum* (1938). They are both Korda projects, directed by Zoltan Korda and produced by Alexander Korda. These films have many stylistic affinities with Indian-set Hollywood productions, but place greater emphasis on the supposed authenticity of their settings and present a very different picture of relationships between officers of different ranks and between colonisers and colonised. Nevertheless, it could be argued that the basic cinematic template for representing India under the Raj was essentially created in Hollywood. Moreover, it is not hard to make the connection between the Hollywood Western and the 1930s imperial drama, as many scholars have demonstrated.⁸² As Richards points out, “American imperialism sprang from the same roots as its British counterpart. It was after all about America that Kipling originally wrote ‘The White Man’s Burden’”⁸³

It is important to note that at this time, India’s sovereignty movement was gaining momentum. The Indian National Congress (INC) was already highly organized, Gandhi had risen to prominence as a nationalist for the independence

⁸² Priya Jaikumar, *Cinema at the End of Empire: A Politics of Transition in Britain and India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). 133.

See also, Mark Cronlund Anderson, *Cowboy Imperialism and Hollywood Film* (New York and Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007).

And, Peter Limbrick, *Making Settler Cinemas: Film and Colonial Encounters in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand* (New York, N.Y. and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁸³ Jeffrey Richards, "Boy's Own Empire," in *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, ed. John M. MacKenzie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986). 157.

movement and civil disobedience had begun as a form of resistance against British rule. Protests around Indian cities became the norm in this decade, leading right up to the beginning of the Second World War. Representatives from the Muslim League (ML) and the INC had traveled to England in an effort to negotiate Indian independence. Despite not much coming from these meetings, it was clear that India had already begun to assert its intention to break from the British Empire. Addressing such political issues surrounding India became something of a taboo at this time, which is evident when one examines how carefully the BBFC censors handled British-made films dealing with India and the possible repercussions. Given the difficulties of navigating such muddy waters, it is understandable that the British film industry effectively abandoned this field to Hollywood.

Clive of India (1935) is a good place to start an analysis of Hollywood's Indian imperial dramas because it is the earliest example. The film is set in the mid-18th century and based around the historical character of Robert Clive (played by Ronald Colman), the man largely responsible for bringing India into the British Empire. In the film, Clive begins as a clerk but quickly joins the army when the French launch an attack in India utilizing native troops. During the war he suggests attacking the key location of Arcot. Historically this is referred to as the Siege of Arcot, and in both the factual and cinematic battle Clive is successful. A celebration is held in his honour and it is here that Clive meets his wife, Margaret Maskelyne (Loretta Young), whom he has only seen once in a photo but has written to ask for her hand in marriage. She arrives and agrees to marry him; they return to England and have a son. However, while Clive is spending his fortune to run for Parliament, his son grows very ill. When Clive has exhausted his monetary resources he and his wife leave their son to die while they return to India to deal with a dissident ruler, Suraj Ud

Dowlah (Mischa Auer), who is blocking British trade and holding English men hostage. All the men are killed and Clive answers this with a plan to replace Dowlah with his uncle Mir Jaffar (Cesar Romero). He arranges a secret treaty with Jaffar to do battle with Suraj and win the throne, which in return will serve the interests of the British East India Company. However, for the plan to work Clive needs the order to be signed by Admiral Watson (Ferdinand Munier) who asserts that he will not sign the treaty. Therefore, Clive forges his signature and goes to battle. A long sequence portrays The Battle of Plassey and Clive is successful and again returns to England with India's trade intact and his wealth restored.

Years later Clive is living out of the public eye happily with his wife and two new children on his country estate. However, news from India arrives indicating that Jaffar has been dethroned and the situation in India is again volatile. He goes to India once more to sort out the corruption, but meanwhile critics in England accuse him of dishonourably gaining his fortune. He defends himself by stating that all he has done has been for India, and for England. The issue of his forgery is brought up, but Clive does not specifically address this, instead diffusing his accusers' anger with citations of the wealth and prestige he has brought to England and the sacrifices he has made to obtain this wealth, specifically the loss of his son. Parliament decides in Clive's favour and the Prime Minister (C. Aubrey Smith) delivers this news personally. He tells Clive that his fortune and honour remain due to the service he has provided to England. He also adds that King George has sent a message to Clive as well: "That whatever the verdict of the House he himself remembers with gratitude that you have added a great new dominion to the Empire." As he says this *God Save the King* begins to play in the background and the film ends on Clive and his wife embracing.

In many ways this film establishes the formulaic approach to the imperial adventure films Hollywood would come to be known for in the 1930s. The ambition of one man becomes the embodiment of the aspirations of a nation, and by extension the Empire. The film also displays some of the common narrative themes and tropes, as well as the stylistic approach that scholars cite as typical of the Empire films in the 1930s. For instance, one attribute present in the film that came to identify imperial adventure drama heroes is the strong devotion they have to the notion of patriotic sacrifice. This trait is prominent in Clive's character and will be discussed shortly. However, it is Clive's wife that demonstrates this attribute most effectively in the film. One of the first lines in the film referring to Margaret is by Clive: "The more you ask of a woman the more she'll give." Margaret suffers the loss of her son, her wealth and abandonment by her husband in the film for the sake of Clive's success. Davinia Thornley makes the important claim that "the extent to which women are accepted within the colonial structure is directly related to how heroically they suffer for the sake of their husband's career duties and subsequent chance of advancement."⁸⁴ This being the case, Clive's wife is the perfect example of an Empire film heroine; her character is measured in relation to how much of a sacrifice she can make for her husband's exploits. Moreover, the film promotes this as an ideal that is to be praised, not just as personal sacrifice but also as the epitome of serving one's country. But it must also be pointed out that *Clive of India* is a unique sort of empire drama as many imperial adventure dramas made during the 1930s set their story during colonial rule, whereas this film shows the beginnings of Indian colonialism.

The film traces the integral part Robert Clive had in bringing India into the British Empire through the manipulation of the British East India Company and the

⁸⁴Davinia Thornley, "Conceptions of Empire: Three Colonial War Films," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* XXI, no. 2 (2004). 112.

British government. The film glorifies his exploits without question, specifically for his vision and determination. At the same time, however, the film also makes no attempt to mask the unscrupulous manner in which Clive achieved his success. The scene in which Clive begs Admiral Watson for his signature on the peace treaty is a perfect example. Clive shares his plans to replace Suraj Ud Dowlah with his uncle Mir Jaffar as a puppet leader for the British in Bengal. The admiral states that the treaty is an underhanded trick and his conscience won't let him sign it. Clive responds that the "scheme" will build an Empire ("We play for an Empire...") and then forges the admiral's signature and gambles that he will win so the admiral won't make an issue of it. Clive's argument to the admiral admits manipulation and dishonesty outright. Yet, this is vindicated at the end of the film by the King himself.

Clive's attitude towards Jaffa and the native population as a whole is typical of the 1930s imperial drama, but it is expressed here in an unusually forthright and cynical fashion. He sees the native rulers as nothing more than British puppets. He states to his wife, when she asks if Jaffar can be trusted, "I trust his greed for the throne." A later statement shows the dictatorial fashion in which power will be exercised by the British in India: "I shall drag that monster from the throne and put his uncle Mir Jaffar in his place. The new King will take orders from me. We must rule or get out!" This overt Machiavellian cynicism is linked to Clive's questionable greed for fortune, which becomes an issue later on. Several times throughout the film Clive expresses to his wife that he wishes to have riches and comfort. However, this is countered with him mentioning just as many times that his determination is for the benefit of England. His plan to put Jaffar on the throne in exchange for continued British trade is essentially the birth of the British Raj viceroy system. The film endeavours to show that Clive's contentious personal ambitions are wholly compatible

with, and inextricable from, the interests of the nation as a whole and the Indian colonial project is presented largely as the product of one man's desire for thrills, glory and wealth.

The Motion Picture Producers and Directors Association of America (MPPDAA) censoring body, otherwise known as the Hays Office, took great pains to ensure that films produced at this time would not offend domestic and foreign audiences. Correspondence between Joseph Breen (the head of the Hays Office at this time) and Darryl F. Zanuck (one of the film's producers) indicates that *Clive of India* was discussed for several months in an effort to avoid offending Great Britain and its Empire dependencies. A letter to Zanuck from Breen asks him to remove several lines and scenes which may be considered offensive to Indians.⁸⁵ The letter also states "We assume that you are obtaining expert advice on the British and Indian angles of this story, in order to avoid any possibility of criticism on this score."⁸⁶ Zanuck replied that the stage play script had been augmented to get rid of potentially offensive material: "the stageplay (sic) openly says that all Indians are bastards, untrustworthy, etc., we have eliminated this and made special individuals our villains." Zanuck also cited the popularity of the play in Britain to alleviate Breen's concerns that it would not be received well there.⁸⁷ He also added that "Mr. Minney, the author of the book 'Clive', is recognized as the greatest literary authority on India today...It might also be interesting for you to know that all of the story is historically true even the

⁸⁵ The words "savage degenerate" which would have referred to Suraj Dowlah were requested to be removed from the script. See, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS), MPPA: PCA: *Clive of India*: Joseph Breen to Darryl Zanuck, 1 Oct 1934.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS, MPPA: PCA: *Clive of India*, Darrel Zanuck to Joseph Breen, 4 Oct 1934.

romance.”⁸⁸ The correspondence between the two also emphasises taking out any lines or images which would offend the British personally, especially the British Navy. It is obvious that the American filmmakers thought they had been sufficiently sensitive, and even historically scrupulous, to avoid causing any offence in Britain. However, it is clear from British criticism of the film that this failed.

Clive of India promotes the ideology that acquisition equals progress. One British film reviewer picked up on this complexity and commented that

The hero is shown as a liar, a trickster, a forger, and a ruthless deserter of wife and children in the cause of Empire, and is surrounded by glamour and a mist of romantic humbug calculated to deceive and gratify 99 per cent of any ordinary audience.

The reviewer goes on to call Clive’s character a hero without any “sense of ethics.”⁸⁹ The film was not highly praised by critics upon its release. Many reasons for this were cited, including that the film was too long, episodic, superficial, miscast and profoundly historically inaccurate.⁹⁰ One reviewer even accused the film of being an example of how Hollywood was beginning to present historical material in a standardised manner: “The certain thing is that the Hollywooden (sic) conception of the treatment of biographical material has become standardised...”⁹¹ The individualism that defines Clive in the film is an attribute common in Hollywood heroes used to

⁸⁸ Ibid. Emphasis original. Here Zanuck is referring to R.J. Minney who wrote a book on *Clive of India*; this was later made into a stage play written by W.P. Lipscomb.

The film is based on both sources.

⁸⁹ Carroll, Sydney. “Clive of India” *Sunday Times*, (24 Mar 1935), BFI Library.

⁹⁰ See “Clive of India” *Sunday Express* (24 Mar 1935), BFI Library.

“‘Clive of India’ and ‘Venessa’” No title available (23 Mar 1935), BFI Library.

“Coleman as Clive: Arlissian History” No title available (27 March 1935), BFI Library.

“Clive of India” *Monthly Film Bulletin*, vol. 2 (Mar 1935), BFI Library.

⁹¹ “Coleman as Clive: Arlissian History” No title available (27 March 1935), BFI Library.

sensationalize the plot, and this is particularly what the British critics abhorred about the film.⁹²

A film that was often compared to *Clive of India* in its own time is *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (1935).⁹³ The film is set in colonial India and revolves around the exploits of three soldiers: Lt. Alan McGregor (Gary Cooper), Lt. Forsythe (Franchot Tone) and Lt. Donald Stone (Richard Cromwell). They are stationed together, the latter being the son of pitiless Col. Tom Stone (Guy Standing), who is in command of the outpost. The plot is mostly comical, portraying the boyish pranks by the three soldiers, until Lt. Stone is kidnapped by the film's antagonist, Mohammed Khan (Douglass Dumbrille), the leader of a dissident Muslim group. His father reacts coldly and decides not to rescue his son, owing to his son's disobedience for wandering outside the outpost. McGregor goes against Col. Stone's orders and he and Forsythe go after Stone in disguise. They are soon discovered by Khan, however, who proceeds to torture them one by one in an effort to get information and locations of military weapons. Stone, under torture, gives up ammunition locations. While they are sitting in prison McGregor and Forsythe try to comfort Stone. In an effort to explain to him the duty of a British soldier, Forsythe recites the first verse of *England, My England* by W.E. Henley. In the meantime, Col. Stone is leading a group of soldiers to Khan's outpost to recover the stolen arms. This coincides with the three lieutenants hatching a plan to break out of the prison and destroy the weapons. In a climactic battle scene, McGregor is killed while destroying the arms but the English soldiers win the battle and Lt. Stone kills Khan in the process. Stone's betrayal is kept a secret and the film

⁹² See concluding chapters in Ruth Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood, 1918-1939* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997).

⁹³ For example, see "Clive of India" *Sunday Express* (24 Mar 1935), BFI Library.

ends with Stone and Forsythe, and McGregor posthumously, receiving medals of honour. This scene of celebrations within the outpost fades out to *God Save the King*.

This film, even more so than *Clive of India*, institutes a pattern for Hollywood imperial films made in the 1930s. Unlike *Clive of India*, the film is set during colonial rule and predicates the authority of the British Empire solely on moral superiority to the Indian natives. In this way, this film anticipates later 1930s imperial drama films such as *Beau Geste* (1939) and *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1936). The film is notable for its overwhelming male presence and images of self-sacrifice for the Empire which were also to become symptomatic of 1930s imperial dramas.⁹⁴ Forsythe's dramatic speech demonstrates the inspiration Hollywood derived from Kipling and Kipling-like (such as W.E. Henley) imperial poets. The result is that the natives are perceived as madmen, particularly the main antagonist who deceives and tortures the three soldiers to gain advantage, while the British characters are presented as civilised and in possession of higher, distinctly Western, moral values.

Visually, this moral supremacy is reinforced throughout the film but can be seen acutely in its opening sequence. The very first image presented to the audience is of a map of India. This image fades and then shows Indian people in the Bay of Bengal harbour. Next is a scene of a large group of Islamic worshippers kneeling for morning prayers; this is followed by several scenes of crowded streets, bazaars and Indian people going about their daily routine. The camera then goes to the British headquarters in Bengal and, again, the image of the map of India appears. As the camera moves back to expose more of the scene it is revealed that the map is sitting at the centre of a room in the British outpost while British soldiers go about their business. What is striking about the scene is not that it reminds the audience that the

⁹⁴ Landy. 100.

British oversee colonial India but how separate the lives of the British and Indians are. Moreover, it highlights the cultural differences between the British and the Indians. Going a step further, one may argue that the film assumes the Indian people are extremely primitive in comparison to the British, given that one of the few prominent Indian characters in the film is deceptive and violent. However, it balances this segregation with the impression that all live in close quarters, suggesting more of a Western setting in which conflict is inevitable. Priya Jaikumar argues that “a parallel between the visual setting of American westerns and colonial settings gives the setting a more compact area for conflict to arise...”⁹⁵

While the film gives expression to the idea that the British Empire is rooted in moral superiority it also demonstrates this utilising a more individualistic approach characteristic of Hollywood Westerns. For example, Gary Cooper’s character, a Scottish-Canadian soldier, constantly makes jokes that play on British stereotypes, such as the scene in which he imitates his superior officer as a stuffy, English gentleman. One of the most prominent ideological values being touted in the film is, as pointed out before, the virtue of sacrifice. Colonel Stone is constantly drilling the importance of this to his son, “There is no room in the army for sentimentality.” Moreover, Col. Stone abandons his son to Khan by refusing to break his orders. Maj. Hamilton (C. Aubrey Smith) argues this is because he has poured his “entire soul” into the army. However, the film is conflicted about how to interpret the Colonel’s actions. Like Clive in *Clive of India*, Col. Stone is sacrificing his son for the Empire and Maj. Hamilton makes a fair argument to defend his actions. However, McGregor’s actions to rescue the junior Stone goes against this decision and the results of his disobeying orders are ultimately highly beneficial. Yet, McGregor is in

⁹⁵ Jaikumar. 135.

turn sacrificed for the good of the British Empire. That it takes a white colonial subject (McGregor) to save the British is an interesting twist in the film. His cowboy tactics are reproached by his English superiors, but it is his bold action which brings the film to a favourable conclusion, something it seems none of the English commanding officers could accomplish. McGregor's death is hailed with all glory as *God Save the King* begins to play while he is awarded the Victoria Cross (posthumously). This demonstrates most clearly the Western genre influence on the imperial drama. The actions of one individual, rather than collective organisation, seem to drive Hollywood's Indian imperial epic dramas in the 1930s. Furthermore, the film suggests that the British colonial structure in India is archaic and flawed, necessitating the action of a rugged rule breaker to save it.

The Lives of a Bengal Lancer was produced amidst some controversy. According to MPPDA records, the film script was sent to the Hays Office for approval in May of 1931. The MPPDA corresponded with Paramount to develop the script. Louisa Burns-Bisogno suggests that the MPPDA made some important deletions to the script, including "toning down [the] images of British brutality and disrespect of Indian-Muslim culture."⁹⁶ Burns-Bisogno is referring to correspondence between James Wingate and Hays, which stated "we are not so sure about its reception by the British authorities."⁹⁷ While this was a general concern, correspondence between May 1931 until December 1934 indicates more apprehension regarding animal rights (especially concerning the pig-sticking scenes in the film in which the officers go on a hunt for wild pigs) and foul language. By the time *The*

⁹⁶ Louisa Burns-Bisogno, *Censoring Irish Nationalism: The British, Irish, and American Suppression of Republican Images in Film and Television, 1909-1995* (Jefferson, N.C. and London: McFarland, 1997). 60.

⁹⁷ Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS, MPPA: PCA: *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, James Wingate to William Hays, 9 Dec 1932.

Lives of a Bengal Lancer reached the BBFC for approval, there was apparently little left to object to. Minor recommendations asked the filmmakers to delete scenes of torture as well as to delete several swear words from the film. A report generated by Breen even stated “After four years of work Paramount has finally achieved a fine picture, which seems to be headed for box office success.”⁹⁸ The only real complaint the BBFC reviewer found was simply that the behaviour of the British officers was considered “American and very un-English throughout.”⁹⁹

It was quite a surprise to the Hays office and the filmmakers, therefore, to learn that the film produced outrage in certain influential quarters upon its release in Britain. A letter from Foreign Manager F. Herron to Geoffrey Shurlock in the Hays Office gave an early warning that the combined efforts of the studio, the Breen Office and the BBFC had underestimated political sensitivities:

Mr. Beck in London ... has been talking with the Private Secretary to the Prime Minister. This man told Mr. Beck that we should be very careful not to put any sequences in our pictures like the one in “Bengal Lancers” which made use of a pig’s skin. While this is perfectly harmless to British or American audiences, it is extremely sacrilegious to the native Indian...¹⁰⁰

Herron’s suggestion was that there be separate scenes to replace potentially offensive ones so there would be no trouble “in the Mohammedan countries (sic)”¹⁰¹ Shurlock’s response acknowledged the problem and assured Herron that any future reissues of the film would replace such sequences with something “inoffensive to Mohammedans

⁹⁸ Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS, MPPA: PCA: *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*. Breen, Joseph. 2 Jan 1935.

⁹⁹ 24th Jan 1934, *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* Scenario, BBFC records, BFI Library. *The Times* followed up on this by citing Coopers’ accent as “intrusive.” “Carlton Theatre: ‘Lives of a Bengal Lancer’” *The Times*, (1 Feb 1935) 12. BFI Library.

¹⁰⁰ Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS, MPPA: PCA: *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*. F. Herron to Geoffrey Shurlock, 27 May 1935

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

(sic)”¹⁰² However, since the film had already been released, the floodgate of criticism to follow was inevitable. The *Statesmen-Assembly* stated that the censoring of the film was a “slip-up” and had been acknowledged by the American censors, who stated “It is unfortunate that this (censoring) arrangement did not prevent the production of the offensive parts...”¹⁰³

The outraged public response from British politicians demonstrates the immense sensitivity to these themes. In an important exchange between the Secretary of State of the time, R.A. Butler, and Sir A. Wilson, the film was discussed in Parliament. Wilson drew Butler’s attention to the film and asked if any comment or interaction with the Indian government had been made to address the scenes “in which Moslems (sic) were sprinkled with pigs’ blood and threatened with death in a pigskin by British officers...”¹⁰⁴ Butler revealed that “India’s attention had been drawn to this film. They had not asked for representations to be made, but they had powers to deal with films which they considered objectionable in India.”¹⁰⁵ Minister Kirkpatrick added that the film “could not but give the greatest offence to our Moslem (sic) fellow-subjects.” The discussion does not go beyond this point, and despite the fact that no more action was taken on the part of the BBFC or the British government, the short exchange is still important. The film had obviously portrayed the British and Indians in a way unacceptable to the British government. The drive behind these comments suggests cultural empathy but in a manner consistent with colonial policy especially Kirkpatrick’s comment, which shows a penchant for the paternal-like

¹⁰² Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS, MPPA: PCA: *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, Geoffrey Shurlock to F. Herron, 4 Jun 1935.

¹⁰³ Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS, MPPA: PCA: *The Statesman Assembly*, 19 Sept 1935. This statement applies to not only *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* but also *India Speaks*.

¹⁰⁴ “An American Film: ‘Lives of a Bengal Lancer’” *The Times*, 30 April 1935. 7. BFI Library.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

colonial oversight typical of British policies and social beliefs. One can see the ideological gap between the British policy makers, obliged to express moderation and cultural sensitivity to their subjects, and the American filmmakers portraying the Empire.

It is interesting to note that these concerns were apparently not widely shared beyond Westminster. On one occasion, the film was actually co-opted as imperial propaganda when it was screened at a Territorial Army recruitment event held at Ealing Studios.¹⁰⁶ It was, however, more commonly received without any frame of ideological reference as a work of escapist entertainment. Film reviewers generally praised the film as a “heroic narrative of Kiplingesque adventure.”¹⁰⁷ The *Daily News* felt that the “story is beautifully projected against a colorful background.”¹⁰⁸ The reviewers comment mostly on the spectacle of the film as positive without addressing the contentious issues Parliament brought up.

The critical reception of *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, a film which, unlike *Clive of India*, did not seek to directly explain and justify British rule in India, partially vindicated the BBFC's relatively lenient stance on Hollywood's imperial themed films by confirming its assumptions that such films would not be taken very seriously. British-made films on the same subject were clearly felt to require much more intensive regulation. The sheer number of potential objections was obviously intimidating enough to discourage most British producers from any inclination to make films set in India. The surviving BBFC scenario reports record only five such British scripts submitted. Of these, three were rejected outright, and the two that were

¹⁰⁶ “T.A. Recruiting Film: 116 Men Enrolled at Ealing” *The Times* (24 Mar 1937), BFI Library.

¹⁰⁷ Sennwald, Andre, “The Lives of a Bengal Lancer” No title available, BFI Library.

¹⁰⁸ Cameron, Kate, “Superb Adventure in Paramount Film” *Daily News*, (12 Jan 1935), BFI Library.

approved and were subject to various amendments and never went into production.¹⁰⁹ Conversely, of the films Hollywood submitted to the BBFC for approval, the majority (10 out of 14) were passed. It may be conjectured that the wisdom behind this policy must have been that Hollywood treatments of the subject would always be understood as remote from the realities of current conflicts and controversies.

Such a view was clearly justified in the case of a film like John Ford's *Wee Willie Winkie* (1937), which overtly presents colonial India as a redressed setting for a conventional Western. The Western theme of manifest destiny appears quite prominently in John Ford's *Wee Willie Winkie* (1937). Jeffrey Richards is one of the few scholars who has noted the importance of early Shirley Temple films within the imperial adventure genre, but he does not expand greatly on the topic.¹¹⁰ The film opens with Priscilla (Shirley Temple) traveling with her mother (June Lang) to the Rajpur outpost in India. They are traveling to stay with Priscilla's grandfather, Col. Williams (C. Aubrey Smith). Along her journey she inquires where the *Indians* are, why the English posted in India don't live in England, and if her Grandfather is an Indian. As an American child, she innocently mistakes the Indians in India for the American Indians.¹¹¹ Her mother explains the difference to her. As the two arrive at the station they see a man, later identified as the film's antagonist, Khoda Khan (Cesar Romero), being arrested by British soldiers. Priscilla sees Khan drop a necklace and she, again quite innocently, tries to return it to him. When she arrives at the outpost she immediately takes a liking to a Scottish soldier Sgt. Donald MacDuff (Victor McLaglen) who takes her under his wing and teaches her about the life of a

¹⁰⁹ See BBFC Scenario Reports 1930-1939, BFI Library.

It must be noted that the two Korda films discussed in this chapter do not appear in the BBFC Scenario Reports.

¹¹⁰ Jeffrey Richards, *Visions of Yesterday* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973). 5-6.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 5.

British soldier at the outpost. Meanwhile, her stuffy English grandfather does not take the same liking to her and remains mostly indifferent to her. At the outpost prison she discovers Khan and finally returns his necklace to him. She befriends him and unknowingly helps him escape by taking messages to him, without understanding what she is doing. A battle between his dissident faction and the outpost soon breaks out. In the middle of this Sgt. MacDuff dies and Priscilla, struck with grief and lack of understanding of the two cultures' divide, resolves to go and speak with Khan. She makes it to his camp and both Khan and her grandfather are moved by her pure gesture for peace and friendship. She brings the two men together and they proceed to negotiate peace.

Since the main character is a child, especially an American child, the film arguably exposes ironic contradictions in the imperial ideology without doing so directly. The virtue of a child does not threaten the moral superiority which the British Empire predicated itself upon, but inoffensively and safely raises problems and inconsistencies in Britain's imperial policy through to the unsullied curiosities of a child. When she asks why the English people do not live in England her question comes across as more comical than anything else but this statement could be taken as subtle American scrutiny of British colonialism. Moreover, Priscilla's mistake at thinking the Indians will be not the Indians of India but the American Indians in North America indirectly (and perhaps not even consciously) makes a parallel between Manifest Destiny and British colonialism. As Marcia Landy points out:

If the Western deployed the popular mythology of westward expansionism, the colonization of the American Indian, and the appropriation of the frontier couched in religious and nationalist terms, the empire film translated expansionism, colonization, and commerce into a spectacle of benevolence of

high-minded heroes acting in the name of royal prerogatives, culture against anarchy, and the white man's burden.¹¹²

It is a common narrative device of the Western (and John Ford's opus in particular) to start from the position that the West is no place for women and children, and then ending with acknowledgement that the frontier needs the taming and civilising influence of females. This shift in attitude is duplicated by C. Aubrey Smith's character within *Wee Willie Winkie*. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that *Susannah of the Mounties* (1939), released just two years later, shares essentially the same plot with *Wee Willie Winkie*. The only difference between the two films is the landscape. However, even visually the films look stunningly similar in spite of the geographical differences. Both sets resemble each other and also look like typical Hollywood Western locales.

The native group in *Susannah of the Mounties* has changed but the plot is more or less the same: a settler group needing to negotiate peace with the natives to successfully colonise the land. It is the parallel between these two films which reveals the basic simplicity with which Hollywood interpreted colonial relations. More evidence to support this observation lies in the advertising campaigns for each film, as they are essentially the same as well. Both Press Books submitted posters that feature the native antagonists on horseback waving rifles and other weapons (Figure 2.1)¹¹³ Such posters seem to be popular for imperial film adventures in general, as many portray the native adversaries in this way. Advertisement posters for *Clive of India*, *The Four Feathers* and *The Charge of the Light Brigade* included drawings of natives analogous to the Shirley Temple imperial films.¹¹⁴ The effect is that *any* native group

¹¹² Landy. 97.

¹¹³ Press Book for *Wee Willie Winkie* and *Susannah of the Mounties*, BFI Library.

¹¹⁴ See Press Books for *Clive of India*, *The Four Feathers* and *The Charge of the Light Brigade*. BFI Library.

can be synonymous with the poster illustrations. The obvious effect is to reduce colonised ethnic groups to the status of generic stereotypes.

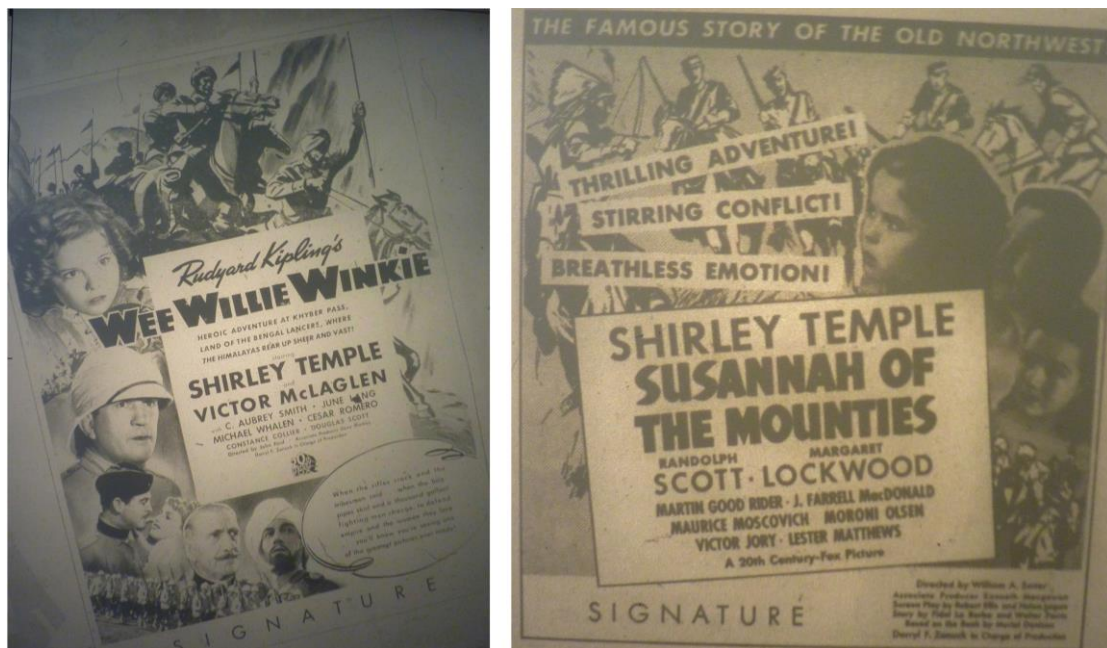


Figure 2.1 Wee Willie Winkie and Susannah of the Mounties Press Book Adverts

What is striking in these Hollywood films is that the native population is barely represented within the films themselves. Beyond the antagonists, the films do not give a voice to the Indian people, and the audience is only introduced to them through the display of their different cultural practices, such as Islamic praying in *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*. Turning to the British imperial films, one finds that they give more of a voice to native characters. As has been noted before, the most immediately obvious difference between British and American screen treatments of India is one of quantity: only two such British films were made in the 1930s: *Elephant Boy* and *The Drum*. Before discussing these films in detail, it is worth examining the ways in which the BBFC applied different regulatory criteria to British films set in India - and colonial dramas generally - so as to effectively suppress this particular sub-genre.

One of the most revealing BBFC scenario reports in this regard concerns a British script set in colonial North Africa. *The White Prophet*, adapted from the 1909 novel by Hall Caine, was to be a tale about a rebel in Sudan who plans a coup, which is averted. The reviewer would not approve the script without some important changes.¹¹⁵ He commented that:

The story is fiction throughout and does not purport to be founded on historical facts... The final scenes, p 463 and the following pages, of Court Martial on Colonel Lord: petition for clemency signed by every officer and man in the Army of Occupation, interference of His Majesty who grants Col. Lord a free pardon under the great seal of England, promotes him to General and posts him to command of troops in Egypt are too *fantastic* (sic) and could not be shown in this form... [T]hese scenes... would certainly have a tendency to bring the British army into contempt and ridicule.¹¹⁶

It is evident that Hollywood had more leeway on this issue or Gary Cooper's role in *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* may have never have made it to cinemas. The different set of censorship standards applied to British imperial dramas suggests that the BBFC had adopted as a guiding principle some notion that British films were obliged, or at least might be perceived as being obliged, to offer an accurate and responsible representation of official military policies. The comparatively fantastical liberties taken with the truth by Hollywood films were what chiefly enabled them to be classified as harmless. This makes Jeffrey Richards' suggestion that the only British films set in the colonies which could be approved were those which most closely imitated American models appear logical and convincing. His claim does undoubtedly

¹¹⁵ This example is not an Indian set film but is used to bring to light issues the BBFC had with how the British military was portrayed. Priya Jaikumar brings in cinematic representations of Africa to argue her point regarding British portrayals of Indian cinema in a similar fashion.

Jaikumar.

¹¹⁶ *The White Prophet*, (14th Oct 1932) BBFC Scenario Reports, BFI Library. 90. Emphasis added.

contain an element of truth, but it should be noted that British producers in the 1930s were denied the opportunity to straightforwardly duplicate the Hollywood approach. The evidence of this is seen in the fact that Hollywood was allowed to depict outlandish scenarios, such as a little American girl making peace between a Northwest frontier tribal warlord and a British soldier in India. Yet, in a British film, a pardon from the King for a Colonel who has been guilty of misdeeds is impossible. This seems to be the fundamental reason Hollywood films were allowed to portray the Empire more often than British filmmakers: because Hollywood was allowed to be eccentric in their approach and this was deemed non-threatening. The BBFC seems to have forgiven Hollywood for its mythmaking, while British filmmakers were held to a higher standard of accuracy.

Precision in matters of military protocol was not the only issue on which the BBFC judged British imperial dramas by stricter standards, and the matter of cultural sensitivity towards colonial subjects was of paramount importance in this regard. A script filed by Gaumont demonstrates this perfectly. In early 1934, Gaumont wanted to make a film titled *9 Kipling Stories*.¹¹⁷ As the title suggests, it was to be a series of short narratives in one film adapting some of Kipling's short stories. Each segment was reviewed individually and the reviewer demanded that all scenes that could be interpreted as offensive to Hindus be deleted. "The Incarnation of Krishna Mulvanez" drew the comment that the temple scene "must be very carefully done so as to avoid giving offence to members of the Hindhu (sic) religion." Later on, the reviewer further commented that this portion of the film should not be shown at all "owing to the disregard shown to Indian religious beliefs."¹¹⁸ It is curious that this film drew

¹¹⁷ This film appears to have never been made.

¹¹⁸ *9 Kipling Stories*, (8th Jan 1934) BBFC records, BFI Library.

such criticism while films like *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* were allowed to show offensive scenes toward Indian religious beliefs so openly.¹¹⁹

One of the only British imperial films that dealt with colonial India in the 1930s is the Kordas' *Elephant Boy* (1937). This offered a number of striking differences from its Hollywood counterparts. Its principal character is Indian - and is played by an Indian boy who had not acted before - and sections of the film resemble a documentary, largely because of the work done on location by Robert J. Flaherty.¹²⁰ The film is based on Kipling's *Toomai, of the Elephants*, and bears the theme of Empire more discreetly than other Empire themed films. The film opens with the main character, Toomai (Sabu), speaking directly to the camera about his profession as an elephant keeper. The following scene shows him eating in the jungle with his elephant and a monkey playing nearby. His father (not credited) soon fetches him to bring his elephant to Petersen (Walter Hudd), a British hunter. Peterson examines the elephants for the hunt. This hunt produces nothing eventful. However, that night a tiger shows up in the hunter's camp and Toomai's father tries to kill the tiger by himself, but is killed instead. As a result, Toomai and his elephant receive a new master, but the new owner is cruel to them both and threatens to kill the elephant. Toomai steals the elephant and runs away into the jungle. When Peterson learns of this, he takes a search party and goes to look for the boy. Meanwhile, Toomai

¹¹⁹ Recall the pig sticking and threats from British soldiers of killing Muslims and sewing their dead bodies into pig skins in *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* as well as the representation of the Kali cult in *Gunga Din*. It is not a stretch to conjecture that perhaps this is because the bias in *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* is primarily aimed at Muslims, the ethnic and religious minority of India. It seems then that while the BBFC found it acceptable for Hollywood to make insensitive cultural jabs within their films, they were further not pressed to sympathise with India's minority group.

¹²⁰ Robert J. Flaherty mainly worked on documentaries throughout his career. He spent months in India gathering material for *Elephant Boy* but was sacked from the project before the film came together. Zoltan Korda was largely responsible for the finished product. See, Charles Drazin, *Korda: Britain's Only Movie Mogul* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 2002). 173-4.

stumbles upon the gathering grounds for a large number of elephants. When he and Peterson catch up they bring the herd in and Toomai is praised as a hero.

The film's plot is relatively simple but is broken up by many stunning shots of the Indian jungle, showing genuine wildlife as well as scenes displaying the role of an elephant keeper in India. As well as providing a stunning spectacle, there seem to be some traces of a documentary imperative to inform the viewer as to the lives of rural Indians. It must, however, be noted that the spectacle of the Indian jungle also serves to make Toomai look primitive and animalistic. Toomai first appears shirtless and addressing the audience directly. The next five minutes are scenes in which the boy is visually compared to the elephant and monkey he is with. He wakes up and in overly dramatic movements, yawns, scratches himself and begins to eat. Although nothing very remarkable, every action he performs, or over-performs as the case may be, the monkey mimics. The scene is no doubt meant to be comical and show off the scenes of Indian wildlife, but it evokes concepts of primitivism. Sabu spends a good portion of the film half-naked and talking to animals. Hence, this beginning scene sets up a certain view of him that is played out throughout the entire film: that he is a primitive and his actions form part of a spectacle designed for Western audiences that is indistinguishable from the images of the exotic landscape or wild animals. What this accomplishes relates to what Rachel Moore and Priya Jaikumar discuss as an ideological process of "enabling the modern world." By contrasting the primitive and savage world with the civilised Western model, in this case Petersen, the film upholds British modernity as beneficial and necessary to the Indian community. Furthermore, Jaikumar argues that while documentaries in general do not automatically exploit the images they capture, a narrative film utilizing documentary images "makes [the documentary-like] sequences perpetually subservient to an ideological vision

regulated by the narrative sequences.”¹²¹ In effect, the scenes Flaherty shot were used by Korda for a narrative which advances an ideological agenda in line with the attitude of paternal oversight to justify British colonial presence.

The dramatic conflict in the film is not a Hollywood-style climactic battle which guarantees the British a continued place in the development of the colony. Instead the film tries to use the presence of Petersen to demonstrate how the British rule of order civilises the native community. The best example of this in *Elephant Boy* comes when Petersen defies the elephant keepers’ traditional rules. By the laws of the elephant keepers, Toomai’s elephant must be killed because it has attacked a person. However, Petersen overrules this decision when he learns that the elephant was beaten. Since the basic principle of discouraging cruelty to animals cannot but appear reasonable and unobjectionable, it is still a means of imposing Western ideals on the native community. *Elephant Boy* also represents the complexities of the relationship between coloniser and colonised in a deeply simplistic fashion. The key issue here is the fact that the main native character is a child. A child’s innocently trusting and obedient perception of the British comes to represent the ideal relationship between Britons and Indians within the film. Toomai’s youth and naivety serves to reinforce a perception of colonial subjects as uneducated and needing the parental-like mentorship of the British Empire to advance them into a civilised culture. Toomai thus literally embodies what Marcia Landy identifies as the defining trait of the ‘friendly native’ in imperial-themed films: their ‘child-like’ nature.¹²² In this way the

¹²¹ Jaikumar. 131.

See also, Rachel O. Moore, *Savage Theory: Cinema as Modern Magic* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

¹²² Landy. 98.

film “upholds British colonial enterprise as superior, civilising and modern.”¹²³ The exotic shots of the rural community only reinforce the view of native primitivism needing civilization, as British hunter Peterson’s leadership role in the film appears natural. Jaikumar has pointed out that in *Elephant Boy*, “hierarchies between the imperialiser and the imperialised are naturalised and reified.”¹²⁴ Jaikumar argues that this is partially empowered by the realism in the film, brought about by the documentary shots.

Flaherty’s involvement in the film’s production drew comments that the film was an “imaginative documentary.”¹²⁵ *The Statesman* stated that the film would be “nothing at all without the direction of Mr. Robert Flaherty.”¹²⁶ *Monthly Film Bulletin* and *Film Weekly* raved that the film was a cinematic success because of Flaherty’s work on it.¹²⁷ John Grierson, a noted documentary producer himself, wrote that Flaherty’s work on *Elephant Boy* falls into “realist cinema.”¹²⁸ Grierson unreservedly touts that the film, along with Flaherty’s other works, contain the authenticity of a documentary. Critics at the time may not have been aware that Flaherty’s work on the film was largely sidelined when he overstayed his trip to India for work on the film. Flaherty had originally presented the idea for the film to Alexander Korda, loosely modeled on Kipling’s short story. However, after over a year of shooting without any results Korda brought back Flaherty and tried to salvage the film by shooting the

¹²³ Prem Chowdhry, *Colonial India and the Making of Empire Cinema: Image, Ideology and Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000). 242.

¹²⁴ Jaikumar. 25.

¹²⁵ “Leicester Square Theatre: ‘Elephant Boy,’” *The Times*, (7 April 1937), BFI Library.

¹²⁶ “‘Elephant Boy’ at Leicester Square” *The Statesman*, (10 April 1937), BFI Library.

¹²⁷ “Elephant Boy” *Monthly Film Bulletin*, vol. 4, no 39, March 1937. 28. BFI Library.

“Elephant Boy,” *Film Weekly*, vol. 18, no. 443, 10 April 1937. 32.

¹²⁸ Grierson, John, “The Finest Eyes in Cinema” *World Film News*, vol.1, no.12, March 1937.

narrative in a studio. He handed the project over to his brother, Zoltan Korda, and most of the finished product is a result of studio shooting. To accomplish this, “elephants were hired from zoos, and London’s cafes were combed for dark-skinned actors.”¹²⁹ Many of the scenes were shot at night to mask the setting. Hence, what started as a labour of love for Flaherty was hijacked by Korda and reworked into the narrative piece that is *Elephant Boy*. Korda was forced to simplify the story as a result of financial difficulties.¹³⁰ Despite this the press book touted Flaherty’s part in bringing the footage from India included in the film.¹³¹ It seems reasonable to suggest therefore that Flaherty’s abortive involvement in the film served an important symbolic purpose by emphasising the film’s supposed documentary authenticity, in contrast to the ‘mythic’ treatments of colonial India provided by Hollywood.

No doubt emboldened by the critical and commercial success of *Elephant Boy* – and, perhaps just as crucially, its successful avoidance of controversy – Alexander Korda commissioned another film set in colonial India, once again directed by his brother Zoltan and starring Sabu. *The Drum* (1938) takes place in the contemporary northwest frontier of colonial India, in the fictional city of Tokot. Korda asked novelist A.E.W. Mason to write a “film story with an Indian setting for Sabu.” Prince Ghul (Raymond Massey) plots to overthrow the British Raj by killing his brother, the Raj, and his nephew, Prince Azim (Sabu). After signing a treaty with the English, the Raj is killed by Ghul and the prince flees to safety. Ghul plans to honour the treaty his brother has signed, but with ulterior motives. His real plans are to unite the northwest tribes and drive the English out with a display of power by killing his English guests,

¹²⁹ Drazin. 177.

¹³⁰ Ibid. 178.

¹³¹ See Press Book for *Elephant Boy*, BFI Library.

Interestingly, Flaherty was the man largely responsible for bringing Sabu to instant stardom; it was his cameraman, Osmond Borradaile, who discovered the boy. See, Drazin. 176.

Captain Carruthers (Roger Livesey) and his unit. While Ghul is plotting, the prince runs into trouble when one of Ghul's men tries to kill him. He flees to Carruthers's home and Mrs. Carruthers (Valerie Hobson) saves the prince from his attacker. Hence, when Prince Azim finds out about Ghul's plans to kill the Carruthers, he returns to Tokot to warn them. Using the city's sacred drum, he sounds an alarm that saves Carruthers and his men, and a climactic battle ends with Ghul's death. Prince Azim takes up his role as leader of Tokot and rejoices at a continued alliance with the British.

With this production the Kordas can be said to have directly emulated the kind of imperial Indian adventure drama which had hitherto been the exclusive preserve of Hollywood. The storyline of *The Drum* specifically resembles the *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* in many ways. In both films, the British are endeavouring to maintain their presence in the contentious northwest frontier of colonial India, and a British outpost is outnumbered by the northwest tribal peoples. Both films have a fanatical, nationalistic, Muslim antagonist whose goals involve removing the British presence from India using violence. Moreover, both concern a Muslim uprising involving machinations around large weapons caches. These antagonists resort to torture in an attempt to achieve their ends and in both cases a group of British prisoners are captured and must fight their way out of captivity. In both films the British are shown using subterfuge to gain information, by employing spies dressed and made-up as natives. Ultimately, both films finish with the reaffirmation of British rule in India after a military triumph achieved through individual bravery and against the odds.

The Drum, however, did not receive a rebuke from Parliament as had been the case three years earlier with *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*. It can certainly be read as

a more orthodox affirmation of imperial ideology. Prem Chowdhry points out that in imperial dramas, “nationalism is equated with fundamentalism.”¹³² In *The Drum*, Prince Ghul is established as a fundamentalist in an ironic scene. When he is speaking with his followers he states “Victories are not gained by an ignorant rabble led by a fanatical ruler; they are won by an army marching to one man’s order, fighting to one man’s plans.” However, he goes on to preach the death of the “fat, soft, comfortable slaves of the plains, their white throats ripe for the knife.” So while he affects not to be fanatic, his speech ultimately shows that he is. Ghul’s sin is not his vision of freedom for his people but his violence against the Empire. Since violence against the British colonial system is part of his motive, it is easy to dismiss his character as simply mad. Conversely, the British protagonists are described by Landy as “benevolent purveyors of reason, justice and peace” and often representatives of the law.¹³³ Captain Carruthers fits this description perfectly. He is a soldier sent to Tokot to maintain peace in the northwest frontier. The film reinforces this symbolism in its visual strategy as well as a few significant scenes. The film constantly shows Carruthers reading or signing official papers. This, underscored with the scenes of imperial pomp, show Carruthers to be a man dealing with issues of law and justice. His benevolence is demonstrated by his kindness to Prince Azim. Accentuating his actions are Mrs. Carruthers’s motherly tone toward the Prince. The female protagonist’s role in the imperial adventure drama is an important one. Mrs. Carruthers states in the beginning of the film that she hates India but that she is willing to devote her life to Carruthers and therefore live where he is needed. She is also the symbol of the paternal tone British imperial policy had toward the natives in their colonies. The scene in which she holds a gun to Azim’s attacker demonstrates

¹³² Chowdhry. 245.

¹³³ Landy. 98.

this most clearly. She helps Carruthers in the ultimate goal to return peace and order to Tokot.

In this way, a parallel can be made to the character of Clive's wife in *Clive of India*, who similarly suppresses her own needs to support the goals of her husband. A key difference with *The Drum*, however, lies in the fact that Mrs. Carruthers' actions do not merely make her partner's life easier but are also seen to benefit the native population and demonstrate the benevolence of British rule. There are various other ways in which this film is clearly aiming to differentiate itself from its Hollywood forbears. The use of Technicolor and extensive location shooting in India promises a level of visual authenticity which previous Hollywood films about India could not, and did not attempt to, match.

The film also uses similar representational strategies to *Elephant Boy* by giving prominent and sympathetic roles to Indian characters, in stark comparison with Hollywood productions. The focus is again placed on an orphaned Indian child (played, as in *Elephant Boy*, by Sabu) and his need for the support, protection and guidance of British authority figures who, more so than many of his own countrymen, are shown to have his best interests at heart. The central metaphor of the film – the drum – symbolises how, despite their different cultures, Sabu's Azim and a young army drummer boy (played by Desmond Tester) ultimately speak the same language and can reach a shared understanding.

The reviewer for *Monthly Film Bulletin* fully recognised that this gesture towards a benevolent and sympathetic treatment of certain Indian characters was ultimately rooted in orthodox imperialistic paternalism:

The English are represented as courageous, honest, clever and quietly cynical in their dealings with the natives...The natives, on the other hand, are conveniently callous (with the exception of Prince Azim, who was educated at

an English school). The real difference between them seem to be differences of method rather than motive, of degree rather than kind. Possibilities of friendship and respect between them seem to be limited to the younger generation, as represented by Azim and the English drummer boy, where distinctions of class as well as race are forgotten.¹³⁴

The film generally received extremely flattering reviews in the British press, though, and successfully avoided in its home market the kinds of controversies which had dogged its Hollywood predecessors. However, it is vitally important to acknowledge that this was not the case when it came to *The Drum*'s reception in India. Prem Chowdhry has chronicled in some detail how the release of the film in Bombay provoked two weeks of hostile picketing from Muslim protestors outside the cinemas where it played, which led to mass arrests and the film's withdrawal from circulation.¹³⁵ Chowdhry makes clear that following the outrage provoked by *The Drum*, subsequent Hollywood films dealing with imperial India, such as *Gunga Din* (1939), also faced greater scrutiny and hostility when they were released on the sub-continent.¹³⁶ However, her otherwise comprehensive and compelling account does not explain why it was specifically *The Drum* which triggered political resistance to this genre of films. As she notes, much of the offence occasioned by *The Drum* involved perceived insults concerning ethnic affiliations and caste protocols which the filmmakers probably could not have intended or been conscious of.¹³⁷ The ostensibly more inflammatory *Lives of a Bengal Lancer* had been officially denounced by the Indian government as it was by the British, and also by middle-class Indian film

¹³⁴ "The Drum," *Monthly Film Bulletin*, vol. 5, no. 52, 30 April 1938. BFI Library.

¹³⁵ Chowdhry. 92-6.

¹³⁶ Ibid. 131-63.

¹³⁷ Ibid. 92.

critics, but the outrage provoked was relatively mild compared to the apparently spontaneous acts of mass resistance which accompanied screenings of *The Drum*.¹³⁸

It is surely reasonable to conclude that the simple fact that *The Drum* was a British production was the key factor in the reaction it inspired. It could be taken as a direct symbol of official British attitudes and imperial policies, and thus became a meaningful target of nationalist protest. Indian viewers thereby read the film with a similar approach to that adopted by the BBFC in examining British film projects about India, in that they perceived different relationships to the realities of colonial life in British and American films and respectively judged them by very different standards. The next chapter will show how, by contrast, the creative freedoms afforded British and American filmmakers were in some respects effectively reversed when it came to the screen representation of colonial Africa in the 1930s.

¹³⁸ Ibid. 82.

Chapter Two

The Dark Continent: The Screen Representation of Colonial Africa in the 1930s

The great disparity between the numbers of 1930s feature films dealing with colonial India respectively made by British and American companies shows that Hollywood took a dominant role in creating popular representations of life under the Raj. When turning to the 1930s imperial adventure films set in the African colonies the opposite is true. Although Britain did not produce a great number of films relating to colonial Africa, Hollywood produced significantly fewer, and these were only made at the very end of the decade: *The Sun Never Sets* (1939) and *Stanley and Livingstone* (1939).¹³⁹ While British filmmakers had to play catch up to Hollywood when it came to Indian subject matter, they were first in the field with regards to Africa: *Sanders of the River* (1935) was the first in a cycle of films comprising *Rhodes of Africa* (1936), *Song of Freedom* (1936), *King Solomon's Mines* (1937) and *High Command* (1938).¹⁴⁰

Explaining the reasons behind this reversal of trends in the production of imperial-themed films will obviously be a major preoccupation of this chapter. The apparent reluctance of American filmmakers to extend their appropriation of British imperial history to Africa may appear all the more surprising in light of the fact that the dominant figure in attempts by British filmmakers to represent colonial Africa

¹³⁹ It is worth noting that Hollywood did produce other films set in Africa, *Beau Ideal* (1931), *The Last Outpost* (1935), *Beau Geste* (1939) for example, that do resemble an imperial epic but these either are not set in British colonies or fail to address imperial issues altogether.

¹⁴⁰ There is another British Paul Robeson film not included in this study because its story takes place in French colonial Africa. Although it will be drawn upon to make some important points, the relevance of the film is noted by other scholars.

See Thomas Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900-1942* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

See also, Stephen Bourne, *Black in the British Frame: Black People in British Film and Television 1896-1996* (London and Washington: Cassell, 1998).

was a legendary American star: the actor and singer Paul Robeson, who took star billing in *Saunders of the River*, *Song of Freedom* and *King Solomon's Mines*. Much has been said of Robeson's career, and as Richard Dyer points out that there is "striking disparity in the different ways he is perceived."¹⁴¹ For the importance of this study however, the significant point is how Robeson's films marked an important divergence from Hollywood's approach to African colonialism. In at least one of these films, *Song of Freedom*, an imprint of Robeson's ideological leanings left its mark. Differing in tone to the Robeson films which will be discussed is *Rhodes of Africa*, which bears a fleeting resemblance to *Clive of India* and may suggest that British filmmakers attempted to capitalise on Hollywood's construction of British imperial figures.

If it is feasible to suggest that Hollywood filmmakers provided a template for the screen treatment of colonial Africa with their Indian-set films, then why did they not take a similar lead with the 'dark continent'? This suggests something more was at work. This chapter will argue that the answer lies close to home in the colonial legacy of America's racial inequalities. As pointed out in the previous chapter it is apparent that Britain avoided India as a topic because of tension from the Indian independence movements escalating at this time. Concerning America, a parallel issue existed: tensions and controversies concerning the disenfranchised African American population. At this time segregation between the African American and European American population still existed in the form of the Jim Crow laws.¹⁴² Racial violence in the American South often erupted into mass killings, lynching and political

¹⁴¹ Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London, Basingstoke: British Film Institute and Macmillan, 1986). 69.

¹⁴² Jim Crow laws refer to the set of laws in the United States which instituted segregation and made racial inequality standard practice. The laws are collectively known as the Jim Crow laws based on a famous song of the same name typically performed by a white person in blackface.

injustices.¹⁴³ The prejudice in America against the African American population, especially in the American South, was countered by the African American intelligentsia movement started in New York more commonly referred to as the Harlem Renaissance. The friction this caused represents not only the beginning of the African American civil rights movement but also a source of international embarrassment for America. A plausible explanation for Hollywood's apparent disinterest in colonial Africa lies in the degree to which it was felt to be straightforwardly undesirable to give prominence to black characters (with the risk of boycotts in the South all too likely) and because stories of the troubles faced by white authorities in governing rebellious and recalcitrant black populations might too easily appear as allegories for sensitive domestic problems. The degree to which Hollywood found Africa all too amenable to interpretation as a mirror of its own political dilemmas is forcefully demonstrated in the final case study of this chapter. *Stanley and Livingstone* represents an early example of Hollywood filmmakers using stories of Empire as a fitting framework for the discussion of America's place in the world, and as such offers a glimpse of how this genre of U.S. cinema would subsequently develop in the 1940s and '50s.

Turning first to the British films, it is useful to examine the censorship materials surrounding British films portraying colonial Africa. BBFC reports have survived for several of the British films which are examined in this chapter, and no serious objections were voiced. There are two other British films, titled *The Colour Bar* and *Black Land*, which were submitted to the BBFC and approved but never

¹⁴³ One more famous example of this was the case of the 'Scottsboro Boys' a group of nine African American boys and young men falsely accused of raping two white women. The young men were then sentenced to death. The American Communist party brought the case to appeal but the boys were still found guilty after three unfair trials.

See James Haskins, *The Scottsboro Boys* (New York: Henry Holt, 1994).

subsequently made.¹⁴⁴ *Black Land* was a Gaumont project set in the fictional setting of Bugenya and portrays native malcontent with the greed of a colonial soldier. The film reviewer approved the film, noting “The native discontent is not against government (sic) but against the greed of one individual and all the government authorities are shown in sympathy with the native.” However, the reviewer required that some changes be made and emphasised one point in particular: “I think any association, even pretend, between white and black man and woman should be avoided.”¹⁴⁵ As has been pointed out before, portraying interracial relationships in any way was strictly forbidden by the BBFC during the 1930s, and the African imperial films are no exception. The film was approved pending this change. The objection in *The Colour Bar* had a similar reference to miscegenation which had to be removed to gain approval.

According to the surviving BBFC records, there were only three major imperial-themed British films set in Africa that were not approved in the 1930s. The more serious objections to these films concerned political implications contained within the narratives. A film titled *The Coming of the Lord* set in South Africa revolved around a Christian mission in Africa. The reviewer was uncomfortable with the fact that the proposed film contained elements which portrayed “British jurisdiction in a queer light.” It is particularly interesting to note that he/she justified these concerns by suggesting that American censors would have found the treatment of racial relations inflammatory had the film been set there: “Shown as an American state, I feel the Americans might object.” As passing a comment as this may be, it shows that contemporary observers were well aware of the parallels that might be

¹⁴⁴ *The Colour Bar*, BBFC Scenario Reports, BFI Library, 5th Jan 1934.

Black Land, BBFC Scenario Reports, BFI Library, 21st June 1934.

¹⁴⁵ *The Colour Bar*, BBFC Scenario Reports, BFI Library, 5th Jan 1934. (Emphasis is not added, underlined material is representative of the original source).

drawn between Britain's governance of Africa and America's treatment of its black population.¹⁴⁶ Another film titled *The Man Eaters of Tsavo* was also not approved due to political implications.¹⁴⁷ The film included a portrayal of the Fashoda crisis and the BBFC reviewer commented that "The Fashoda incident was one which caused great resentment in France against England, and any reproduction of it, even after 40 years, might easily arouse animosity unless it was very correctly handled."¹⁴⁸ The reviewer suggested that if the "Anglo-French hostilities" were eliminated then it could be possible to make, but if they weren't then it was "too full of political controversy and too recent history to be suitable for a film."¹⁴⁹ The comments and ultimate rejection of these two films displays the sensitivity to colonial issues. However, what one does not find in the BBFC records is a sympathy with the native population that was given to the Indian subjects, which suggests there may have been no empathy from the censors, and that concerns were focused on Britain's diplomatic reputation within the international community.

A film entitled *The Dop Doctor*, which dealt with the Boer War, was not approved despite the fact that a silent version had already been made in 1915.¹⁵⁰ Both the silent film and the proposed 1936 film drew from a lengthy book of the same

¹⁴⁶ *The Coming of the Lord*, BBFC Scenario Reports, BFI Library, 13th June 1934, 308.

¹⁴⁷ *The Man Eaters of Tsavo*, BBFC Scenario Reports, BFI Library, 21st Mar 1937, 33.

¹⁴⁸ The Fashoda incident was a crisis in 1898 in which French and British imperial interests clashed. The British controlled the Nile and the French endeavoured to push the British out of the area and hence gain control over Egypt. However, Britain maintained rule of the area through diplomatic means despite the heightened threat of war.

¹⁴⁹ *The Man Eaters of Tsavo*, BBFC Scenario Reports, BFI Library, 21st Mar 1937, 33.

¹⁵⁰ Fred Paul, "The Dop Doctor," (United Kingdom: 1915).
The Dop Doctor, BBFC Scenario Reports, BFI Library, 16th April 1936, 54.

name written by Clotilde Graves (under the pseudonym Richard Dehan) in 1911.¹⁵¹ The book portrays the South African War and can be said to portray the Boer peoples offensively. It can also be interpreted to cause offense to the native African peoples and glorify the British imperial cause as inherently morally righteous. However, based on the comments by the BBFC reviewer of the 1936 proposed film, these were not the reasons the BBFC chose to highlight as their basis for rejecting the film. The affront to the native population in the book did not affect the reviewer's decision, who instead chose to focus on the issues with the settler population:

This book was published shortly after the South African war, and gave considerable offence in South Africa to the way both English and Dutch characters in the book were depicted. A silent film of this book was submitted for censorship in 1915 and after one or two deletions had been made was passed by the Board, but I understand considerable objection was taken to it by the Union Government, and as far as I know it was withdrawn from exhibition in this country.¹⁵²

The 1915 film was in fact banned shortly after its release. The reviewer went on to state that "It would be impossible to visualize (the film) without including some very unpleasant or prohibitive scenes." It was suggested that a second scenario be submitted, but to dissuade the producer from making the film by informing him of the "fate of the silent film."¹⁵³ When the second scenario was submitted it was unequivocally rejected based on scenes that included drunkenness, rape, and a few other prohibited themes.

Based on the rejection of this film, one may assume that when it came to Africa, the BBFC were principally motivated to police potential offence to imperial authorities and white settler communities. However, glorifying British imperial

¹⁵¹ Richard Dehan, *The Dop Doctor*, Popular ed. (London: W. Heinemann, 1913).

¹⁵² *The Dop Doctor*, BBFC Scenario Reports, BFI Library, 16th April 1936, 54.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

ambitions provoked none of the cautiousness shown with regard to Indian subject matter, as demonstrated by the production of *Rhodes of Africa* (1936). The film may have been loosely inspired by *Clive of India*, as it is an example of venerating British imperialism by representing it through one man's unyielding dedication to the British Empire. The very name of the film references the Indian Empire builder, as Clive of India is a historical nickname but Rhodes of Africa is not. The insinuation by the filmmakers seems to invoke the legacy of Clive in an effort to transpose his importance onto Rhodes in the same manner. It may also be conjectured that the filmmakers were making reference to the film *Clive of India* in an effort to capitalise on its success. The narrative is based on the life of Cecil Rhodes (played in the film by Walter Huston), the man who is largely responsible for the creation of Rhodesia. Cecil Rhodes is an ambitious man who combines his economic enterprises with politics to bring part of Southern Africa into the British Empire as Rhodesia. The film opens on a British settlement in South Africa. When a man finds a diamond a great rush to mine the area begins. A montage sequence showing this rush and the development of the mines follows and concludes when the scene comes to Rhodes mining his area of the mines. A brief altercation with a neighbouring miner, Barney Barnato (Frank Cellier), establishes Rhodes's aspiration to buy all the diamond mines. This is reaffirmed when Rhodes comes into a pub to see Dr. Jameson (Basil Sydney). Before he gets to the doctor, Barnato renews his grievances, but Rhodes calmly assuages him while reasserting his desire to buy the remaining diamond mines. When he does see Dr. Jameson it is revealed that Rhodes is sickly and will not likely live beyond six more years (and this is if he rests).¹⁵⁴ Rhodes does not lament this news

¹⁵⁴ This development is partially based on historical fact, but a reason for its inclusion is more than likely to make the motivations for his Empire building seem less selfish since he would not expect to be around to enjoy the fruits of his success.

but instead renews his fervor to claim the diamond mines, citing expansion for the British Empire as his ultimate goal. In reality, and in the film, he does achieve this end by owning the majority of the Kimberley minefields. He then sets his sights on the gold mines in the north. However, this brings him into conflict with the Boer settlers. Circumventing the Boer president, Ohm Kruger (Oskar Homolka), he goes directly to the native chief, King Lobengula (Ndaniso Kumala) for permission to claim the land. The chief agrees, despite the fact that the Boers had already come to an agreement with him. Another event during the negotiations with Lobengula marks the beginning of tensions between Kruger and Rhodes, as Kruger's friend and representative, Hendricks (Percy Parsons), is killed after his meeting with Lobengula and Kruger accuses Rhodes of this.

Rhodes continues with his plans to colonise the area that Lobengula has allocated to him. In an animated speech to a group of settlers, Rhodes encourages the colonists to persevere in their ambition. He is about to march with them when he receives a telegram naming him as Prime Minister and requesting that he return to the Cape to assume this role. He sends Jameson on the trail with the settlers instead and returns to take up his role as Prime Minister. Jameson proceeds and a long scene of pioneers struggling through the African terrain culminates in a montage sequence. This is followed by a scene between a distraught Lobengula and Jameson. Lobengula laments the decision he has just made with Rhodes, as he did not anticipate such a large group of settlers, but is pressed to keep his side of the bargain by Jameson. He claims he may not be able to maintain peace as his warriors are unhappy. This soon erupts into violence. After an attack on the settlers' police by Lobengula's warriors, Jameson, on the orders of Rhodes, goes to battle with the warriors. This issue is

See Robert I. Rotberg and Miles F. Shore, *The Founder: Cecil Rhodes and the Pursuit of Power* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

settled but news of malcontent of British settlers within the Boer territory emerges soon after. They come to Rhodes for help. Rhodes is not eager for a conflict, but through a misunderstanding, sets into motion the Jameson Raid, which fails, both in the film and historically. This leads to Rhodes resigning as Prime Minister and begging for Jameson's life. The film shows Rhodes health declining after this event until he dies in his bed. Yet after his death he is celebrated for expanding the British Empire and the film ends on Rhodes's tombstone overlooking the South African landscape.

As mentioned before, the parallels between *Clive of India* and *Rhodes of Africa* are worthy of note. This includes the use of Hollywood Western devices to achieve the tone of the film. One example can be found in the speech Rhodes gives to the pioneers going to settle on Lobengula's land; Rhodes states that they are "the first settlers of a new land...riding into the future...on a proud journey..." and they should not be bridled by any challenge. This rhetoric echoes America's westward expansion policy during the era of Manifest Destiny.¹⁵⁵ The montage sequence showing a vast line of covered wagons battling through rough terrain visually underscores this. Another major nod to Manifest Destiny is the resilient individualism. Just like Clive in *Clive of India*, Rhodes is singularly minded on a fixed goal of expanding the British Empire. The opening text in the film states that Cecil Rhodes "set out *single handed* to unite a continent."¹⁵⁶ Rhodes himself states that "England must expand or perish, there is the making of a great colony here" - a statement mimicking Clive's "we must rule or get out" concerning India. Rhodes repeats this sentiment throughout

¹⁵⁵ John L. O'Sullivan, "Annexation," *United States Democratic Review* 17, no. 1 (1845).

See also, Robert Walter Johannsen, "The Meaning of Manifest Destiny," in *Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansionism*, ed. Sam W. Haynes and Christopher Morris (College Station, Tex.: Texas A&M University Press, 1997).

¹⁵⁶ Emphasis added.

the film. Moreover, like Clive, Rhodes makes great personal sacrifices to achieve his dream. He disregards his health for the sake of building the colony he envisions.

However, there are also some important differences between the two films that sets *Rhodes of Africa* apart from *Clive of India*. The one major example is Rhodes's attitude in the film, which can be characterised as generally compassionate. While both Clive and Rhodes show great ambition, determination and devotion to the Empire in the film, Rhodes is altogether more sympathetic to the native population than Clive, who is straightforwardly Machiavellian in his approach. To Clive the native population are nothing more than tools to achieve British rule, to be set up as puppet rulers for the material gain of the British. However, Rhodes shows a degree of consideration to the native population. In the scene in which Rhodes negotiates a treaty with Lobengula, who was originally supposed to be played by Paul Robeson, Rhodes invokes a bitter historical grievance to empathise with the tribe.¹⁵⁷ Specifically, he blames the Boers for taking Lobengula's land "the Boers took his father's country." He then plays up the purity of his own intentions by talking about Queen Victoria and touching on themes of benevolent leadership. Blatant manipulation aside, the tone of the film constantly shifts colonial discord onto the Boer president and even goes so far to show Rhodes making an effort to avoid conflict and violence with the Boers. The film portrays Kruger as largely responsible for instigating tension in South Africa through trickery and belligerence. This not only contrasts him with Rhodes but aids the film's portrayal of Rhodes as a selfless hero.

¹⁵⁷ Paul Robeson was contracted to play this role and would have undoubtedly changed the dynamics of the film had this come to fruition but his obligations tied him to *Show Boat* (1936). See Martin B. Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (London: Pan, 1991). See also, Cripps.

To further soften the image of British conquest the filmmakers removed a scene which would have showed machine gun fire mowing down native attackers.¹⁵⁸ However, the film does not refrain from showing scenes of cruelty towards the native population if these are tinged with comedy. One sequence early on in the film shows a native worker being shoved about and accused of stealing diamonds at the beginning of the film. The native worker fears he will be killed as he shouts “Boss don’t shoot me!” Instead the miner produces a bottle of castor oil, implying he is to expel the diamond from his system. The other workers roughly lead him away to get the diamond back. Yet Rhodes is shown in the film to be motivated by more than just the desire for material wealth. Hence, the filmmakers may have produced this scene to draw a comparison between Rhodes and his fellow mine owners. There is only one scene which does portray Rhodes as violent toward the native population. Rhodes is in the middle of a meeting with Anna Carpenter (Peggy Ashcroft), an outspoken journalist, and speaks mostly about the natives in Africa as children, using the metaphor of Africa as a woman and the native peoples her children who in Rhodes’ opinion need to be educated. This meeting is cut short when news from Jameson arrives telling Rhodes of Lobengula’s warriors attacking the settler population. Rhodes angrily mutters that “children need to be punished,” and asks for a bible. He then flips through the pages fervently searching for an applicable quotation. He picks out Luke 14.31 and states that that is his answer to Jameson. The passage reads “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand?”¹⁵⁹ The next sequence is the one that was cut to exclude the machine guns. Instead there is a series of scenes which begins with the

¹⁵⁸ "Review: Rhodes of Africa," *News Review* 1936.

¹⁵⁹ Luke 14.31, King James Version.

text, “Lobengula strove to maintain peace but he was powerless to curb the savagery of his young warriors.” There are shots of the African warriors readying themselves for war and marching against a group of settlers led by Jameson. The scene then cuts back and forth between the two groups, building tension. A fairly anti-climactic scene follows in which the two groups meet, shows a brief gun/spear exchange and then ends. The text that appears next on the screen is simply one word, in all capitals, and engulfed in flames: Rhodesia. This signals that after the battle Rhodesia has been established as a colony. The brevity and 'chasteness' of these scenes of conflict might be fairly described as euphemistic. Importantly, it removes blame from Rhodes by transferring the actual act of violence to Jameson, a pattern subsequently maintained throughout the film.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, there is a certain degree of justification induced for Rhodes and Jameson's actions given that Lobengula states he cannot control his warriors: if the African native community cannot be controlled then the film's moral justification seems to be that it falls to the British settlers to do so.

There is another valuable point to be taken from this scene: it is the only point in the film in which Rhodes is worthy of criticism. Outside of this scene, Rhodes can be seen trying to avoid conflict and endeavouring to empathise with the native population, and the Boers. In fact, Julie F. Codell points out that the criticism of Rhodes can be seen as a concession to liberal interpretations of events, which are embodied in the female character of Carpenter.¹⁶¹ The audience finds out subsequently in the film that Carpenter has written a book and in it censured Rhodes' actions against Lobengula's warriors as “Not a punishment of children, but a savage

¹⁶⁰ This argument is characterised by Julie Codell as the splitting of Rhodes masculinity between himself and Jameson. Julie F. Codell, "Imperial Masculinity, Mimicry and the New Woman in "Rhodes of Africa"," in *Art and the British Empire*, ed. TIm Barringer, Geoff Quilley, and Douglas Fordham(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007). 259.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

revenge.” However, when they meet again and she says this to him plainly, she then immediately apologises for this remark. The film struggles to completely vindicate Rhodes’ treatment of the native community. It therefore endeavours to address this issue through Carpenter’s character; by portraying her as the voice of feminine modernity. The film therefore contains the criticism of British imperialism within the scope of an imperial framework. While Carpenter acts as Rhodes’s conscience, she also still subscribes to his beliefs by submitting to stay quiet as the last act of sympathy to him. This may be seen as a deliberate interpolation by the filmmakers, since her character is completely fictional. It is equally important to acknowledge that the film takes pains to show Rhodes as loved by the native community. The very opening text in the film states “By some he was hailed as an inspired leader, by others he was reviled as an ambitious adventurer. But to the Matabele – the very people he had conquered – he was a Royal Warrior, who tempered conquest with the gift of ruling. At his death, they gave to him, alone of white men before or since their Royal Salute ‘Bayete!’”

As with *Clive of India*, a few critics took issue with the emphasis on the hero’s maverick qualities. *Kino News* wrote a scathing review stating that, “The moral of the film points at the conclusion that only individualists, such dreamers as Rhodes, can visualise industries and developments over what are barren deserts and sun baked plains.” The reviewer goes on to attack the historical character of Rhodes.¹⁶² However, this being a newspaper aimed primarily at a socialist audience it would not have represented the consensus view. Many other reviewers in fact praised the film, including its view of British imperialism. It was often highly praised for its perceived historical accuracy and authentic setting. *Kinematograph Weekly* described the film as

¹⁶² "General Releases: 'Rhodes of Africa'," *Kino News* 2 (1935). BFI Library.

a “finely conceived spectacular biographical drama...”¹⁶³ The review further suggests that no “drastic liberties have been taken with history...” It also commends the overall historical character of Rhodes, saying that he is “revered by Englishmen as the great Empire builder.”¹⁶⁴ *Hollywood Spectator* not only acclaimed the film as accurate, but further commented that “The story is straight biography without any romance to make it comply with the Hollywood conviction that without love it is not a motion picture.”¹⁶⁵ The absence of romantic melodrama may have been adopted to both emulate the Hollywood template established by *Clive of India* whilst simultaneously asserting difference on the grounds of the British filmmakers’ greater seriousness and authenticity.

This film undoubtedly affirms colonial presence in Africa as positive and praises imperial ambitions and reinforces moral and colonial supremacy. However, the approbation of the native population is merely asserted rather than demonstrated. The question of African attitudes towards the Empire would be more directly confronted in the three films about Britain's relations with the continent that featured Paul Robeson. Robeson came to England to find acting opportunities not open to him in Hollywood, an issue which will be discussed further on. With a remarkable singing voice and acting ability he found roles in several films during the 1930s but gave up his film career after 1940. His career in England was punctuated with several notable roles which arguably helped to reinforce certain popular conceptions of the British Empire. It was Robeson’s wish to gain roles that would uplift the image of African

¹⁶³ "Reviews for Showmen: 'Rhodes of Africa'," *Kinematograph Weekly* 1509 (1936). BFI Library.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ "Much to Britain's Credit," *Hollywood Spectator* 10, no. 12 (1936). BFI Library.

people, something he later felt he had failed at.¹⁶⁶ At the same time Robeson's career was peaking, his political consciousness was burgeoning. Throughout his life he gained more of an awareness of race inequality, but it was particularly during the 1930s that he began to examine Communist ideologies as a possible answer to inequalities of both race and class. His time spent in Spain during the Spanish civil war acted as an important turning point in his political perspectives.¹⁶⁷ Biographer Martin B. Duberman marks this time as the catalyst in Robeson's political consciousness, as he made a meaningful connection between the plight of the working class, racism and inopportunity. Before this he visited Moscow and Eastern Europe and was exposed to Russian Bolshevism.¹⁶⁸ After this visit he sent his son, Paul Jr., to be educated in Russia to shield him from American racism.¹⁶⁹ It was around this same time that he found roles in England. These roles allowed an artistic outlet for Robeson that no other African American (nor any other African British citizen) achieved at this time. It would be a mistake to say these roles straightforwardly drew attention to the plight of African people, who were in most countries still reduced to the status of

¹⁶⁶ From Robeson's point of view this refers to pan-African peoples, including not only African people located in Africa but dislocated Africans in America, Europe and all over the world.

See Paul Robeson, *Here I Stand* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1958).

See also, Chapter 11 Martin B. Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (London: Bodley Head, 1989). 215-32.

¹⁶⁷ Robeson spent time in Spain entertaining the American troops, also known as the Lincoln Brigade. This brigade was made up largely of members of the American Communist party.

See Chapter 11 in Duberman, *Paul Robeson*.

See "Paul Robeson Pays Visit to Spanish Loyalist," *New York Times*, 24 January 1938.

¹⁶⁸ See Chapter 10 in Duberman, *Paul Robeson*.

See also, "Robeson Going to Russia; He Will Be Guest of Eisenstein," *New York Times*, 20 December 1934.

¹⁶⁹ "Robeson Puts Son in a Soviet School; Does Not Want Boy to Have to Contend with Race Prejudice until He Is Older," *New York Times*, 21 December 1936.

second-class citizens, or worse. However, it also cannot be denied that Robeson laid important foundations for other African artists to attract attention to race issues.

Given Robeson's political agenda, a key question to consider is the degree to which Robeson's involvement demonstrates sensitivity to colonial subjects in Africa. His very presence in these films suggests that British filmmakers had some intention to examine the African viewpoint in their films, perhaps more so even than with Sabu's characters in *Elephant Boy* and *The Drum*. As an outspoken Communist who had roles written for him (*Song of Freedom* for example), it may be suggested that British filmmakers shared some of his viewpoints. However, it may also be argued that these filmmakers may have cast Robeson to break into the American market. Before Robeson came to England he was a well-known theatre actor and singer in New York. It is undoubtedly the case that British filmmakers aimed to capitalise on his celebrity status, perhaps with one eye on securing distribution in the American market. It may be further argued that Robeson's films did more to further the positive image of the British Empire than it did to meet his desires to fight for racial and class equality. Robeson himself believed that to a certain extent he couldn't escape the British imperial agenda of elevating the image of Britain's African colonies.¹⁷⁰ His comment on leaving the film industry after *The Proud Valley* (1940) reveals a lot about the British vision of African people.

I am no longer willing to identify myself with an organization that has no regard for reality – an organization that attempts to nullify public intelligence, falsify life and entirely ignores the many dynamic forces at work in the world today.¹⁷¹

What is to be made of Robeson's presence in these films? This question may not have a straightforward answer but will be examined as an underlying issue when

¹⁷⁰ Robeson.

¹⁷¹ Bourne. 22.

examining the British colonial films set in Africa, in the context of a conglomerate of other issues which arise when examining the Robeson films.

Sanders of the River (1935), a Korda production (produced by Alexander Korda and directed by Zoltan Korda) is about British governance of an expanse in Nigeria. Primarily, the story focuses on the relationship between Sanders (Leslie Banks) and one of the chiefs in his commission, Bosambo (Paul Robeson). The film begins with a meeting between Sanders and Bosambo, who has made himself chief of the Ochori, a river tribe under Sanders' jurisdiction. Bosambo informs Sanders that the ostrich feather tribe, King Mofolaba's tribe (Tony Wane), has crossed into Sanders' territory, collecting slaves for trade. Sanders strikes a deal with Bosambo: if he can serve Sanders and the British King loyally he will remain chief of the Ochori tribe. As Mofolaba's warriors head to the Ochori's territory to collect slaves, Sanders sends Bosambo to head them off. A battle between the two tribes' warriors ensues and Mofolaba's warriors are scared off. Bosambo comes across some of the women who were meant to be traded as slaves. One of the women, Lilongo (Nina Mae McKinney), Bosambo later takes as his wife. Sanders follows this battle with a meeting between King Mofolaba and himself in which he negotiates peace and asserts his stewardship and guardianship over the Ochori tribe. He furthermore asserts the superiority of the British king and insists with this authority that no more slave trading is to be partaken in. Five years later, the Ochori have been living peacefully, and Bosambo and his wife have children. Sanders is taking a leave of absence to get married. He is only away a short time when two French arms dealers spread a rumour that he is dead in an effort to rouse war to promote their trade. A montage sequence shows the land descending into chaos as tribes begin kidnapping people for the slave trade again. Ferguson (Martin Walker), the man left in charge in Sanders' stead, is

captured and killed by King Mofolaba. The king then turns his attention to Bosambo and gathers his warriors to do battle against the Ochori. Mofolaba kidnaps Lilongo in an effort to draw Bosambo into war. Bosambo sends his children to Sanders in case he dies and goes to meet Mofolaba alone. Meanwhile, Sanders returns early to deal with the uprising and reestablish order, but gets a bout of malaria. Despite this, he takes his boat to rescue Bosambo and he arrives just in time to stop Bosambo and Lilongo being killed. Bosambo kills Mofolaba and Sanders makes Bosambo king of all the peoples in his commission.

The film opens with the text “Sailors, soldiers and merchant-adventurers were the pioneers who laid the foundation of the British Empire. To-day their work is carried on by the Civil Servants –Keepers of the King’s Peace.” It continues by stating that Africa is governed by a “handful of white men whose everyday work is an unsung saga of courage and efficiency. One of them is Commissioner Sanders.” This information is set to the background of Paul Robeson’s singing. The camera then focuses on a spinning globe which settles on a small portion of Nigeria, identified as the District of Commissioner Sanders. The audience then sees R.G. Sanders himself emerging from an office, pipe in hand to speak to another officer. This visual strategy can be paralleled to the opening of *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* in that it utilises a map to locate the beginning of the story and then opens on the British person who controls the area, in a very bureaucratic setting. When Bosambo enters wearing nothing but a loincloth he appears incredibly out of place. Moreover, the way in which Robeson moves resembles a frightened animal until he feels comfortable in Sanders’s presence. Jeffrey Richards comments that this scene resembles a headmaster-pupil/father-child relationship between Robeson’s character and

Sanders.¹⁷² When Sanders catches Bosambo in a lie regarding who he is, Sanders immediately produces a file on Bosambo revealing that he is a Liberian convict, guilty of petty theft. The characterisation of the colonial service as an agency of all-seeing authority and truth is comparable to the way the film invites itself to be read. Priya Jaikumar asserts that;

Sanders, like all imperial fiction, incorporates realist indices to periods and places, and the film's fragments of reality – maps, location shots, footage of indigenous people, excerpts of Kroo, Ochori, and Yoruba tribal songs recorded on site and advertised as authentic – exist to endow the same order of legitimacy to the fiction.¹⁷³

Jaikumar postulates that *Saunders of the River* attempts to project “realism” but one that is “subservient to political ideology.”¹⁷⁴ She insinuates that the film tries to authenticate British imperialism through the use of documentary-style shots interjected throughout the film.

Publicity materials play up the fact that the film includes scenes shot in Africa. Zoltan Korda spent time in Africa collecting film of native peoples, wildlife and natural settings to add to the film's sense of authenticity. This underscores the argument Jaikumar postulates. One such article includes an interview with Zoltan Korda regarding his time in Africa. He noted while working in Africa that:

The white government of Africa is one of the wonders of the world. No doubt there are some Commissioners who are inefficient, but I did not meet any. Those with whom I came in contact combined the patience of Job with the wisdom of Solomon...¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Jeffrey Richards, *Films and British National Identity: From Dickens to Dad's Army*, Studies in Popular Culture (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997). 70.

¹⁷³ Priya Jaikumar, *Cinema at the End of Empire: A Politics of Transition in Britain and India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). 112.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. 109.

¹⁷⁵ Korda, Zoltan. “Filming in Africa.” Source unclear. 101-5 BFI. BFI Library.

He also stated that, according to a chief, Africans do not work and wondered why white men work so hard. Essentially, he accentuated the same points that the reviewers would highlight: that colonial oversight is fundamentally sound. Moreover, old Victorian assumptions are reinforced and Sanders embodies the 'white man's burden' in his very character, as the river tribes cannot function without his help. This aspect is further demonstrated in Sanders' fight to get rid of the slave trade in the area. According to the film, commercial exploitation of the territory is attributable to African slavers and French arms dealers. Sanders attempts to eradicate both slavery and the corruption that the African people in the film seem to be so susceptible to.

The reviews for the film were mostly positive, going so far as to praise its qualities as imperial propaganda. Sydney W. Carroll stated,

The latest cause for astonishment they have given us is the felicity and success with which foreigners, folk who have no claims, by birth, origin or association with our Empire, can yet evolve moving pictures which voice far more eloquently than we can do ourselves the better purposes of our Imperial aspirations.¹⁷⁶

Carroll is referring to the Korda brothers in this case, who were Hungarian by birth, but he also makes mention of Hollywood's latest films, including *Clive of India*, as America's tribute to British "patriotism." *Kinematograph Weekly* called the film a "glorious piece of ... entertainment."¹⁷⁷ And *Monthly Film Bulletin* praised its "grand theme."¹⁷⁸ Noteworthy is the reviewers' neglect of Robeson's performance. Many of the reviews barely mention his involvement, but instead focus on Leslie Banks's performance. One review commented that "the film's two enduring assets are Mr.

¹⁷⁶ Carroll, Sydney W., "Review: *Sanders of the River*," (Source not clear), 7 April 1935.

¹⁷⁷ "Review: *Sanders of the River*." *Kinematograph Weekly* n1459, 4 Apr 1935. BFI Library.

¹⁷⁸ "Review: *Sanders of the River*." *Monthly Film Bulletin*, vol. 2, n15 April 1935. BFI Library.

Leslie Banks and his part as Sanders: the film would have gained immeasurably in dramatic purpose if both had been given wider scope.”¹⁷⁹ This implies that the critics applauded the role Sanders played as colonial overseer. It also endorses the film’s underlying stance that the African colonies need the British to usher them into civilisation.

The praise of Banks’s character over Robeson’s seems confusing since Robeson is given the leading man’s credit in the film’s title sequence and publicity posters and the film was initially going to be called *Bosambo*, after the main character Robeson plays (Figure 3.1) Moreover, the film was based on Edgar Wallace’s story *Bosambo of the River* (1914).¹⁸⁰ Yet, the film sends mixed signals regarding which character it invites most identification and sympathy with. The plot centers on Robeson’s character, as the audience sees his progression from being made chief of the Ochori, raising a family, rising to challenge the conflict that afflicts his people, to becoming chief of all the river peoples. At the same time the film almost tries to minimise Robeson’s presence by renaming it *Sanders of the River* and portraying Sanders as having an omnipotent presence in the film. His governance is predicated more on myth and propaganda than by actual might. Sanders’ leadership lies in his manipulation of native superstition and the power of rumour. Consequently, it is a mere counter-rumour spread by the French profiteers which poses the most dramatic threat to British authority in the territory. Perhaps it was this representation of just how slim (in terms of physical resources) the thread of moral and intellectual superiority was which kept the majority black population in order that led some American critics to express a marked (and racially inflected) distaste for the film. The

¹⁷⁹ “Review: *Sanders of the River*.” (Newspaper Title Unclear), April 1935. BFI Library.

¹⁸⁰ Edgar Wallace, *Bosambo of the River* (London: Lock Ward, 1914).

New York Times reviewer slammed Robeson and Mae McKinney, maintaining that their performance was more in line with “Harlem night-club entertain[ment]...”¹⁸¹ However, the African American press took Robeson “to sharp account for having lent his name and prestige to a work [Sanders] that disparaged and patronized Africans.”¹⁸²

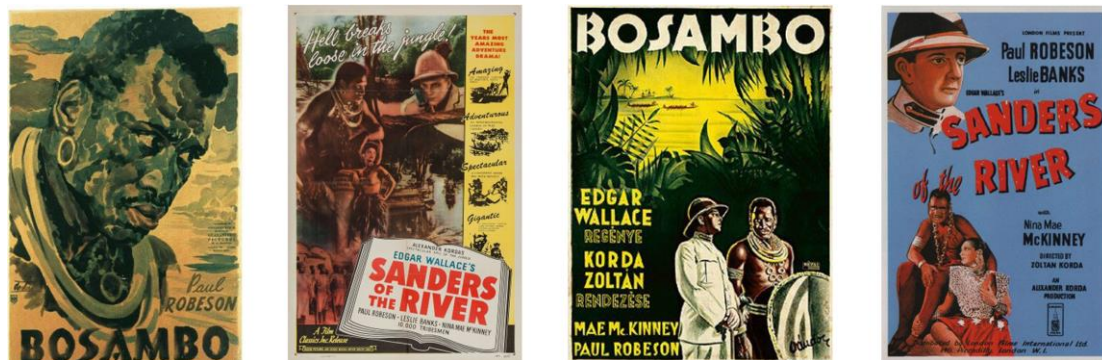


Figure 3.1 Argentinian poster, American poster, Hungarian poster and British poster for *Sanders of the River*

When the film was released on television in the 1950s, it caused controversy in Nigeria. *The Times* reported that:

A letter of protest has been sent by Mr. M.T. Mbu, commissioner for Nigeria in the United Kingdom, to the director of Associated Television claiming that the film *Sanders of the River*, which was shown in the organisation’s programme “The Great Picture of Alexander Korda” last Saturday night is “most damaging” to Nigeria and that it brings “disgrace and disrepute” to Nigerians.”¹⁸³

The *Manchester Guardian* reported on this incident as well and further reported that Mr. Mbu requested an apology from Associated Television. Mr. Mbu is reported also to have prefaced his protest with the statement that he knew that the film bore no direct reference to present day Nigeria but the content itself toward Africa was

¹⁸¹ Andre Sennwald, "'Sanders of the River' a British Film Based on the Edgar Wallace Stories, at Rivoli," *New York Times*, 27 June 1935

¹⁸² Duberman, 180.

¹⁸³ "Film 'Damaging to Nigeria'," *The Times*, 22 November 1957. BFI Library.

offensive.¹⁸⁴ Though this objection came later it shows the discrepancy between how the film was viewed by post-colonial nations and the former colonial powers. The fact that Associated Television named it as a 'great' Korda film demonstrates this most clearly, as the Nigerian government representatives plainly disagreed.

Robeson famously renounced the film after its release. According to Robeson himself, many of the scenes which he objected to were filmed in the final days of shooting and he believed it was too late to protest against them.¹⁸⁵ However, this led to him gaining final cut rights to *Song of Freedom*, as he insisted that he have artistic license to be portrayed in the film in a manner that was consistent with what he agreed to play as.¹⁸⁶ *Song of Freedom*, released the year after *Sanders of the River*, centers wholly on Paul Robeson's character, John Zinga. The film opens in West Africa, specifically on the island of Casanga. Casanga is ruled by a witch doctor who kills the king of Casanga, leaving the people without a leader, ensuring her right to rule over the tribe. During this scene a woman grabs the king's medallion from the witch and flees into the wilderness. She unknowingly seeks the help of a slave trader, who ships her off to England. Generations pass, the slave trade is abolished and the focus of the film's attention comes to John Zinga, who now wears the medallion passed down to him. He is an English dockworker, with an impressive voice. He and his wife, Ruth (Elisabeth Welch), live humbly amongst their co-workers and friends until he is discovered by an opera impresario, Gabrial Donozetti (Esme Percy).

¹⁸⁴ "'Sanders of the River': Nigerian Objection to Tv Showing," *Manchester Guardian*, 22 November 1957. BFI Library.

¹⁸⁵ Robeson himself expressed disgust with the film, and some scholars report that he walked out of the premiere in protest, however other scholars confirm that he did not. Nevertheless, his disapproval for the film after it was released is highly documented. See, Robeson., Duberman, *Paul Robeson.*, Richards; Lola Young, *'Fear' of the Dark: 'Race', Gender and Sexuality in the Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996)., See also, Bourne.

¹⁸⁶ Robeson was the first actor to gain final cut approval in Great Britain. See Bourne. 23.

Donozetti takes Zinga under his wing by training him and arranging concerts for him. Zinga achieves fame and affluence. Yet, Zinga expresses a desire to go to Africa to explore his ancestry. During one of his concerts, an audience member recognises the medallion and tells him that it marks him as African royalty, none other than the King of Casanga. He therefore gives up his life as an opera singer and travels to Africa with the intention of leading his people into civilization. The tribe, still led by a witch doctor, Mandingo (Ecce Homo Toto), is steeped in superstition and ritual. Zinga endeavours to show them how to cure disease with medicine and employ Western practices and technologies to cultivate the land. However, Mandingo challenges Zinga's practices as well as his role as leader by asking impossible tasks of him and reinforcing superstition amongst the people. Zinga counters these actions with Western alternatives to the witch's rituals. Yet, when Ruth interrupts a ritual which she is not allowed to attend (as a woman), she is sentenced to death. In a climactic moment, when she is about to be put to death, Zinga sings the legendary 'Song of Freedom' that he remembers from ancestral memory. This song is the final proof that he is king to the people, and he and his wife are finally accepted as the rulers of Casanga. The film ends with Zinga returning to his career as an opera singer but incorporating the 'Song of Freedom' into his performances as a tribute to his people. He spends part of his time as an opera singer raising money for his tribe and the rest of his time as the leader of his people.

Lola Young provides an interesting textual analysis of this film. She argues that the film utilises the character of Zinga in a manner fundamentally similar to the way Bosambo is used in *Sanders of the River* to justify the presence of British colonial rule. Zinga's training by Donozetti can be taken as a metaphor; "the implication is that he cannot rightfully take up his regal position until he has

undergone the process of acculturation.” Zinga must be tailored to European standards. “This strategy has some success in creating an African who serves as an agent of imperialism: this is Zinga’s trajectory in the narrative.”¹⁸⁷ In other words his trust in Western ideals justifies imperial rule within the film.

While this is one important perspective to be mindful of, it cannot be denied that the film also strongly differs from *Sanders of the River* in some very important ways. For one, Paul Robeson’s character is the lens through which the audience perceives the entire narrative. This represents a point of departure from most 1930s imperial films. The film also examines colonial injustices in some depth, namely slavery. The beginning sequence of the film is the scene in which Zinga’s ancestor is sold into slavery; the film then moves forward in history to see the abolition of slavery in Great Britain. It furthermore shows British people of different backgrounds working the docks, with Robeson’s character accepted by the community, even admired. This is a portrayal that did not happen in Hollywood until the Second World War. Richards offers a different interpretation of the film from Young, emphasising Robeson’s role of leadership in the film. Richards makes the statement that “African culture triumphs over the need for Western military technology.”¹⁸⁸ He is correct in this respect, yet Young offers an equally valid perspective by pointing out that Robeson’s character is not altogether representative of African culture, as he is a Westernised man, and he even explicitly states in the film that he wishes to bring civilization to the tribal peoples. An interaction between the native leader, who is not named in the film (James Solomon), and Zinga demonstrates this perfectly:

Zinga: “Should not a king come to bring help to his people?”

¹⁸⁷ Young. 76.

¹⁸⁸ Richards.

Leader: “You are a stranger to them. Although you are of our colour, you are not of us. A lion not bred in the jungle, does not know jungle ways.”

Zinga: “ You speak truly, but I have more than jungle ways to bring to you. I have learned much from the people across the seas; their wisdom, their government, their medicine.”

Robeson’s character also speaks of bringing machines to till their farms. Kenneth Cameron expands on the idea of twin identities in the film. Cameron explains that the film endorses an aspect of Garveyism, a nationalistic ideology which favoured a return of African people to Africa to escape post-colonial culture.¹⁸⁹ This philosophy also favours uplifting the African people by utilising Western technological progress. This approach to the film implies Robeson left his mark on the narrative. Never a devout follower of Garveyism, Robeson still espoused Garvey’s ideas, especially as they pertained to liberating the African people through a pan-African nationalism that incorporated the benefits of Western culture gained after American slavery.

Robeson himself remained proud of this film.¹⁹⁰ It can at least be said that the film espouses several views of British colonialism: even as it endorses colonial oversight, yet it also voices support for the goal of African nationalism. It can be said to recognise that colonialism cannot be undone and British identity and African nationalism are not mutually exclusive but rather that modern colonialism must move toward a new understanding of what African identity means. The way this is achieved, however, may be considered insincere. Zinga’s desire to go to Africa, to be with his people, is not linked to any meaningful heritage connection; he instead claims to instinctually feel this bond. Moreover, the lyrics of the ‘song of freedom’ he knows comes to him from ancestral memory, which implies a numinous response.

¹⁸⁹ Kenneth Cameron, *Africa on Film: Beyond Black and White* (New York: Continuum, 1994).

Garveyism is based on Marcus Garvey’s idea of a return to Africa. Garvey was a central Harlem Renaissance figure who helped to found the UNIA-ACL.

¹⁹⁰ Duberman, *Paul Robeson*. 202-4.

These attributes associate him with the very mysticism that he is trying to dispel within the tribe.

The discrepancy between Zinga's dual identities is brought out in the press materials as well. In a photo of Robeson and Welch, they are both wearing a pith helmet, an iconic image of a colonial officer in foreign lands. They wear this hat briefly in the film when they arrive on the island (see Figure 3.2). Their clothes are also white, signaling a symbol of colonial oversight. This image does more to reinforce the persona of Robeson's character as a replacement colonial ruler or, put another way, a Westernised subject carrying on the coloniser's role. In this way, the parallel Young mentions between *Sanders of the River* and *Song of Freedom* is more apparent. It is appropriate to suggest Robeson's character is being portrayed as a man between two cultures.¹⁹¹ Some critics were critical of the Garveyistic ideals articulated in the film. *Monthly Film Bulletin* commented that there was a degree of "sentiment" and it contained "exaggerated philanthropy."¹⁹² Robeson himself felt the film deviated from the "romanticised" roles he had played before. He more broadly commented that "Film-producers take the attitude that a negro (sic) must either be a romanticised puppet (usually comic) or else be of no interest to filmgoers at all."¹⁹³ In this respect, Robeson's perceptions are accurate; he is to a certain extent participating in a role not before allowed to him, one in which he can express and develop a character of African identity. It was one of a few roles in this era that allowed an African character to move toward complexity of characterisation. The film was not reviewed well in major American newspapers, such as the *New York Times*, which

¹⁹¹ *Men of Two Worlds* (1946) bears more than a passing resemblance to this film and will be discussed in a chapter further on.

¹⁹² "Review: *Song of Freedom*" *Monthly Film Bulletin*, vol. 3, no. 32. 31 Aug 1936. BFI Library.

¹⁹³ "Robeson Wants the Right Role" *Film Weekly*, vol. 16, no. 414. 19 Sep 1936. BFI Library.

derided its far-fetched simplicity in patronising terms. The film does not seem to have received a general release in the U.S., and one might speculatively conclude from this that while British filmmakers were reasonably comfortable dealing with the legacy of slavery, the mainstream American public did not wish to address such issues.



Figure 3.2 Paul Robeson and Elizabeth Welch arriving in Africa in *Song of Freedom*.

The final imperial-themed film of note in which Robeson starred is *King Solomon's Mines* (1937) which is based on the novel of the same name by H. Rider Haggard.¹⁹⁴ In Africa, Irish fortune seekers Kathy O'Brien (Anna Lee), and her father Patrick 'Patsy' O'Brien (Arthur Sinclair) believe they have found a diamond in the mines. However, when they take it to be examined it turns out to be nothing more than a worthless rock. The two discuss how they've left Ireland to seek out riches trying various 'get rich quick' methods, all of which have thus far failed. When they come across adventurer and African hunter Allan Quartermain (Cedric Hardwicke), they ask to join his hunting party. When Quartermain reluctantly agrees the two

¹⁹⁴ Haggard, H. Rider. *King Solomon's Mines*, London: Cassell & Company, 1885. The novel was part of a larger series involving adventurer and hunter Allan Quartermain.

eagerly come aboard. Several days later they come across another wagon carrying two weak men, one of whom is Umbopa (Paul Robeson). The O'Briens' interest is sparked by the other man in the wagon, who rambles on about his quest for King Solomon's Mines and the treasure it holds. Patsy comes across the map he has been following and tries to persuade Quartermain to seek the treasure. Quartermain is not attracted by the idea, citing the dangers of crossing the desert, and refuses to indulge his desire to go after the treasure. However, the next day the party awakes to find Patsy has gone on alone to find King Solomon's Mines. Kathy begs Quartermain to go after him but he refuses and the party instead carries on to meet the rest of the hunting party. There Robeson's character agrees to lead Kathy to the Mines and the two sneak off with Quartermain's wagon after Kathleen's father.

Quartermain, now joined by Commander John Good (Roland Young) and Sir Henry Curtis (John Loder), set off after the wagon. When Quartermain and his party rejoin Kathleen and Umbopa they all proceed through the desert to the native village beyond. After an arduous march they arrive to unfriendly natives led by a witch doctor, Gagool (Sydney Fairbrother, uncredited), and an unjust chief, Twala (Robert Adams). It is revealed that Umbopa is the rightful chief of the village and challenges Twala to regain his title. He asks for the English/Irish party's help and in return promises them access to the Mines and safe return back to the mining settlement. After a battle with Twala's warriors and the death of Gagool, during which the mines collapse and are sealed, Umbopa takes his rightful place as chief and as promised grants safe passage to the party by sending some of his people to guide them back through the desert to the mining settlement.

In several respects - notably its focus upon a group of intrepid white adventurers seeking to overcome a hostile environment and savage natives - the film

resembles a Hollywood western. One critic has commented that it represents “Gaumont's attempt to crash the American market with Hollywood-styled pictures.”¹⁹⁵ However, Jeffrey Richards has identified one distinctive and even progressive quality of the film's portrayal of settler life. He points out that “unlike the book and the later Hollywood version of the film, (it) centres squarely on the character of Umbopa...”¹⁹⁶ He cites the example of Umbopa taking charge of the expedition. His point is valid based on the visual approach he indicates. The audience sees Robeson's character leading the wagon to his country as well as saving the group from the conditions of the desert, the witch-doctor and the aggression of the tribe's warriors. This is the only one of Robeson's British films in which he did not receive the most prominent screen credit or top billing on posters, but the suggestion that he nonetheless almost dominates the film has merit. In one respect he is even granted a degree of moral superiority over some of the white protagonists.

When analysing this film it is important to remember that there are two colonised groups being portrayed: the African natives and the displaced Irish settlers. The two Irish characters are not in the novel but are added in the film to act as the catalyst upon which the adventure begins. The dynamics of the film take on new meanings when considering both colonial groups in conjunction with one another. Patsy and Kathy are shown as foolish opportunists who must be rescued from themselves by the English members of the wagon party. Much like Umbopa needs the party to help him regain control of his tribe, so Kathy and Patsy require help. The prime difference is that they are deceitful when seeking help from the group, whilst Robeson's character is never deliberately shifty, only a bit mysterious. Moreover, the

¹⁹⁵ "Rediscovered: 'King Solomon's Mines'," *Films in Review* May (1977). 304. BFI Library.

¹⁹⁶ Richards. 71.

two Irish characters drive the plot forward by creating discord, which must be corrected by the English characters.

What has not been discussed thus far is a commonality between the three Robeson films which bears closer examination. This is the reoccurring partial nudity of Robeson's character in each film. In *Sanders of the River* Robeson wears nothing but a leopard skin loincloth for the majority of the film. He is more clothed in *Song of Freedom* but spends the second half of the film in a sleeveless shirt, and several of the advertising posters for the film feature him in this sleeveless shirt with added emphasis on his arm muscles, which appear more prominently in the posters than they do in the film.¹⁹⁷ Finally, in *King Solomon's Mines*, Robeson's character is clothed like the other members of the wagon train. He wears short sleeves, while the others all have long sleeves. Moreover, the other African characters in the film are either in native dress or in sleeveless settler wear. When Robeson's character returns to his tribe, he redresses himself in native wear, which exposes more of his body, particularly his midsection. Richard Dyer has pointed out that before the 1950s, white male characters rarely revealed so much of their body and that partial nudity was reserved for non-white male characters.¹⁹⁸ Dyer conjectures that this visual strategy is utilised to distinguish civilised from uncivilised. He labels this as "atavism", which is characterised by an assumption of primitivism.¹⁹⁹ By extension, one may postulate that Robeson's character is being portrayed as uncivilised. Going a step further, if the films are considered alongside one another then the costuming of Robeson's character directs the audience to how he is to be perceived within a colonial framework. In *Sanders of the River* this is clear; he is primitive owing to the fact he barely wears

¹⁹⁷ *Song of Freedom* Press Book, BFI Library.

¹⁹⁸ Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997).

¹⁹⁹ Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*. See specifically chapter on Paul Robeson, 67-139.

clothes. *Song of Freedom* suggests he represents the coloniser's intentions by wearing Western dress throughout the film. Being sleeveless yet remaining in his Western clothes while he tries to lead the African tribe bears the suggestion that he possesses a dual identity. The same may be said of his wife, who goes sleeveless as well when she settles in Africa. Moreover, the last scene in *Song of Freedom* shows Robeson singing on stage without a shirt at all on a set meant to mimic Africa. Robeson's character is not only bringing Westernisation to the tribe he rules but bringing back stereotypes of colonial Africa to the people of Europe. In *King Solomon's Mines* his costuming suggests much the same, even if the plot does not obviously indicate this.

However, these Robeson films can be taken in a number of different ways, as demonstrated simply by the difference in textual analysis between Jeffrey Richards and Lola Young. Moreover, Thomas Cripps offers still another perspective on Robeson's brief career in England.²⁰⁰ It is certain that a staunch ideology of paternalism is more overt in the African colonial films (especially if *Rhodes of Africa* is included). Yet, Robeson's characters in the *Song of Freedom* and *King Solomon's Mines* are more independent from British colonial rulers. Moreover, there is no outstanding military presence in the Robeson films, and this can be taken in two ways. One is that the British rulers implicitly rule by wisdom rather than force. The need to disseminate this message is partially based on the fact that there was in reality a proportionately smaller military presence in African colonies than in India. *Sanders of the River* attempts to negotiate this apparent 'weakness' in imperial authority by suggesting that the British can compel obedience through sheer magnetism. However, with a charismatic figure like Robeson present, this celebration of white charisma is inevitably compromised, perhaps explaining why the title was ultimately changed to

²⁰⁰ Cripps. 383-4.

privilege Sanders. Despite criticisms of his participation glorifying British colonialism, he left his mark on British films by promoting modern Harlem ideals of Garveyism, socialism and racial unity. Moreover, his characters showed the complex nature of colonial relationships and identities.

One should remember Robeson's perceptions of his career options: he felt he had little opportunity in Hollywood.²⁰¹ It is a truism that African-Americans were profoundly marginalised in Hollywood at this time. Many Hollywood films through the 1930s still used black paint on white actors to portray African characters who were typically stereotyped as stupid and lazy. "Black characters in American films of the period rarely moved beyond Al Jolson in blackface, or the dim-witted buffoons played by black actors like Stepin' Fetchit."²⁰² Thomas Cripps conveys Hollywood's attitude toward African American actors at this time aptly. "Blacks in Hollywood had a choice before them – whether to seek a Hollywood 'new deal' or some sort of race nationalism apart from Hollywood."²⁰³ Not only were African-Americans denied access to leading roles in Hollywood, but any portrayal beyond stereotypes was non-existent.

The marginalisation of African American actors and steadfast avoidance of any overt treatment of controversial race issues in Hollywood cinema is mirrored in its approach to colonial Africa. In American cinema of the 1930s Africa appears most commonly as an untamed wilderness in which there is no regular co-existence of whites and blacks. This approach is typified by jungle dramas such as *King Kong* (1933) and *Trader Horn* (1931). These films seek to show the imperilment of female white virtue in a straightforward savage and hostile environment. They present the

²⁰¹ See Duberman, *Paul Robeson*.

See also, Robeson.

²⁰² Bourne. 14.

²⁰³ Cripps. 309.

African terrain and natives as posing serious threats to the morality of white females. Rhona J. Berenstein addresses this issue in great detail, concluding that such jungle films from the early 1930s “align monstrosity with darkness and position the white woman as the figure who negotiates the chasm between the white and black worlds...She is under threat and in need of white male care.”²⁰⁴ Such themes assert white racial identity as superior. These films are indicative of American attitudes toward race in the 1930s, but films do not engage with political questions of race relations in the ways that British films of colonial Africa do.

There are two exceptions to this rule, both produced at the very end of the decade, which illuminate in different ways how colonial Africa constituted a sensitive subject for American filmmakers, evoking issues that were close to home. *The Sun Never Sets* (1939) chronicles the lives of several generations of one English family, who are all called to colonial service in South Africa. Davinia Thornley's analysis of this film makes clear that the native population plays no active part in the narrative, and simply takes the subordinate role of a servant class, as if in a Southern plantation drama. The relegation of African characters to an inert, ornamental status is particularly extreme when the wives of the principal colonial officers are foregrounded. As Thornley explains, “There are very few scenes when either Helen or Phyllis is shown in the same shot as the native people, and when they are there is little or no interaction between the colonial women and the Africans.”²⁰⁵ Such extremely reactionary representational tactics are not evident in the only other Hollywood film dealing with British colonial rule in Africa made in this period: *Stanley and Livingstone* (1939). This film constitutes an exception that very much demonstrates

²⁰⁴ Rhona J. Berenstein, “White Heroines and Hearts of Darkness: Race, Gender and Disguise in 1930s Jungle Films,” *Film History* 6, no. 3 (1994). 335.

²⁰⁵ Davinia Thornley, “Conceptions of Empire: Three Colonial War Films,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* XXI, no. 2 (2004). 113.

the rule that this territory constituted a whirlwind of problems for American filmmakers in the way that it overtly treats colonial affairs in nineteenth century Africa as an allegory for America's political dilemmas on the eve of the Second World War.

Stanley and Livingstone was proposed to the MPPDA censor board in late 1937. Breen approved it after some correspondence between Colonel Joy and himself. As with most films dealing with the British Empire, Breen suggested that the Foreign Department be consulted on how to portray the British, the colonies, and the native African peoples. However, most of Breen's suggestions concern representations of the British soldiers. "We suggest you check with your Foreign Department as to the possible British reaction to this scene of the British Consul getting tipsy and singing *Rule Britannia*."²⁰⁶ There are a few other notes like this in his letter but only one specific criticism on how the African people are treated. "We suggest masking the action of Stanley hitting the native over the head with his rifle, to avoid possible deletion by censor boards."²⁰⁷ Breen is presumably referring to the BBFC, as he was accustomed to identifying what the British censors would react to.

The film is based on the famous life of Sir Henry Morton Stanley (born John Rowlands). It opens on the American frontier, specifically the Wyoming territory, in the mid nineteenth century. Stanley (Spencer Tracy) is a journalist for the *New York Herald* reporting on the wars with the Native American tribes. When he arrives back to his office, his editor sends him to Africa to find Dr. David Livingstone (Cedric Hardwicke), a Scottish missionary presumed lost in Central Africa. The film charts the arduous journey of Stanley to find Livingstone and the subsequent disbelief from

²⁰⁶ See Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS, MPPA: PCA: *Stanley and Livingstone*, Joseph Breen to Colonel Joy, 12 Nov 1937.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

the British public when Stanley publishes the story of their meeting in a small African village (historically known as Ujiji). Stanley's findings are challenged in an inquiry by the Society of British Geographers. Proof of his visit arrives with a letter from Livingstone, followed by news of his death that proves he had in fact found Livingstone. The film concludes with Stanley continuing Livingstone's quest throughout Africa, mapping various lands in Central Africa.

The film differs greatly from Hollywood's Indian adventure dramas. For example, it utilised footage actually shot in Africa, as compared with the mostly studio shot Indian films. The film also marks a shift in the imperial adventure films in this era in the very fact that it charts the imperial aspirations of an American. Stanley only mentions in passing that he was actually born in Great Britain during the pivotal speech he gives at the Society of British Geographers, and he critically comments on the class-bound nature of British society and speaks of the "prejudice" he feels the society has toward him as an American. Moreover, the film goes to great lengths to show some of the British characters as incompetent and averse to American opinions regarding the African colonies. The film tracks the progress of Stanley across an unknown frontier to find a representative of British imperial aspirations, Livingstone. It is through this interaction that Stanley is pressed by Livingstone to continue his work, mapping Africa. Before the end of the film, Livingstone's dying wish is that Stanley carry on his work. "The torch has fallen from my hand, come and relight it." In this regard the film endorses colonial oversight, but it goes a step further in the way that it nominates an American as the fittest man to honour colonial ambitions. Aside from Livingstone himself, the other British characters are painted as unfit to do so, notably John Kingsley (Henry Travers) who, according to his daughter (Nancy Kelly), has lost his mind living in Africa.

Stanley and Livingstone endorses a need for paternalistic rule for Africa in more emphatic terms than anything attempted in the British films made with Paul Robeson. This is best expressed in a scene in which one of the natives of the village tries to steal a mirror from Stanley. Bongo (uncredited actor) is looking through Stanley's things. When Stanley catches him, he strikes him and yells at him for the theft. Livingstone comes in at this moment and chastises Stanley for his behaviour stating that "You should never strike one of these simple people. They respond in kind to the treatment they receive. They know enough brutality without white men teaching them more." Bongo is struck and lies on the ground when Livingstone walks in and then Bongo crawls behind Livingstone, crouching like a censured child. While he lies on the ground a shot of Livingstone's hand demanding the stolen item is held above him. Bongo looks up and timidly returns the item before running out (Figure 3.3). The entire scene plays out like a school child being reprimanded for bad behaviour and mimics what Richards refers to as the headmaster-pupil relationship so prevalent in imperial dramas.²⁰⁸ Another important scene in the film which vindicates colonial oversight is that in which a native child injures himself and is tended to by Livingstone. The imagery reaffirms Livingstone's patriarchal position. Moreover, his role as doctor serves as a further image of Westernised scientific progress, that when put in the context of the scenario endows Livingstone with a position of technological and scientific superiority. Livingstone's native assistant, constantly muttering "yes master," only serves to reinforce this image. None of the native characters in the film are given a voice to express any kind of point of view.

²⁰⁸ See Jeffrey Richards, *Visions of Yesterday* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973); Richards, *Films and British National Identity: From Dickens to Dad's Army*.



Figure 3.3 Cedric Hardwicke and un-credited actor in *Stanley and Livingstone*

After Livingstone has finished tending to the injured child he tells Stanley that any new country appears to settlers as frightening.

“How do you suppose America looked to the first settlers who saw it only as an unknown wilderness teeming with hostile savages...(the) white man has seen Africa only through the eyes of ignorance, and that means through the eyes of fear... fear of a blank space on a map, fill in that blank space, drive away that fear.”

Livingstone also speaks of others coming to Africa to bring civilization to the continent. He makes a parallel to the colonisation of America.

In fact, the film makes multiple analogies between Africa and America. In the very opening scene in which Stanley is on the American frontier, he is shown having returned from Native American tribal territory in Wyoming. The guide with him, Jeff Slocum (Walter Brennan), is the same he takes to Africa to aid him. Moreover, that the lead character is American visually implies the sceptre of colonial aspirations being passed from the British to America. The timing of the film’s release is significant as some Americans saw parallels between the imperial leanings of British

colonialism and Hitler's Nazi expansionist policy.²⁰⁹ This film, however, seeks to endorse British imperialism and redefine it as congruent with the spirit that led to the founding of modern America.

One of the writers for this film was Phillip Dunne, who also participated in developing the script for *The Rains Came* (1939), which was a unique film in its time, given that it promoted Indian self-determinism while emphasising sympathies with British colonialism on the eve of the Second World War (this film will be discussed at length in Chapter Four). Dunne also wrote the script for the 1936 version of *The Last of the Mohicans* which expresses sympathy with the plight of Native American tribes. Dunne has been revealingly referred to as Darryl Zanuck's "liberal conscience" during his time at Fox.²¹⁰ He was also a member of the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, the Motion Picture Democratic Committee and the Motion Picture Artists Committee.²¹¹ Defend America by Aiding the Allies favoured sending military machinery to Britain. Moreover, Dunne was president of the Motion Picture Democratic Committee until an ideological dispute between the members occurred, namely between Soviet supporters and those opposed to the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1938. According to Dunne's autobiography he joined these organisations because he contested Hitler's "subversion of human dignity", supported Spain's fight against fascism, opposed Japanese aggression in China and supported Franklin D. Roosevelt's foreign policy.²¹² Dunne's personal opinions about the impending War are decidedly in line with FDR's non-

²⁰⁹ See Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (London and New York: Free Press; Collier Macmillan, 1987).

²¹⁰ George Frederick Custen, *Twentieth Century's Fox: Darryl F. Zanuck and the Culture of Hollywood*, 1st ed. (New York: BasicBooks, 1997).

²¹¹ Phillip Dunne, *Take Two: A Life in Movies and Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1980).

²¹² Ibid. 110.

isolationist stance in spite of the strong isolationist posture of America before its involvement in the Second World War. Around the same years Dunne was heavily involved in these organisations he was also working on the script for *Stanley and Livingstone*. Dunne contends that he was originally unenthusiastic about the assignment and the idea he had come up with had involved Stanley escaping a work house in London as a boy and befriending Livingstone before moving to America. Stanley's reasons for searching for Livingstone are therefore out of familiar association.²¹³ However, Zanuck presented them with a new angle. "Someone had written [Zanuck] a memorandum suggesting a complete reversal of Stanley's motivation." The suggestion was that Stanley was a journalist urged by his publisher to find Livingstone as a "publicity stunt" for the newspaper. Dunne says this transformed the direction of the narrative and "on every page of the screenplay there is opportunity for conflict, development of character, and comedy..."²¹⁴

It is important to bear in mind Dunne's convictions when viewing the film. Admittedly, he makes no direct connection in his autobiography between his political aspirations and the script of *Stanley and Livingstone*, but given his political views and participation in politics, as well as bearing in mind the political insinuations in the film, it seems reasonable to suggest that an allegorical message about America's relationship to events in Europe is intended. There are obvious parallels for such an allegorical approach in Hollywood cinema in this period, such as the way in which Warner's *The Life of Emile Zola* (1937) implicitly draws parallels between the late nineteenth century Dreyfuss Affair and the contemporary mistreatment of Jews in Germany. In a similar fashion, *Stanley and Livingstone* is clearly advocating the

²¹³ Ibid. 58.

²¹⁴ Ibid. 58-9. Dunne states that he does not know who wrote the memo to Zanuck but felt the story would not have developed well without it.

benefits of America taking an active and leading role in global affairs. At one point Livingstone asks Stanley “be my voice...I’m counting on you.” Dunne suggests in his autobiography that the Second World War (before America’s involvement) was an “imperialist war transformed into a patriotic war.”²¹⁵ Hence, it is even easier to see the connection in Dunne’s mind between late 1930s politics and the narrative of *Stanley and Livingstone*. The story examines the place of America in world politics, and given the political turmoil intensifying at this time can thus be taken, in part, as an articulation of issues at the forefront of Dunne’s mind. It may be said that the film shows an interest in colonial affairs as a justification for America’s growing involvement in global affairs at this time. By showing the perceived philanthropic merits of British imperialism, American filmmakers demonstrate the benefits of becoming involved in the impending war as well as world affairs in general.

Ironically, the explicitly pro-imperialist agenda of this film was so earnest that it led some British critics to criticise the filmmakers for being insufficiently critical of Stanley's legacy. Graham Greene even perceived a different parallel that might be drawn with the contemporary situation in Europe:

History, by which I no longer mean the research of Hal and Sam, tells us how [Stanley] carried on that work: the heavily armed ferocious forays, the massacre of natives who had learnt not to trust his Fuhrer’s temperament...the unpleasant sexual rumours which drifted back to London clubs.²¹⁶

Stanley and Livingstone marks a change in the relationship between British and American filmic representations of imperial history. For most of the 1930s, the two sets of films occupy a different discursive territory and share relatively few

²¹⁵ Dunne is referring to Hitler invading the Soviet Union and hence changing the rhetoric to describe the war in Europe. Ibid. 112.

²¹⁶ Graham Greene, "'Stanley and Livingstone' Film Review," *Spectator*, 20 Oct 1939. BFI Library. Hal and Sam refers to Hal Long and Sam Hellman who are cited for doing the historical research for the film.

ideological concerns. Hollywood's Indian films were unreservedly pro-British, but demonstrated little sensitivity to contemporary Anglo-Indian relations. By contrast, American filmmakers showed a much greater timidity when it came to imperial Africa than their British counterparts. British feature film treatments of colonial Africa in the 1930s offer cruder and bolder defences of Empire than Korda's Indian films, whilst also occasionally confronting the inadequacies of a paternalistic ideology simply by showcasing the forceful charisma and intelligence of Paul Robeson as an embodiment of various native peoples. The hypothesis presented in this chapter that American filmmakers were wary of engaging with colonial Africa because of unavoidable parallels with sensitive domestic race relations is aptly demonstrated in the way that *Stanley and Livingstone* makes clear analogies between the past and present fates of both continents. More importantly, *Stanley and Livingstone* represents the first instance of American filmmakers exploring British colonial history for metaphors to help define and project an image of America's future role in international affairs. As will be demonstrated subsequently, the screen representation of imperialism became trickier to manage in the context of public opinion in both America and the colonies during the Second World War, before coming back into fashion as a compelling means of mapping out a new post-war world order.

Chapter Three

Wartime Imperialism, Reinventing the Empire

James Chapman has observed that “The first major cycle of empire cinema ended with the outbreak of the Second World War.”²¹⁷ He is speaking here of production trends in both British and American cinema, and in many respects it is impossible to dispute this assessment. Fiction films set in colonial territories and representing British authorities subjugating pockets of dissent among the native population and reaffirming Britain's imperial authority - of the type which had been so conspicuous in the 1930s - did indeed become temporarily extinct for the duration of the war. As will be explained in this chapter, the ongoing history of British imperialism represented a problem and potential embarrassment for a propaganda effort determined to represent the Allied cause as a fight for freedom and democracy against forces of coercion and tyranny. The subject of Britain's overseas Empire was perceived as a particular impediment to successful achievement of the major goal of Allied diplomacy during the first phase of the war: securing American support. However, blanket suppression of any reference to this thorny but prominent issue would hardly have constituted sophisticated propaganda. Although it is not commonly acknowledged in existing scholarship on cinema and the Second World War, it should not be considered too surprising that a small number of British and American feature films of this period DID directly confront the subject of the British Empire and make a substantial effort to redeem its contentious reputation. The main endeavour of this chapter will be to show how this positive spin was subtly and sometimes covertly articulated. The chapter will furthermore argue that, despite the fact that British

²¹⁷ James Chapman and Nicholas J. Cull, *Projecting Empire: Imperialism in Popular Cinema* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009). 8. Emphasis added. See also, “The outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 brought the cycle of Empire films to an abrupt halt.” 26.

imperialism represented a potential obstacle to the creation of a robust Anglo-American wartime alliance, it is during the war that we see for the first time a significant congruence of approach shared by British and Hollywood filmmakers to the screen representation of Empire.

The British Empire According to The Archers

The story of the wartime British cinema is well documented by other scholars and does not need to be retold in detail here.²¹⁸ On the other hand, as pointed out before, British scholars do not often prioritise how British wartime cinema handled the subject of imperialism. Mark Glancy notes that British filmmakers endeavoured to hide imperial themes to counter views by many Americans that Britain was just another Empire, much like the Nazis themselves.²¹⁹ James Chapman implies that British imperialism became taboo by remarking that “The outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 brought the cycle of Empire films to an abrupt halt.”²²⁰ It is certainly true that imperial adventure films celebrating conquest quickly disappeared after the war began.

It was also an official propaganda objective to prevent the continued circulation of such films. The MoI stopped some 1930s Empire-themed films from

²¹⁸ See Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, *Britain Can Take It: The British in the Second World War* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Michael Leonard Graham Balfour, *Propaganda in War, 1939-1945: Organisations, Policies, and Publics, in Britain and Germany* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979); James Chapman, *The British at War: Cinema, State and Propaganda 1939-1945* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris 1998); Antonia Lant, *Blackout: Reinventing Women for Wartime British Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Robert Murphy, *British Cinema and the Second World War* (London and New York: Continuum, 2000); Neil Rattigan, *This Is England: British Film and the People's War, 1939-1945* (Madison N.J. and London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press and Associated University Presses, 2001).

²¹⁹ Mark H. Glancy, *When Hollywood Loved Britain: The Hollywood "British" Film 1939-1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999). 190-1.

²²⁰ James Chapman and Nicholas Cull, *Projecting Empire: Imperialism and Popular Cinema*. (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2009). 26.

being re-released in an effort to stifle representations vulnerable to the charge of cultural bigotry. *Gunga Din* (1939) for example, was not re-released at the behest of the MoI and the OWI.²²¹ Furthermore, the Rudyard Kipling adaptation, *Soldiers Three* (1951) was originally planned by Korda and Balcon before the war. However, Balcon did not make it until after the war, so as not to interfere with MoI objectives during the 1940s:

It seems likely that further progress on *Soldiers Three* was halted by the outbreak of World War II, during which the OWI systematically discouraged celebrations of British imperialism as inconsistent with the democratic values at the heart of the Allied propaganda effort.²²²

Similarly, M.G.M. agreed to shelve a planned film adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* at the request of the OWI. It appears that older conceptions of imperialism were perceived as a liability and films dealing with the Empire were very carefully policed. This is not to say the MoI and filmmakers strove to completely suppress imperial content during the war; they encouraged the release of newer films challenging the very ideas they filmmakers had engendered just a decade before. Jeffery Richards has observed more generally of British film policy during the war that "It is a truism that the war saw a change in the nature of British films, what can perhaps be described as democratisation..."²²³ The drive to portray the British Empire as a democratic entity also involved a extensive rebranding of concepts of Empire. As a result, 'Commonwealth' increasingly became the favoured term used to reference colonial territories. Wendy Webster has shown how during the war various forms of mass media were used to help create a new form of solidarity between England and the

²²¹ Glancy. 191.

²²² Jeffrey Richards, "*Soldiers Three*: The 'Lost' Gaumont British Imperial Epic," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* XV, no. 1 (1995). 141.

²²³ Jeffrey Richards, "National Identity in British Wartime Films," in *Britain and the Cinema in the Second World War*, ed. Philip M. Taylor (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988). 59.

colonies. For example, people in South Africa and Australia often listened to the news from 12,000 miles away.²²⁴ Challenged by some Americans' viewpoint that British imperialism was comparable to Nazism, Britain peddled the idea of the Commonwealth not just to the people of England, but also to the colonies themselves and to the world. Toby Haggith has argued that "As war progressed, the concept of Empire underwent further changes, challenged by more egalitarian and democratic ideas of interdependence and cooperation."²²⁵ Haggith is specifically referring here to a new breed of imperial-themed cinema propaganda. He is mostly referring to non-fiction shorts, but there is one feature-length fiction film which is an example of this new screen approach to the Empire-as-Commonwealth: *49th Parallel* (1941), which was officially sponsored by the MoI.

Along with *49th Parallel* (1941) there are two other important feature films which can be understood as attempts to remodel the image of the British Empire during the war. One is *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943). The other was a film planned during the war specifically to improve Anglo-American relations by the same filmmakers but released shortly after the war ended: *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946). It is not a coincidence that three of the most significant attempts to confront the subject of Empire during wartime were made by the famous director-writer team of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, also known as the Archers. The celebrated filmmakers are not typically labelled as apologists for the British Empire, yet the Archers had a preoccupation with exploring Britain's place in the world

²²⁴ Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). 24-5.

²²⁵ Toby Haggith, "Citizenship, Nationhood and Empire in British Official Film Propaganda, 1939-45," in *The Right to Belong: Citizenship and National Identity in Britain, 1930-1960*, ed. Richard Weight and Abigail Beach (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998). 77.

through their films. Hence, the Archers are commonly described as 'cosmopolitan'.²²⁶ One might argue that there has been a failure to properly identify certain recurrent characteristics in their work which would otherwise more clearly explain why they of all British filmmakers were particularly keen to take on the task of fulfilling the MoI's directive to rebrand the Empire as a more idealised Commonwealth.

The nature of the Archers' 'cosmopolitanism' is rather vaguely defined other than by acknowledging non-English collaborators amongst their production team and a regular gravitation towards non-English settings. By virtue of being antithetical to national insularity, this has traditionally been considered as politically progressive.²²⁷ However, It may be that 'cosmopolitanism' identified in The Archers' work may be somewhat less progressive, in that part of their international sensibility lies in their belief in the importance of the British Empire. In this regard, Richard Dyer's characterisation of Powell as a 'profoundly reactionary filmmaker' and the idea that

²²⁶ Consider just a few films such as *Black Narcissus* (1947), *Ill Met by Moonlight* also known as *Night Ambush* (1957), and *The Queen's Guards* (1961) which are considered cosmopolitan. Specifically, Powell's colonial subject matter in *The Queen's Guards*.

Many scholars have called Powell and Pressburger films cosmopolitan. For example see, Andrew Moor, *Powell & Pressburger: A Cinema of Magic Spaces*, Cinema and Society Series (London and New York: I.B. Tauris 2005). 10; Pam Cook, *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005). 87; M. Todd Bennett, *One World, Big Screen: Hollywood, the Allies, and World War II* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012). 153-4; Duncan J. Petrie, *The British Cinematographer* (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 1996). 82; Ian Christie, *Arrows of Desire: The Films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger*, New ed. (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994). 15; Ian Christie and Andrew Moor, *The Cinema of Michael Powell: International Perspectives on an English Film-Maker* (London: BFI, 2005).; Duncan J. Petrie and Robert Kruger, *A Paul Rotha Reader*, Exeter Studies in Film History (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999). 75. Andrew Moor, "Spirit and Matter: Romantic Mythologies in the Films of Derek Jarman," in *Territories of Desire in Queer Culture: Refiguring Contemporary Boundaries*, ed. David Alderson and Linda R. Anderson (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000). 53.

²²⁷ Andrew Moor, "Mythologies in the Films of Derek Jarman" in Alderson, Anderson. eds, *Territories of Desire in Queer Culture*, 2000, 53.

this has led to nominally 'progressive critics' having to 'contort themselves' in order to praise him is an apt description.²²⁸

49th Parallel was the only feature film to be officially sponsored by the MoI; as James Chapman shows, a degree of controversy, surrounded the unprecedented situation of the British state directly sponsoring a commercial feature film. After *49th Parallel* “the MoI preferred to work behind the scenes suggesting film projects to producers.”²²⁹ In this film, a careful effort is made to re-brand the Empire as the Commonwealth. The film centres on a group of Nazi survivors from a sunken U-boat trying to escape across Canada to neutral America. The group, led by emotionless Lieutenant Hirth (Eric Portman), first encounters a trapper station manned by French Canadian Johnny (Laurence Olivier), Scotch Canadian David (Frederick Piper), and Lapp Canadian Nick (Ley On) as well as a community of Lapp fishermen and hunters. Brutally mistreating Johnny and the Lapps, the Nazis steal a plane and make their escape. They next encounter a Hutterite community. Here they observe the cooperative and democratic nature the group has adopted to thrive. The Nazis ask the community to join the Nazi cause, making an appeal to their common Germanic heritage. The leader of the community, Peter (Anton Walbrook), not only retorts with disgust but explains that the ways of the community are inherently opposed to Nazi ideals. One of the Nazis, Vogel (Niall MacGinnis), becomes attracted to Anna, a Hutterite woman who coincidentally has lost someone dear to her at the hands of Nazis. Therefore, Vogel, struggling with his convictions decides to stay in the community after a talk with Peter. However, Hirth charges him as a traitor and

²²⁸ Richard Dyer, "Feeling English," *Sight and Sound* (1994). 19.

It is noteworthy that Kevin Macdonald labeled the Archers a “purveyors of an old fashioned Anglican Tory philosophy...” See Kevin Macdonald, *Emeric Pressburger: The Life and Death of a Screenwriter* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994). 233.

²²⁹ Chapman, *The British at War: Cinema, State and Propaganda 1939-1945*. 56.

executes him. At this point there are only three Nazis left and they wind their way through Winnipeg and the Canadian forestlands, crossing a Crow Native American heritage celebration at which another one of the group is caught by the police. The final two wander into a camp in which Leslie Howard's character, Phillip Armstrong Scott, is studying Crow culture. When he realises they are Nazis a confrontation leads to one of the other members being caught. Hirth now makes his own way but is finally caught himself by a Canadian army deserter, Andy Brock (Raymond Massey) on the American/Canadian border.

Powell and Pressburger were directly commissioned to make this film by the MoI. A meeting with Kenneth Clarke, the then head of the Films Division of the MoI assured Powell and Pressburger that the state would supply the resources they needed.²³⁰ Setting the film on the American border was strategic: Powell states in his autobiography that part of the drive of the film was to scare the Americans into the war.²³¹ As a consequence, the marketing for this film in America was centred on the theme of paranoia that was rampant around this time.²³² Several articles to be used at its release blatantly encouraged fear of Nazi attacks. Most prominently the title was changed to *The Invaders* for its American release. Articles set to be released along with the film do not neglect to mention F.D.R.'s aid to the production; he stated he was "delighted to give all facilities for your interesting project."²³³ Although the film was intended to help bring the Americans into the war, it premiered in New York the 5th of March 1942, three months after Pearl Harbor.

²³⁰ Michael Powell, *A Life in Movies: An Autobiography* (London: Methuen, 1987). 347.

See also, records dating 1940 in TS 27/485. The National Archives.

²³¹ Ibid. 347.

²³² See Robert Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel: Cinema and Society in Britain, 1939-1948*, Cinema and Society (London: Routledge, 1989). 19.

²³³ *49th Parallel* Press Book, 1942. BFI Library.

The film insistently attempts to contrast Nazi ideology with Commonwealth ideals, by showing the diversity of people from all over Canada and highlighting their harmonious way of living. Possibly the best example of this comes when the Nazis encounter the Hutterite community. A montage helps establish the polarity of each group by showing the Hutterites happily at work on their land. A discussion in the dining hall between one of the Hutterites and the Nazi group regarding the democratic and inherently cooperative nature of the Hutterite community also underscores this. The contrast is developed in the scene in which Hirth discusses fascism and total war with Vogel as well as the scene between Vogel and Peter in which Vogel confesses he feels he has no choice but to be a Nazi and he longs for the time when he was doing more for his own people. The community is ethnically similar to the Nazis, but the ideologies clash when Hirth tries to incite the community to join the Nazi cause for the sake of ethnic purity; he is rebuked by the leader of the community played by the renowned anti-Nazi actor Anton Walbrook. In this way, democratic ideals thriving in a British Dominion territory are modeled against the fascist ideals of the Nazis.

An underlying criticism of Nazi racism in the film begins with the treatment and comments of the Lapp people at the trapper station, continuing to the ethnic purity speech delivered to the Hutterites. This critique serves to distance the discourse of racial superiority that was traditionally used to justify imperialism from association with the British Empire. It is instead attributed to the Nazi characters. Showing the diverse groups of people, the Hutterites, Native American tribesmen, French and Scotch Canadians creates the sense of the Commonwealth as a unity of diverse ethnic interests, in accordance with one of the core aims of wartime propaganda. The Nazis are characterised as aggressively xenophobic individuals who abhor what Canadians

in the film celebrate. The Native American festival is literally a celebration of native culture in Canada, for example. Moreover, in this film can be seen the beginning of a new modern benevolent concept of colonialism in British cinema in which Britain's imperial exploits are shown to have empowered colonised peoples. In particular, it is implicitly suggested that the modern conception of colonialism, the Commonwealth, is not a system of exploitation but a unified, cooperative unit sharing in the wealth.²³⁴

Powell himself maintains that he wanted to draw attention to the idea of the Commonwealth by making a film about Canada. His idea for the film came from “a story published in the *Toronto Financial News* in 1939, dealing with Canada's entry into the war.”²³⁵ The fact that Powell and Pressburger wanted “interwoven into the framework of the plot dramatic conflicts between the Nazis and various types of Canadians – these encounters bringing out every phase of present-day life in the Dominion” confirms the motivation to position the Nazis against the British Empire as ideologically polar opposites.²³⁶

Despite the Commonwealth being depicted as unified and Canada shown as a democratic member of the Empire, the colonial spectatorship of the *other* remains in this film. The Hutterites and Native American tribes are portrayed within the film; production notes and press books as ‘others’ and the promotional discourse dissects their *curious* cultural habits as if discussing another species. The production notes detail the challenges of filming the Hutterite settlement and the challenges the Native American communities offered as well. Effectively, the ‘other’ continues to be the object of gaze for Westerners but is also the object of white self-righteousness in which the colonial self fails to see the harm colonialism brings and only observes the

²³⁴ Enjoying the wealth is a concept specific to the white colonies such as Canadian and Australia; treatment of African and Asian colonies is never quite so generous.

²³⁵ *49th Parallel* Production Notes, 1. The BFI Library.

²³⁶ *49th Parallel* Production Notes, 5. The BFI Library.

benefits of Western societal norms on native culture. There is also a sense of loss created in such films, or what one may call vanishing race syndrome, where the Westerner (in this case, Leslie Howard) recites the plight of the tragic colonised peoples in an effort to redirect the attention on their tragic fate instead of the actions of the colonisers themselves. This sort of acknowledgment often ends up reinforcing stereotypes (the mystical shaman, or land devoted Native American is an example of this).

The articles in the press book for the American distribution campaign cite Hutterite persecution in Europe as an opportunity for the Americas to act as a new home for those fleeing persecution. Hence, Canada is presented less as a colonial subject but more as a home to those who seek refuge, a strong parallel to American ideals dealing with housing persecuted peoples. This promotional material plays down the history of imperialism while attempting to show a unity between the Americans, Canadians and Allied forces. Moreover, the Commonwealth idea is tied in with ideals of democracy. To emphasise this point, the press book reprints Anton Walbrook's speech to Hirth and recommends reproducing it in the newspaper, over the radio or at boys and girls clubs:

...We are only one amongst many foreign settlements in Canada. There are thousands of them in this part of the world, and they have been founded, some recently, some eighty years ago, by people who left their homes in Europe because of famine, because of starvation, because of racial and political persecution and some, like ourselves, because of their faith. Some came only to find new land, new boundaries, a new world. But all have found here, in Canada, the security, the peace and tolerance and understanding which in Europe, it is your Fuehrer's (sic) pride to have stamped out...

The press book proclaims, "It is a speech that every true believer in democracy will want to hear..." and goes so far as to call it the "Freedom Speech."²³⁷ The speech deliberately references faith-based persecution, to highlight the anti-Semitism going on in Nazi Germany at the time. It is important to note that the speech seems to appeal directly to America's sense of its own democracy and freedom. Moreover, it appeals to broader ideas of internationalism by drawing out a history of close relationship between Europe and the New World. The speech criticises the Old World in contrast to the promise of the New World. However, it does so in a clever way in which it finds a common bridge between the New World and Europe as embodied by the speaker himself as a Hutterite; Peter is of German decent but has found purpose in Canada. His speech furthermore, galvanises the sense of Commonwealth by fusing Canada's goal with that of Allied Europe's: that is to fight Nazism.

In several regards, Powell and Pressburger's next film *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) represents a departure for The Archers so far as wartime propaganda is concerned. Compared to *49th Parallel* which was commissioned by the MoI, it is well documented that the MoI and the War Office actively discouraged production of *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, to the point of considering banning the film altogether.²³⁸ Nevertheless, while some elements of the film's focus on a generational conflict over the military conduct of the war were deeply provocative and controversial, it may also be suggested that it has a secondary agenda

²³⁷ *49th Parallel* Press Book, 1942. The BFI Library

²³⁸ For a comprehensive discussion surrounding the political controversy surrounding *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* see James Chapman, "'The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp' (1943) Reconsidered," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 15, no. 1 (1995).; Jeffrey Richards and Anthony Aldgate, *Best of British: Cinema and Society, 1930-1970* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983).; Nicholas Pronay and Jeremy Croft, "British Film Censorship and Propaganda Policy During the Second World War," in *British Cinema History*, ed. James Curran and Vincent Porter (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983).; Ian Christie, "The Colonel Blimp File," *Sight and Sound* 48, no. 1 (1978).

to defend the historical ideals of the British Empire, and that it takes an altogether more conservative and nostalgic approach in the pursuit of this aim.

The narrative begins with a doppelganger of David Low's familiar cartoon character reclining in a Turkish bath. Clive Candy V.C. (Roger Livesey) a Major-General now volunteering for the Home Guard gets a shock when Spud Wilson (James McKechnie) begins a war exercise early and bursts in on Candy. While Spud and Candy argue about this breach in protocol, the film flashes back to Candy's earlier years after the South African War. For his participation in the war, Candy has received the Victoria Cross. Candy is entreated by a young woman, Edith Hunter (Deborah Kerr) to go to Germany to dispel rumours of British cruelty during this conflict. However, while he is there he manages to insult the German army and hence gets drawn into a fencing challenge to make up for the insult. His clash with his opponent, Theo Kretschmar-Schuldorff, played by Anton Walbrook, ends in a draw and shortly after the two become friends in the hospital. When the time comes for Candy's departure, he finds he has fallen in love with Edith only to discover that Theo and she are engaged. Nevertheless, he and Theo agree to remain good friends.

Candy returns to England and just before the start of the First World War there is a montage sequence of Candy's spare room being filled with heads of game he has hunted from the far corners of the Empire. Candy is a senior member of the army during the First World War and patrols the trenches comfortably from his car, driven by the Scotsman Murdoch (John Laurie). One particular scene shows his attempt to extract information from German Prisoners of War, but his soft approach is quickly countered by a South African, lower ranking soldier who tortures them (off-camera) for the information needed, while the other soldiers joke about Candy being a product of an older generation of soldiers:

“Who were those other wars he was talking about captain, the Boer war, and the Sommie-something? I never heard of them.

Those weren’t wars, those were just summer manoeuvres.”

During his time in the war he falls in love with Barbara Wynne (also played by Deborah Kerr), a war nurse, and after the war they are married. Once home, Candy discovers his old friend Theo is a prisoner of war and goes to visit him, but he is initially brushed off by Theo who has become hardened and cynical in their years apart. Candy, however, not dissuaded, invites him for dinner and he and his fellow comrades assure Theo that the British will help rebuild Germany and are ready to forgive and forget. Theo and his fellow detainees are incredulous at and contemptuous of this overture.

Another transitional montage shows Candy’s parlour filling up with yet more hunting trophies from around the globe. This brings the film to 1938, which begins with Barbara’s death. A year later at the outbreak of the Second World War Theo comes to England as a refugee. Returning to his now deceased wife’s homeland, having lost his sons to the Nazis he is coming to England for sanctuary. Candy comes in to speak on Theo’s behalf and the two catch up over dinner at Candy’s home. Their different outlooks on the new war unfold and the two friends have conversations regarding the change in Europe over the coming months which also involve Candy’s driver, and Spud Wilson’s girlfriend, Johnny Cannon (yet again played by Deborah Kerr) about the importance of fighting fairly and honourably. Candy is to give a speech over the radio but is instead told by the broadcaster that his time has been cancelled at the last minute. When Candy returns home disappointed he also finds he has been booted out of the army into retirement. The next major event in the film catches the audience up to where the film began before the flashback, with Spud humiliating Candy in the Baths and the two ending up in a wrestling fight. Johnny

fetches Theo to comfort Candy, who finally realises he doesn't belong in the new war and recognises that Spud embodies the modern soldier, appropriately saluting him at the conclusion of the film.

It remains a challenge to scholars exactly what to make of this film and making sense of the political message that the film aims to communicate is far from straightforward. Chapman has documented that a consistent complaint amongst many reviewers upon the film's original release was that the satire promised by the film's association with David Low's cartoon caricature was extremely hard to detect.²³⁹ For the purposes of interpretation, the least contentious element of the film is that which caused most controversy during its production: the contemporary framing narrative. It is suggested that Candy's well-meaning but outdated attachment to the rules of fair play that defined the image of the British army in previous conflicts must be considered dangerous to the Allied cause. Candy clings to ideals of the past - directly associated by the film with an imperialist worldview - and is thus symbolic of a military command which fails to recognise that an era of 'total warfare' demands a different mindset. Theo plainly spells this message out to Candy, and it is arguably the one element of the film that is vaguely consistent with the angry satire of Low's original cartoon series.

The contemporary narrative is only one part of the film however, and even here Candy's final willingness to accept the validity of Theo's argument marks him out as a reasonable, honourable and ultimately intelligent individual rather than another blinkered Blimp. It is even harder to ascertain the aims behind the historical flashback sequences, when honour, nobility, generosity and (belated) intelligence are presented as Candy's defining characteristics. The first flashback is more than likely present to

²³⁹ Chapman, "'The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp' (1943) Reconsidered." 39.

explain why Candy has become the man that he is, and the film seems determined to portray him in a highly sympathetic and understanding light. Candy rushes to Berlin in 1902 to defend the British Empire against German claims that its army have been guilty of despicable savagery towards, and even the mass extermination of, captive women and children at concentration camps during the Boer War. Similar claims are today accepted as historical facts, and even at the time of the conflict the Liberal MP and future British Prime Minister David Lloyd George openly voiced in Parliament accusations that the British government was pursuing a policy of extermination against the civilian Boer population. However, Candy insists that he was present at the prison camp in question and knows all the allegations to be abominable lies. It is tempting to consider the possibility that the film is inviting its audience to see Candy as a profoundly hypocritical liar or an ignorant fool, but it is very hard to detect an ironic undercurrent. The German responsible for spreading stories of British outrages against the Boers is represented as a pompous and buffoonish propagandist, whilst Candy is portrayed as a man of unimpeachable honour, guilty only of noble intentions and political naivety.

The main purpose of the 1902 sequence is perhaps made clearer by the subsequent scenes set in Flanders in 1918. Brigadier-General Candy arrives at an outpost where Germans suspected of torturing British soldiers have been captured. Candy insists he will be able to ascertain the truth from them without any need for such dishonourable methods. The South African Major in charge of the unit humours Candy before surreptitiously expediting his removal elsewhere so that he is free to (successfully) employ a more ruthless mode of interrogation, warning the prisoners that he is not an 'English gentleman'.

There are several conclusions which the viewer is invited to draw from this, and

which bring the Berlin episode into clearer relief. Firstly, it is important to note that Afrikaners are now happily fighting alongside the British, implicitly calling into question the allegations of genocide against the Boers by the absence of any bitter legacy and by the unity of purpose which has succeeded their earlier subjugation at the hands of the British. Secondly, the suggestion is made that an occasional ruthless pragmatism has not been as alien to the British military tradition as Candy believes, which reinforces the message preached in the modern sequences that Britain must be prepared to fight dirty when necessary. Thirdly, it serves to emphatically underscore for the viewer that Candy's imperialist mindset is at worst guilty only of naive idealism. Any past willingness to compromise gentlemanly conduct in war has seemingly been pursued under the noses of high command. Candy's pre-WWII military experiences have served to convince him that it will always be the case that 'right equals might' rather than the other way around. For all that the film is provocatively critical of modern British military authorities for failing to appreciate the scale of barbarousness that their current adversary is capable of, one would have to say that *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* promotes an exceptionally rose-tinted view of the previous forty years of imperial conflict and the ideals which supposedly underpinned it.

It was a common complaint amongst contemporary British reviewers of *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* that the film was indulgent in its treatment of Blimp where David Low had been mercilessly savage.²⁴⁰ The interpretation of the film presented in this chapter is consistent with the verdict reached by the reviewer in *Documentary News Letter*: "Not only is [Candy] not Low's Blimp; he is the very reverse--an apologia for the upper-class specialists who misguided this country into

²⁴⁰ See *ibid.* 40. See also, Paul Trench, "'The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp' Odeon Review," *Evening Standard*, 12 June 1943. The BFI Library.

the mud of Munich and the disasters of 1939-40", and it is suggested that he served to "reassure the reactionaries by making it clearer that they are, as they themselves so often suspected, the salt of the earth."²⁴¹ James Chapman considers this to be a classic case of a critic's (left-wing) ideological beliefs leading them to read completely against the grain of a film's avowed intentions, and quotes Powell's own account of the rationale behind the film (articulated several decades later) by way of refutation: "Colonel Blimp was a symbol of British procrastination and British regard for tradition and all the things which we knew and which were losing the war."²⁴² The interpretation which this thesis offers is that the film manages to advance this critical view of the military authorities in the 1940s while still celebrating the traditions of British imperialism, which is perhaps what left-wing contemporaries found so repellent about it.

It is a moot point whether this defence of Britain's imperial history was, like *49th Parallel*, largely intended to address American misgivings about its main ally. But there can be no question that the final Archers film discussed in this chapter was primarily designed to alleviate 'misunderstandings' between the two countries. *A Matter of Life and Death* was conceived during the war and plans were made for production in the war years but due to production difficulties filming did not begin until August 1945.²⁴³ According to Powell's autobiography, Jack Beddington commissioned the film to promote Anglo-American relations and to help cement what

²⁴¹ *Documentary News Letter*, 4, 1943, 5 cited in Chapman, "'The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp' (1943) Reconsidered." 41.

²⁴² *Ibid.* 41.

²⁴³ Ian Christie points out that it was lack of Technicolor stock, which prevented an earlier, start date. Filming began the 14th of August (the day Japan surrendered). Ian Christie, *A Matter of Life and Death*, BFI Film Classics (London: BFI Publishing, 2000). 42.

many in British government hoped would become a close long-term alliance.²⁴⁴ The film is on the surface a love story between RAF pilot Peter (David Niven) and American USAAF worker June (Kim Hunter). Following a bureaucratic mistake in heaven, Peter, who was supposed to die in a plane crash is spared death and subsequently falls in love with June. However, certain celestial factions, in an uproar over this rare mistake make the claim that Peter must take his place in heaven. Conductor 71 (Marius Goring), a French aristocrat killed in the French revolution, insists Peter take up his place only to be challenged by Peter who feels he deserves to remain with June. Therefore, Conductor 71 must take his plea back to heaven. Meanwhile, Peter confides this to June who believes he was severely injured by his crash and hence hallucinating. She asks a friend, Dr. Reeves (Roger Livesey) to observe him. The doctor agrees and recommends surgery. Meanwhile, Conductor 71 returns to tell Peter that heaven has granted him permission to plead his case and he now must choose someone to represent him. Given this recent visit, Dr. Reeves speeds up the time for the surgery but dies before it can be carried out. Hence, Peter chooses Dr. Reeves to represent his case in heaven. While his trial is being prepared, Peter goes in for surgery back on earth. Meanwhile, in heaven the case is heard in a grand arena and Abraham Farlan (Raymond Massey), an American Revolutionary, prosecutes while Dr. Reeves argues in Peter's defence. Essentially the case boils down to a discussion of the Anglo-American special relationship as Dr. Reeves defends Britain's historical role in world affairs and by extension, Peter's right to remain with June. Dr. Reeves suggests bringing June to testify so the entire court goes to earth to hear what she has to say. As heavenly and earthly beings collide, Peter is awoken from surgery to make a plea to the court and June is brought forward to

²⁴⁴ Powell. 487.

testify to her love for Peter. In the climax, Dr. Reeves asks June to take Peter's place so he may live but she will die instead. She agrees and is beginning to be taken up to heaven when the court rules that since their love is true they can remain together. Peter is granted a stay on earth to live out a long and happy life with June. His vision over, he awakes from surgery to June and proclaims, "we won!"

Among the many critical exegeses of this film, James Chapman alone has argued for greater focus to be placed on the film's relationship with contemporary political issues, but there has been little attention paid to a central theme of the film: how Anglo-American relations can transcend a history of British imperialism from which America itself once forcefully rebelled.²⁴⁵ The initial sequences set in Heaven give the distinct impression that Britain still rules the world, in that the afterlife is governed as if it is a branch of the British Civil Service. However, this joke gives way to the acknowledgement that Britain's role in international affairs is on trial. The case against Peter is prosecuted by Abraham Farlan, a fictional character presented as a symbol of anti-imperialism: he is supposedly the first American killed by the British in 1775. The initial jury is composed entirely of representatives from former and current British colonies, a selection deemed unfair in that they are bound to be biased against the British pilot.

It is crucial to note that the film does not seek to validate the imperial project by explicitly defending Britain's past. There is a more complex agenda evident to imagine how international affairs may be regulated in the post-war world. Ian Christie points out in passing that the court resembles the United Nations.²⁴⁶ As the UN was being established at this very moment and the Americans and British were firming up

²⁴⁵ James Chapman, "'The True Business of the British Movie': *A Matter of Life and Death* and British Film Culture," *Screen* XLVI, no. 1 (2005).

²⁴⁶ Christie, *A Matter of Life and Death*. 36. A heading accompanying a still of the court reads, "Wanger meets the United Nations: the heavenly amphitheatre."

their post war relationship, this setting aptly echoes the new world order, a coalition of countries bound by post-colonial structures led by the joint effort of America and England. This film, made with government support, was responding not just to the need to recognise the rising superpower status of America but it also involved coming to terms with the “trend toward what was increasingly being known as internationalism.”²⁴⁷ In this vein, Mark Mazower makes the important argument that the growing internationalism lifted a veil on imperialism. The effects were that there was a general cry for increased political suffrage. Geopolitical developments during the war lent impetus for Britain to attach itself to America so as to maintain its influence in international affairs. It was becoming clear to the British that as their post-war Empire was failing apart they would need to cling to the rising superpower status of America to still wield power globally, Churchill noted this need by introducing the idea of the special relationship in 1946. “Such a fraternal association, he stated, meant “a special relationship between the British Commonwealth and Empire and the United States.””²⁴⁸ Hence the need to emphasise the special relationship in wartime propaganda was superseded by the need to sustain a special relationship in a new world order as well. “Propagandists placed Anglo-American relations in a global context, where potential dangers would continue to unite the two allies.”²⁴⁹

The global context is established in the opening sequences of the film where a narrator goes through the universe to settle on the world and then England. Directly after this the film introduces the two lead subjects of the film, an Englishman and an

²⁴⁷ Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009). 31.

²⁴⁸ Churchill quoted in Webster. 57.

²⁴⁹ Susan A. Brewer, *To Win the Peace: British Propaganda in the United States During World War II* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997). 239.

American woman, metaphorically representing the two leading countries to be addressed in the film, and, by extension the most important past and present forces in global politics. The two characters in question are not merely the objects of a love story but represent the affair between America and England and their relationship with the world. This noted, the cultural norms of reason and science as theoretical underpinnings to the Western world's method of perspective are embodied by Dr. Reeves who is introduced manipulating a scientific instrument (camera obscura) through which he views and to a certain extent oversees his little world. However, this is also addressed in the flower garden scene in which Conductor 71 informs Peter of the mistake in heaven concerning his death. Peter argues that law is based in reason, and while this may seem a moot point, it is informed by a validation of logic and philosophical reason that pervade post enlightenment Western ideals. This idea is further reinforced by the scene in which Peter is on the long escalator to heaven viewing the statues, who are primarily rooted in Western philosophical culture: Lincoln, Plato, and Solomon. Peter also mentions Socrates and asks if his prosecutor, Abraham Farlan is a philosopher or statesmen, hence emphasising the credentials of a competent leader in a successful democratic process. Therefore, Western reason rather than narrow British bureaucracy is the method by which heaven is to be run.

At the mercy of an American jury, Dr. Reeves gambles June and Peter's future. At first this must be justified to the world, as the jury is more representative of world members. However, as England does not have to justify its actions in the post-colonial world to its former colonies, who are not in a position to exact judgment on them, both in the film and the real world, so they must plead their case to America which is not just a former colony itself but has historically judged them and is now in a position to gain the attention of their former colonial ruler. In this way the special

relationship was contrived as an instrument of diplomacy.²⁵⁰ In numerous propaganda pieces involving speeches by Churchill and non-feature film media the idea of the special relationship was developed as a way for England to ally itself with a source of strength that would protect it from the Cold War communist threats and strengthen its position of influence.²⁵¹ While propagandists played on the sentimental aspects of Churchillian rhetoric concerning the special relationship of comradeship and sacrifice, they also “promoted partnership in terms of American interests and, in defining American interests, projected a new role for the United States.”²⁵² Hence the film is pleading its case in a way that plays to America’s new superpower vanity. Realising the special relationship was of considerable importance during the war. This relationship would also continue to take shape after the war and the long-term development of close ties between the two countries was sought to strengthen international political structures in the New World Order. “The idea of a ‘special relationship’ produced a heroic, public rhetoric of national destiny in which America and Britain jointly provided the world with moral leadership, representing freedom and democracy.”²⁵³ In this way, the political internationalism of the time sees Britain looking to America for cultural reinforcement for its joint post-war, neo-colonial approach to new political frameworks.²⁵⁴

It may be argued that the key aim of *A Matter of Life and Death* is to imaginatively validate the main thrust of Britain's post-war diplomatic policy, by

²⁵⁰ Ibid. 235.

²⁵¹ Ibid. 235. Also see, Webster.

²⁵² Brewer. 243.

²⁵³ Webster. 16.

²⁵⁴ It is worth noting that critics of the time were largely confused by the political message present in the film.

See, Herb A. Lighman, "Two Worlds in Technicolor," *American Cinematographer* 28, no. 7 (1947). The BFI Library.

"Film Reviews: "A Matter of Life and Death"," *To-Day* 67, no. 5417 (1946).

"Reviews for Showmen," *Kinematograph Weekly* 2064 (1946).

offering a vision of the international community as an expanded Commonwealth, with Britain and America at its head. It is telling in this regard that while the celestial court room shows a variety of non-Western and non-caucasian peoples given a seating allocation in the justice arena, they are not active participants but passive spectators appreciatively observing the spectacle of Western law.

Hollywood's British Empire during the War

There are several important factors to consider when analysing Hollywood films which addressed the subject of Empire during the war. In the years before America entered the war, film policy censored the way filmmakers could comment on it. For example, Charlie Chaplin fell under government scrutiny because *The Great Dictator* directly addressed the events taking place in Europe. Walter Wanger's *Foreign Correspondent* was monitored closely by Joseph Breen and Wanger was forced to rewrite the majority of the script to appease the censors and not challenge America's isolationist stance.²⁵⁵ A good portion of the American population was against entering the war and despite Franklin D. Roosevelt's obvious inclination toward involvement, he had to respect the wishes of the citizens. Moreover, the view of many Americans toward the British could be defined as ambiguous at this point. Weary after the Great War, Americans wanted to shy away from another global conflict. Americans also saw Nazi aspirations as somewhat parallel to British imperialism. Major American newspapers and publications called for Indian independence; and a survey conducted in 1943 concluded that sixty percent of Americans saw Britain as an imperial power and not as a democracy; furthermore,

²⁵⁵ Glancy. 185.

they felt that it treated its colonial subjects unfairly, and fifteen percent believed that Britain “was only fighting to defend its Empire.”²⁵⁶

Therefore, it is no surprise that during the war the type of epic imperial adventure dramas commonly produced in the 1930s were no longer commissioned. However, just as America’s political and economic policies began to incline toward the Allies, particularly the British, so did Hollywood’s films. After Americans entered the war there was a concerted effort to portray a sense of unity between the Allied nations.²⁵⁷ The OWI, created by FDR in 1942, itself created a Motion Pictures Bureau (MPB) to generate propaganda materials as well as liaising with Hollywood filmmakers in an effort to draw them into the war effort. The OWI produced the infamous “Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry.” This outlined to filmmakers what types of films the government wanted produced and had authority to deny “foreign distribution licenses to any script lacking MPB approval.”²⁵⁸ The third section of the Manual states that

...there is a tendency to be critical of the British, *their imperial past*...But, the British people are putting up a magnificent battle. Where would we be today if Britain had not continued to resist in the critical year when she stood alone, unprepared, and without allies, against the Axis?²⁵⁹

The films made which did refer to the British Empire either demonstrate a thematic shift from the 1930s dramas or take careful steps to portray the British Empire as benevolently democratic in nature.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁶ Ibid. 186-190.

²⁵⁷ The United States Office of War Information Bureau of Motion Pictures, *Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry* 1942.

²⁵⁸ Brian Locke, "Strange Fruit: White, Black, and Asian in the World War II Combat Film 'Bataan'," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* Spring, no. 36 (2008).

²⁵⁹ *Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry*, 1942. Section 3. *Italic emphasis added, Underlined emphasis original.*

²⁶⁰ The last of the imperial adventure films released in the 1930s revealed a move away from typical portrayals of colonial natives. *Gunga Din* was released in February

Before the events triggered by Pearl Harbor, Joseph Breen insisted that American filmmakers should not be showing an inclination toward ideologies on either side of the war.²⁶¹ However, some Hollywood filmmakers were outspokenly in favour of American involvement in the war, and many were anti-fascist. For example, the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League was formed in 1936. By 1940, the general public was in favour of aiding the Allied powers in all matters except fighting themselves.²⁶² Moreover, in the summer of 1940 Germany banned American films. It is perhaps not so surprising, therefore, that there were a number of films made prior to America's entry in the war which implicitly demonstrate support for the Allied cause. Several of these films actually chose to articulate this support via a new kind of positive representation of Britain's biggest PR liability: its imperialism.

Cecil B. DeMille's *North West Mounted Police* (1940), for example, can be taken as a masked attempt to imagine Anglo-American cooperation in the contemporary world theatre by utilising the British Empire as the setting and projecting the narrative in the past. The Canadian police, loyal subjects to the British monarch are shown as an exemplary model of law. In the film, set in the 1880s, they battle a group of racially mixed peoples (half Native American, half European) who are unhappy with their present state of affairs and start a rebellion which they invite

of 1939 and teeters a line that puts it before the start of the Second World War but can best be categorised as a 1930s high adventure drama in style and narrative. Many scholars would argue the film typifies the 1930s imperial adventure drama. See Prem Chowdhry, *Colonial India and the Making of Empire Cinema: Image, Ideology and Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Priya Jaikumar, *Cinema at the End of Empire: A Politics of Transition in Britain and India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). However, Frederic Cople Jaher and Blair B. King point out that the film shows the beginnings of national awakenings in Indian. See Frederic Cople Jaher and Blair King, "Hollywood's India: The Meaning of Rko's *Gunga Din*," *Film & History* XXXVIII, no. 2 (2008). 33.

²⁶¹ Robert L. McLaughlin and Sally E. Parry, *We'll Always Have the Movies: American Cinema During World War II* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006). 30.

²⁶² *Ibid.* 28.

the native tribes to join. The Mounted Police are joined by a Texan cowboy, Dusty Rivers (Gary Cooper), present amongst the fray to arrest an outlaw that absconded to Canada before becoming immersed in the rebellion himself. The outlaw is the leader of the dissident group, Jacques Corbeau (George Bancroft). Sgt. Jim Brett (Preston Foster) leads the Mounted Police against the ethnically mixed peoples. The conflict intensifies throughout the film until a great battle ensues. The secondary plot involves a love triangle between Brett, Rivers and April Logan (Madeleine Carroll), as well as the relationship between April's brother, Ronnie Logan (Robert Preston) and the half Native American-French Canadian Louvette Corbeau (Paulette Goddard), daughter of Jacques Corbeau. The film ends with a resolution between the Native Americans and Canadian police after Brett marches into their camp and threatens them with the Queen's Army. He arrests Corbeau in front of the Cree peoples and their chief accepts the Queen's authority. The ethnically mixed peoples are defeated and Rivers captures Corbeau himself and takes him back to Texas.

This film resembles the imperial adventure films of the previous decade, but there are important distinctions to be made. The film confronts the reach of the British Empire across the Atlantic, but the differences between Canada's status as a British Dominion and American independence are treated lightly. Comedic exchanges between Cooper's character and the Canadian red coats play out not as mocking but as comradely jesting. For instance, in one of the first scenes in which Rivers is introduced to the Mounted Police as a group they speak of Britain as a mother. Rivers says he wants to be home for the fourth of July; "my Uncle Sam's birthday." To this, one of the mounted police officers states America was "hatched and protected for one hundred and fifty years... We stuck to our mother..." Rivers replies that "it's a wise child that knows its own mother." Brett adds "and a wiser one that appreciates her."

It is also important to note that this film features a character without precedent in Hollywood's imperial-themed films of the preceding decade: a prominent woman of mixed-race. The character of Louvette Corbeau (Paulette Goddard) is portrayed as highly sexualized. Elise Marubbio describes Louvette as the “sexualised maiden manifested in a fetishtic and phobic fascination that surfaces in the visual and verbal rhetoric...”²⁶³ Louvette is also characterised as treacherous. In the scene between April and Louvette, in which April begs Louvette to warn her brother about the ambush, Louvette is reluctant to go. She asks why she should warn the police since she believes after the skirmish she'll be wealthy: “pretty soon I have silks, I have rings.” She eats her meal like an animal, picking up an entire roast chicken and ripping the meat off with her teeth. Her rugged appearance contrasts sharply with April's: while April is neatly kept, Louvette's disheveled look suggests she is uncivilised (Figure 4.1). When Louvette does go to Ronnie she charms him into abandoning his post to marry her. However, she leads him to a trap, and against his will binds him to keep him safe from the conflict. His crime of abandoning his post is only absolved when he is killed on his return to face the consequences of his actions – his death coming as an accidental result of Louvette's selfish scheming. Marubbio identifies Louvette's character as an example of a common stereotype of mixed race women as highly sexualized. Such representational practices have a long lineage in colonial discourse: “The markers of ‘racial’ and ‘sexual’ become modes of differentiation that identify and split the subject and also confine it within a particular social structure.”²⁶⁴ And indeed the film makes a strong distinction between the British-Canadian peoples, the Native Canadians and the ethnically mixed characters;

²⁶³ M. Elise Marubbio, *Killing the Indian Maiden: Images of Native American Women in Film* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2006). 89.

²⁶⁴ Ibid. 90.

the entire impetus for the film's narrative is the discontent of the ethnically mixed groups' opposition to the laws and lack of place in either culture.



Figure 4.1 Madeleine Carroll and Paulette Goddard in *North West Mounted Police*

An exception is made for one ethnically mixed race character, Tod McDuff (Lynne Overman), a stereotyped Scotsman, who also shares native heritage. His stance for the British Empire is established almost at the introduction of his character. He states that he will “not fight the Queen” because his ancestors helped build the Empire in the Scottish highlands. This inaccurate statement negates the history of violence between England and Scotland and insists on a unified image of the British Empire. The use of the Scots character as a loyal colonial subject is often employed to justify British colonial presence in Indian-set films in the 1930s. His character, seemingly tangential is important to the plot in the way it implies a collective and inclusive vision of the Empire. The Scots are used for this similar purpose in the British produced film *The Drum* in that the Scottish soldiers help defend the Indian Empire. This idea is also represented in the character of McDuff in *Wee Willie Winkie*, the Scotsman who teaches Shirley Temple's character the way the Empire operates in India. In *North West Mounted Police* the Scots character conveys a sense

of common national destiny between the colonial nations. The Scotsman would serve a similar objective in British Second World War films, identifying the multicultural dimensions of Great Britain and presenting Britain as unified in the face of fascism.²⁶⁵

North West Mounted Police is indirectly implying that an alliance of interests between America and Britain comes naturally and like *49th Parallel* (which directly addresses contemporary war concerns in its narrative) the film achieves this in a Canadian setting. Setting such films on America's doorstep and drawing a parallel between the British Commonwealth nation of Canada and its neighbour America is a particularly effective method of promoting a positive Anglo-American relationship and urging Americans into joining the War on the side of the British. Portraying colonialism as a positive force in Canada makes a case for the British as a democratic nation rather than imperial. The film is commenting on British colonialism in a manner that Americans can relate to, since the United States had ongoing colonial relations with its native community as well. In this way, one may see the commonality in motives between Powell and Pressburger and DeMille's vision of Anglo-American relations by similarly using Canada as setting to make British culture more accessible to an American audience. The significance of the mixed race character in this film will be addressed in more detail further on, because this is a recurrent element in wartime American films set within the British Empire, and I do not consider this to be coincidental.

In 1941, a Hollywood film which more directly validated the British Empire and the Allied cause was made. Produced by Walter Wanger and directed by Henry Hathaway who also directed *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, *Sundown* is a film about a

²⁶⁵ See Nick Hayes and Jeff Hill, *'Millions Like Us'?: British Culture in the Second World War* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999). 55-60. See also, Chapter 3 in Rattigan.

British outpost in Manieka, Kenya. For Walter Wanger this was the second film to address the war in a forthright manner. Wanger was decidedly for intervention in the war and was outspoken regarding the issue; it was Joseph Breen who had to stifle Wanger's sentiments in *Foreign Correspondent* (1940). Yet, *Sundown's* pro-Allies slant was more liberally overlooked. The film was received well by American critics and was nominated for three Academy Awards.²⁶⁶ In Britain it did quite well, fetching \$400,000 in box office sales.²⁶⁷

William Crawford, or Bill (Bruce Cabot), is the District Commissioner of a British outpost in Kenya. He comes across evidence that guns are being smuggled into the area from an unknown source. Major Coombes (George Sanders) suspects a local trade leader in the area, Zia (Gene Tierney), is behind the gun trade but Crawford does not believe she is. When Zia goes missing and her friend, an Italian prisoner of war, Pallini (Joseph Calleia) is found dead, more suspicion is cast on her. However, she has been captured by Kuypens (Carl Esmond) and is en route with him. She tries to warn the British about the arms dealings several times but they do not understand her warnings. Crawford finds out where the guns are being hid and finds Zia at the source. He blows up the supply of guns but is captured and put into lock-up with Zia. He accuses her of trading the arms but she protests her innocence and warns him that the rebel group is going to try to attack the outpost that same night. Together they formulate a plan to escape and warn the outpost. They fail but Dewey (Harry Carey), a hunter helping the British outpost workers, has already brought the soldiers to Kuypens's hideout and a climactic battle ensues. The dissident native group and Kuypens are defeated in this battle. However, Coombes is fatally wounded. In a dying

²⁶⁶ "Review: 'Sundown'," *Variety*, 15 Oct 1941. The BFI Library.

"Sundown," *New York Times* 1941

²⁶⁷ Glancy. 32.

speech he tells Crawford that the work they do in Africa is godly and extols the ways of the British church. The next scene is in a church in London and Bishop Coombes (Cedric Hardwicke), Major Coombes's father, also praises the work of the British in Africa. Seated in the church are Zia and Crawford, newly married. The film ends on the church, light filtering in on the congregation.

Released just weeks before the attack on Pearl Harbor, America had yet to enter the war. Yet *Sundown* is a film with a decidedly "pro-British slant." The final epilogue by Sanders in the film praising the "glories of the English church and the British army" is a testament to this bias.²⁶⁸ The policy of the Hays Office for this film was in line with the isolationist stance that it adopted before the Americans entered the war. "The pro-British stance was fine...so long as it did not become explicitly anti-German."²⁶⁹ This is perhaps the biggest reason the antagonist group in the film is never named, even though their identity is obvious. Kuypens, the chief antagonist, is a Dutch double agent. Clues that reveal this is an anti-Nazi film emerge within the plot. The Czech guns being smuggled to the dissident native group, for example is particularly telling, since at this time Czechoslovakia was under Nazi rule. In this instance the film was in line with the way in which American politics was leaning; it cannot be denied that FDR was preparing to enter the war and had already taken sides with the Allies; the Lend-Lease program established in March 1941 is authentication of this fact. What is more fascinating about this film is how it promotes British colonial values and glorifies the British Empire as morally virtuous.

The colonial administration is presented in a positive light. Crawford carries out his duties with cultural understanding and empathy. However, it is important to

²⁶⁸ Matthew Bernstein, *Walter Wanger: Hollywood Independent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). 168.

²⁶⁹ Glancy. 60-1.

note that he is not from Britain, but from the Commonwealth. The Canadian Crawford, while representing British authority, is also critical of flaws in British colonial administration. The best example of this is the scene in which Zia comes to Pallini's birthday dinner. Coombes, the representation of the stuffy British gentleman who has not yet embraced modernity, sets up two tables so that the African characters will be seated outside. Crawford voices objections to this, stating that to invite Zia for the meal and then seat her outside is a grave insult. Coombes retorts with outdated ideas of propriety, stating that even the natives discriminate against "chi-chis, half-breeds." To diffuse the situation Crawford sits outside with Zia. However, she is aware of the significance of the table set outside and points this out to Crawford. He states that "The England that's going to win this war is going to do away with a lot of this nonsense." He continues to say that the African people are like the soil, needing cultivation. In one conversation Crawford justifies the British presence in Africa but states that the African people need help establishing civilised society. However, he is also critical of Coombes's racial prejudice: "that kind of discrimination might be alright down in Nairobi... but here Zia is an invited guest." Crawford is therefore exposing flaws in colonial administration, validating some of the concerns America had with British imperialism.

Crawford acts as a foil to Coombes. While Coombes demonstrates certain failings in British colonialism, Crawford shows that colonial administration could be informed by progressive values. Significantly, Coombes's character changes his perspective by the end of the film and embraces the ideals Crawford has. More importantly though, he states what is at stake in the war. Preempting the American complaints regarding British colonialism, in his final speech Coombes tells Crawford to "carry on and don't lose your ideals. You may not realise it but they're the ideals of

the church ...people of all churches pulling together, that's strength, that's all we need..." He goes on to state that his father is a bishop and that his father wanted him to be one too, but he chose the army. He states that the two are related: "They're both the basis of civilisation; the church holds it together and the army defends it and the Crawfords make it good." After this event Bishop Coombes makes another speech, which stresses the notion of patriotic sacrifice. He exalts the work of his son who he states has "serv(ed) god and country." He also praises the work of the colonial administrators and their loyal subjects who "died that freedom and decency of deed might survive. Keep bright your faith, hold until our England wins." Both speeches accentuate a sacrifice for freedom. This projects the idea that English colonialism is a form of democracy, moreover that the British Empire has brought the ideals of freedom and democracy to the Kenyan peoples. When this is set parallel to the antagonistic gun running and violence of the Nazis, it makes the case for British colonialism to the American people.

This film invests a great deal of effort in projecting the British Empire as compassionate toward their colonial subjects and as educating them in ideals of freedom and equality. This is particularly evident in the sequence where Crawford arbitrates a marriage settlement between two native men who wish to marry a young woman (Dorothy Dandridge). Kipsang (Emmett Smith) is a soldier who wishes to marry the woman but does not have enough money, as per the custom of paying the father for the young woman. The other man has the money and the blessing of the woman's father but the young woman does not wish to marry him. Crawford decides in favour of Kipsang, loaning him the money to marry the young lady. Kipsang and his wife are thus empowered to reject the constraints imposed upon them by traditional custom. Furthermore, as Jeffrey Richards points out, in *Sundown* "the

British Empire is equated with the Church, as a religious faith.”²⁷⁰ The film attempts to make this support for the Empire credible in the eyes of a sceptical American public by acknowledging instances of rule-bound prejudice on the part of the British and using a North American hero to both validate what is good about the Empire and also press the case for necessary reform. Moreover, the film infers that the British Empire is acting as a guardian to the colonised peoples by protecting them against a fascist regime. Some of the British press did not necessarily see the film in this way. *Monthly Film Bulletin* claimed that while there were elements of suspense and excitement in the film “the British will find an embarrassing sentimentality in the American conception of Empire builders...”²⁷¹ However, the *Kinematograph Weekly* called the film a “tribute to British colonial administration...”²⁷²

The same high ideals are not readily detectable in *White Cargo* (1942), a B-movie released in 1942. The plot revolves around a conniving woman of mixed race heritage named Tondelayo (Hedy Lamarr). The film takes place on an African rubber plantation in 1910, although it is a framed narrative being told by Mr. Worthing (Richard Ainley) in the present day. Harry Witzel (Walter Pidgeon) oversees the work being carried out by the native workers to produce the rubber. A new worker arrives, Mr. Langford (Richard Carlson), and he and Witzel clash constantly. Tondelayo seduces Langford into giving her gifts of silk and jewelry, much to the dismay of Witzel who calls Langford a fool for this. Langford falls for Tondelayo’s advances and marries her against the advice of everyone on the rubber plantation. Five months later, Tondelayo is tired of Langford and stirs up trouble between him and Witzel who

²⁷⁰ Jeffrey Richards, *Visions of Yesterday* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973). 119.

²⁷¹ D.E.B., "Films in Review: 'Sundown'," *Monthly Film Bulletin* 8, no. 96 (1941). BFI Library.

²⁷² "Reviews for Showmen: 'Sundown'," *Kinematograph Weekly* 1808 (1941). BFI Library.

she also tries to seduce. The two have a violent confrontation and soon after Langford grows feverish. The doctor (Frank Morgan) cannot understand why he is not recovering. However, Witzel discovers that Tondelayo is slowly poisoning him. He forces her to drink her own poison and she flees into the jungle to die. Langford is shipped back to Britain to recover and the film ends with a new worker, Mr. Worthing, coming to work for the plantation under Witzel's direction.

As a Hollywood film made in wartime which relays a story of Empire in the historical past, *White Cargo* is a rarity. It is on the face of it very difficult to discern any meaningful political impulse. The overriding impression presented is that the British presence in Africa has brought few benefits to either culture. The film promotes the idea that colonial natives in Africa are corrupt and are interested primarily in material wealth. Moreover, Witzel constantly comments that the native workers are lazy and mischievous. The British agents posted there also suffer a loss of sanity and corruption of the soul. The film's conclusion suggests that these are all now problems of the distant past and that modernisation and industrialisation have transformed the area for the better. However, the film was not well received in Britain. *The Times* called it "the moral equivalent of dry rot."²⁷³ The film was banned throughout the British Empire.²⁷⁴ *White Cargo* was based on a 1923 play of the same name and, according to Susan Courtney, the Hays Office had repeatedly forbidden

²⁷³ "New Films in London," *The Times*, 1 Mar 1943.

²⁷⁴ A.P. Thornton, "The Shaping of Imperial History," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. William Roger Louis et al. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). 51.

Many American states banned the film as well. See Chapter 10 in Ruth Barton, "Hedy Lamarr the Most Beautiful Woman in Film," (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2010). <http://muse.jhu.edu/books/9780813126104/>.

adaptations to be made in the 1930s.²⁷⁵ She suggests that the 1942 screenplay was approved because the ethnic background of Tondelayo was changed from a black native, as in the original source, to a woman of mixed race. This made the fact of her marriage to a white Englishman permissible within the narrative (the priest feels he cannot refuse to marry her because of her white heritage) and to conservative American audiences.

Although this narrative feature of the film is thus explainable as a matter of expediency, it is important to note that *White Cargo* is the third of three Hollywood films of Empire made during the war which feature a mixed race female protagonist. The sudden appearance of this trend at this particular time is perhaps worthy of reflection, and it may suggest that some propaganda value was perceived in *White Cargo* after all. Hedy Lamarr plays Tondelayo in blackface and is deliberately played as the oversexed female native. Lamarr's career was often punctuated by roles in which she was "an exotic reward for a virtuous American male." This film similarly "tropicalizes" her character.²⁷⁶

(It is an) old colonist trope that feminizes the colonized (in) a banal way to suture the unsymbolisable into the familiar symbolic of gender. But in many colonialist texts we see the dangerous native women that devour the colonial master with their incomprehensibly toxic sexuality...for instance *White Cargo*, in which the white master is turned into human cargo, in a state of spiritual death and physical debilitation, to be shipped from a tropical plantation back to the West, having been deprived of whiteness by going native through sexual contact with a racialised woman.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ Susan Courtney, *Hollywood Fantasies of Miscegenation: Spectacular Narratives of Gender and Race, 1903-1967* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). 129-131.

²⁷⁶ Diane Negra, *Off-White Hollywood: American Culture and Ethnic Female Stardom* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001). 112.

²⁷⁷ Hyon Joo Yoo, *Cinema at the Crossroads: Nation and the Subject in East Asian Cinema* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2012). 53.

Tondelayo is very much like Louvette in *North West Mounted Police*. She is the femme fatale, highly sexualized native female. In *North West Mounted Police* and *White Cargo* both her native community and the coloniser's society type the female lead as a social outcast. She is also represented as sexually promiscuous and dangerous to the British community. Richard Dyer states that when women take "centre stage" in cinematic representations of Empire it signals "doubt and uncertainty." Essentially, the "female soul is associated with its (the Empire's) demise."²⁷⁸ In *Sundown* the mixed race character of Zia is portrayed positively but Zia is noticeably 'whiter' than Louvette and Tondelayo. It may be speculated that issues of miscegenation emerge in the imperial wartime films for the first time as part of an attempt to present colonial issues in a form that American audiences may have found more palatable. These particular films present one of the key tasks of colonial administration to be the policing of racial boundaries. A shift in focus from the politics of democracy to the politics of race would obviously present the value of colonial authority in a very different light for large groups of the American population.

After America joined the War the Office of War Information (OWI) became immersed in Hollywood filmmaking, enlisting filmmakers to aid the war effort. As stated earlier it produced a manual in mid-1942 called the *Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry*. In the manual questions were put to Hollywood filmmakers asking them to think about the war effort in their films and making suggestions about how war films could benefit the image of Americans and

See also, Wiley Lee Umphlett, *The Visual Focus of American Media Culture in the Twentieth Century: The Modern Era, 1893-1945* (Madison N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004). This source also makes a similar argument concerning *White Cargo* and the sexualisation of the female lead. 222.

²⁷⁸ Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997). 184.

their Allies. *Sahara* (1943) was made after America joined the war and the OWI was involved in guiding the filmmakers' portrayal of the characters in the film as well as providing them with military equipment. The film no longer labored under the constraints of isolationism but instead celebrated the relationship between the Allied groups.

Directed by Zoltan Korda and starring the charismatic Humphrey Bogart as Sgt. Joe Gunn, the film begins on a battlefield in the Sahara. Gunn and his two comrades, Waco Hoyt (Bruce Bennett) and Jimmy Doyle (Dan Duryea), get orders to retreat. On the way they come across a decimated hospital and there encounter a group of five British soldiers headed by Capt. Jason Halliday (Richard Aherne) and a French soldier, Jean Leroux "Frenchie" (Louis Mercier). The remaining four soldiers are from several corners of the British Empire: Fred Clarkson (Lloyd Bridges) from Canada, Marty Williams (Carl Harbord) from London, Osmond "Ozzie" Bates (Patrick O'Moore) from Sussex, Peter Stegman (Guy Kingsford) from South Africa and Halliday himself is from Ireland. Gunn allows them on board the tank, the Lulubelle, and they continue south. Further on they come across Sgt. Major Tambul (Rex Ingram) a Sudanese soldier with his Italian prisoner Giuseppe (J. Carrol Naish). Initially, Gunn agrees to take on Tambul but not Giuseppe, saying he will waste water and food rations, but sympathy eventually persuades him to let Giuseppe on board as a prisoner of war. As the linear progression of the tank across the desert continues the group is attacked by a Nazi plane. They take the pilot, Capt. Von Schletow (Kurt Kreuger) prisoner and continue on their way to find a source of water. They eventually reach the ruins of Bir Acroma and find a dripping source of water which Tambul begins to collect. There they rest and collect water until several German scouts attack them. Gunn presses them for information until one reveals there is a

platoon of German soldiers heading for the ruins. After deliberating, Gunn decides to send Waco to get British reinforcements, while he and the rest keep the Nazi troops at bay. In a climactic battle sequence the Allied group fights the Nazis, losing almost every member of their party until the Nazis finally throw down their weapons in exchange for water. The well is now flooding since the Nazi tank fire has caused it to burst. Gunn and the remaining soldiers collect their guns while they desperately crowd around the water source. They then march the prisoners to meet reinforcements. The film ends when they meet the troops sent to help them and Gunn laments the fallen soldiers.

Each member of the growing band of soldiers that Bogart comes across are “all stereotypes of their respective social classes and their nation.”²⁷⁹ This makes it easy for the American audience to identify and empathise with the British characters and in turn demonstrates a Hollywood strategy to show unity between the Allied nations. What the film is also good at representing is the unrelenting “Nazi aspiration for world domination...”²⁸⁰ This diverts attention from the fact that the British have multiple colonies within Africa. The setting of the film further directs audience attention away from this issue, as they are fighting in Italian-controlled Libya. The film also accomplishes a divergence of tone between the British and the Nazi characters by portraying the Nazis as racist, uncompromising, and without compassion. The British by contrast are portrayed not only as comradely and humane but the differences in their geographical backgrounds serve to highlight the unified military effort of the varied quarters of the Empire. They are represented almost in the same manner American citizens are, as a diverse group of individuals unified by a

²⁷⁹ Lawrence H. Suid, *Guts & Glory: The Making of the American Military Image in Film*, Rev. and expanded ed. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002). 71.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 71.

common national destiny. Neglected are the actual grievances these countries have with their colonial rulers. The film is particularly evasive on this point when it comes to the character of Halliday, who identifies himself as being from Ireland. His English accent and the fact that he is part of the war effort would suggest that he was merely born there as the son of English landowners or military personnel and is not ethnically Irish. However, this representation of an 'Irish' soldier serves to elide the fact of disgruntlement and disunity within the Commonwealth (Ireland remained neutral during the war because it would not fight alongside Britain), and is perhaps deliberately intended to confuse any Americans only faintly aware of this issue.

After the nationality of each soldier is established, the film successfully differentiates the British and Nazi aspirations and the scene in which Halliday makes a plea for the life of Giuseppe demonstrates his capacity not only for sympathy but democratic process. When he states, "this man is a prisoner of war and as such he is entitled to certain rights," he is demonstrating what America is putting forth as its primary reason for fighting the war: democracy and due process. To leave Giuseppe would be to ignore these ideologies. It seems strategic that a British officer is shown reminding an American of these principles. Halliday later states that "the men out there (the Nazis) don't know the dignity of freedom." It is not generally the American characters that articulate ideas of democracy and freedom throughout the film, but the British characters. This reinforces the message that they are equally committed to democratic principles.

More fascinating is the treatment of Tambul in the film. Every member of the group except for von Schletow treats Tambul as an equal. The scene in which von Schletow is captured establishes this point. When he is being searched he objects to being searched by Tambul and when asked why states that he does not want to be

touched by “an inferior race.” Moreover, when he is insolently addressing the group he uses the word “negro” to address Tambul, instead of his nationality as he does the others.²⁸¹ Later on in the film Waco and Tambul exchange stories of their homes and wives. They regard one another with respect and Tambul states “we both have much to learn from each other.” This formed part of a conscious propaganda strategy to emphasise racial equality within the Empire:

The OWI worked closely with screenwriters John Howard Lawson and Zoltan Korda to strengthen certain propaganda themes. At the OWI’s urging, they made the Sudanese an equal...²⁸²

But, of course, it also helped to assuage an issue which nagged at the consciences of liberal Americans during the war: fighting for democracy was undermined by America’s ill treatment and segregation of its African American citizens. The OWI wanted to eradicate this image in war propaganda and the imagery of Tambul is a direct result of this goal. Furthermore, the film’s script-writer, John Howard Lawson was an unapologetic liberal. He was arrested numerous times for writing articles for the *Daily Worker* on the civil inequality of African Americans in the South. His observations of racial discrimination in the South were what he cited as his inspiration for the play *Marching Song* and he later helped develop the script for *Cry the Beloved Country*. He also wrote several books in which he commented on the plight and inequality of the African American community.²⁸³ This would explain partially why

²⁸¹ Negro is not the German word for black, nor is it a word used in the German language to address a person of African descent. The possible interpretation made be that the film is invoking the American racist term nigger.

²⁸² Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (London and New York: Free Press; Collier Macmillan, 1987). 303.

²⁸³ Lawson was the head of the Hollywood division of the American Communist Party. He was later called before the House Committee on Un-American Activities and blacklisted after the war during the Red Scare. John Howard Lawson, *Film in the Battle of Ideas* (New York: Masses & Mainstream, 1953).

Tambul was one of two African characters to be given a rare and substantial role in a Hollywood film at this time, the other being Wesley Eeps (Kenneth Spencer) in *Bataan*. Despite the OWI's wish that African Americans be given a prominent and dignified treatment in Hollywood films at this time, this was, in actuality, not accomplished to a large extent.

Sahara received good reviews. *Variety* called it "absorbing" and "realistic."²⁸⁴ *Hollywood Reporter* commented that it was an "honest war drama...no tinselled fiction, but a hard-bitten drama..."²⁸⁵ Harlem newspapers praised the characterisation of Tambul and Harlem audiences apparently cheered the film.²⁸⁶ The British critics lamented what they saw as its inauthenticity, however. *The Times* perceived the film as a composite of two films *The Thirteen* (1937), a Soviet film about a band of soldiers in Asia, and *Nine Men* (1943) a British film about British soldiers on a desert campaign in Africa. It was dismissed as a rehash of the two films through "a Hollywood lens" with "a distinctive American flavour."²⁸⁷ The reviewer claims that

The vivid realism of the pictures the Russian director (of *The Thirteen*) drew in the sand is lacking and *Sahara* is left to console itself with the reflection that, as a synthetic studioish production, it might have had less force and excitement.

Clearly the British reviewer did not appreciate the liberties in realism the film took. It is tempting to suggest that this lukewarm reception may be indicative of the fact that the film's propaganda content was not primarily addressed to British audiences. The

²⁸⁴ "Trade Showing: Sahara," *Variety*, 27 Sept 1943. The BFI Library.

"Film Review: Sahara," *Variety*, 29 Sept 1943. The BFI Library.

²⁸⁵ "'Sahara' Honest War Drama Meriting Wide Success: Bogart Tops Strong, Hard Hitting Cast," *Hollywood Reported*, 27 Sept 1943. The BFI Library.

²⁸⁶ Kevin Michael Kruse and Stephen G. N. Tuck, *Fog of War: The Second World War and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). 114. See also, Stephen G. N. Tuck, *We Ain't What We Ought to Be: The Black Freedom Struggle, from Emancipation to Obama* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2010). 225.

²⁸⁷ "New Films in London: A Story of the Desert," *The Times*, 20 Dec 1943.

same might be said, to a varying degree, for most, if not all, of the films examined in this chapter, both British and the American productions. On the infrequent occasions when the subject of Empire was addressed in mainstream fiction films made during the Second World War, a primary intention seems to have been to assure sceptical American audiences that Britain's colonies were governed with the very best of intentions. The fact that both British and American filmmakers fastened upon stories set in Canada as a means of demonstrating the benefits brought by imperial rule, and also the parallels to be drawn with America's own treatment of a conquered indigenous population, is a particularly striking reflection of this.

Given the fact that it is commonly implied that the subject of Empire was effectively placed off-limits to commercial filmmakers during the War, it is worth noting how wide-ranging and systematic the approaches taken to its screen treatment were. *North West Mounted Police*, *White Cargo*, *Sundown* and *Sahara* represent two groups of films respectively made by some of the most ideologically conservative and progressive elements of the Hollywood film industry, yet both develop their own distinctive strategies to defend and justify colonial rule. Ironically, in one case this defence is made in the name of racial segregation, in the other as part of a plea for the advancement of greater racial freedom and tolerance.

The clear synergies between the representational approaches taken by British and American filmmakers mark a distinct new phase in the depiction of Empire on film, and are in part the product of a new political alliance and, simultaneous to this, a greater involvement of the state in the production of mainstream cinema in both countries. This direct and overt association between both the spheres of politics and entertainment would dissolve significantly after the war. However, the final chapters will attempt to demonstrate that in dealing with the subject of colonial and post-

colonial history, British and American filmmakers continued to find ways to celebrate and replicate the Anglo-American 'special relationship'. The heavenly metaphor for a new international world order which is presented in the closing sequence of *A Matter of Life and Death* establishes an ideological framework which is tacitly supported by most screen representations of neo-colonial authority throughout the 1950s.

Chapter Four

Post-Colonial India in the New World Order

After the Second World War it was not long until India achieved independence from the British Empire. In 1947 the British Raj system officially ended and the partition of the land into Pakistan and India went forward. In 1950, India became a Republic. Pakistan remained as a Dominion until 1956 when it too became a Republic. At the same time the Western world was in the midst of the Cold War, and this is a particularly important context to bear in mind when discussing the political aims of both Britain and America in relation to a number of former British colonies. During this early period, Western powers actively sought opportunities to develop post-colonial nations economically so that they would adopt a capitalist economy and a democratic political structure. Pandit Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India and former pupil of Gandhi, is recorded, by the British Foreign Office, as saying “‘it (is) necessary to consider what specific action should be taken to counter expansionist policy of Russia (sic).’ He suggested that both sides were motivated by fear and that this was not a good basis for action. He agreed that a solution must be sought on economic lines.”²⁸⁸ He was willing to be persuaded by the British government that economic development, with the help of other Western aid, would be best for his country. The Western powers saw this as an opportunity to prevent the Communist spread in Asia, which became a great concern when the Republic of China declared itself the People’s Republic of China in 1949. Hence, South Asia, particularly India, became of great interest as a means to combat the spread of Communism in the

²⁸⁸ Foreign Office Telegram No.12, DO 35/2962 10 Jan, 1950. The National Archives.

remaining countries of Asia.²⁸⁹ While these events were occurring, the British Empire was crumbling around the world as former colonial holdings gained independence.

In Hollywood, McCarthyism created a rise in anti-Communist propaganda as governmental agencies sought to influence the way films dealt with the topic of Communism.²⁹⁰ Concurrently, McCarthy called many actors, directors and producers from Hollywood studios before the House Committee of Un-American Activities with accusations of supporting Communist activities. This was the atmosphere one must consider when analysing post-colonial films made during the 1950s. One might expect to find that post-war films which featured Indian settings had no option but to address this transformed political context, but it must be acknowledged that a number of films were produced in Britain and America in the 1950s which straightforwardly replicated the tone and content of filmic treatments of India in the 1930s. The list includes such Hollywood films as *Khyber Patrol* (1954) and *Soldiers Three* (1951) and the British productions *The Strangers of Bombay* (1959) and *Storm Over the Nile* (1955). The first three films on this list featured no location shooting in India; two of them were low budget genre films, and *Soldiers Three* – which bears more than a passing resemblance to *Gunga Din* (1939) – is largely played as a light comedy. *Storm Over the Nile* – a remake of *The Four Feathers* (1939) – is a more serious and ambitious production. Steve Chibnall has argued that the film was an answer to the Suez Crisis when Britain needed “to rekindle national pride.”²⁹¹ This claim probably has considerable merit, however the focus here will be instead upon a very different

²⁸⁹ See the financial plans outlined in DO 142/267 and DO 35/2921 which is labelled “South East Asian, Economic aid to India as part of counter attack against Communism.” January 1949 – December 1949. The National Archives.

²⁹⁰ Eldridge, David N. “‘Dear Owen’: The Cia, Luigi Luraschi and Hollywood, 1953.” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 20, no. 2 (2000): 149-98.

²⁹¹ Steve Chibnall, *J. Lee Thompson, British Film Makers* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2001). 205.

group of high-profile and expensively-produced Indian-set films of this period. All three films featured extensive location shooting in India and/or Pakistan and made a considerable amount of publicity capital of their supposed authenticity. These particular films – the British *Northwest Frontier* (1959), the Hollywood film *The Rains of Ranchipur* (1955) and the Anglo-American co-production *Bhowani Junction* (1956) - clearly felt a more pressing need to present a new and updated vision of the relationship between India and the West.

Britain's New India

The only British-funded film in this group of case studies, *North West Frontier* (*Flame Over India* in America) is also the only film in this group to set its tale in the past. In 1907, an American governess and a British Captain are charged with saving the life of a five-year-old Indian prince. The boy's father is a Maharaja and has made an appeal to the British government for the protection of his son. Captain Scott (Kenneth More), and the boy's governess Catherine Wyatt (Lauren Bacall), must save the prince by delivering him to Delhi from the Muslim fanatics trying to kill him. The film opens with the narration "India: a country of many religions. Men find reasons for killing each other: Greed, revenge, worship(ing) different gods..." After this the film has no dialogue for nearly ten minutes, allowing the audience to absorb the chaotic atmosphere the prince and his protectors are fleeing; as they escape the child's father is killed and his palace burned down by Muslim separatists. The three flee to the nearest province, Haserabad, which is itself in a state of unrest due to the rebel attacks. Catherine and Scott find an old train to escape in and, along with a few other people who have made arrangements to be there as well, they make a dramatic escape from the city.

The train ride to Delhi hosts a debate around colonial issues between the various characters aboard the train: the train engineer Gupta (I.S. Johar), the Dutch-Indonesian journalist Mr. Van Layden (Herbert Lom), the arms dealer Mr. Peters (Eugene Deckers), Lady Wyndham (Ursula Jeans), the governor's wife, and Mr. Bridie (Wilfrid Hyde-White) a British man in the service of the governor. On the way, the train gets held up upon discovering a refugee train has been attacked and everyone killed. Catherine goes aboard to search for survivors and discovers a baby left alive. She takes the baby with them and they continue toward Delhi. Before reaching their destination they discover that they are being trailed by the rebel group. They also learn that Van Layden is a Muslim, allied ideologically with the dissident group. He acquires a gun and attempts to kill the Prince. As the scene reaches its climax, Captain Scott and Van Layden fight atop the train. Just when Captain Scott is in real peril, Catherine shoots Van Layden with a rifle. The rest of the passengers reach Delhi safely and as Captain Scott and the young Prince say goodbye to one another, the Prince thanks Scott but makes a prophetic prediction that he may have to fight the British someday. The film ends with Catherine and Scott walking away from the train together.

While there are superbly choreographed action sequences, the film's plot is driven forward equally by both action and dialogue. The train itself consists of various passengers with different perspectives on colonial India and the present tribal uprising they are facing. Appropriately, Van Layden comments that the train represents a microcosmic world, sarcastically adding that "Mr. Peters can sell us guns and we can fight each other." Just about every bit of dialogue consists of two or more characters challenging the position of the other. Van Layden offers a critical voice on British colonial rule in India, consistently pointing out the flaws in the Raj system and

creating debate around the topic. Mr. Peters provokes debate on the ethics of selling guns to dissident groups. Captain Scott offers a voice in defence of British colonial rule. And while Lady Wyndham and Bridie also defend the British Empire their characters also clearly demonstrate the flaws within the Empire. Catherine of course represents America's outside perspective on colonial India. The only real perspective the audience has from an Indian character is from Gupta the train engineer and Van Layden. The other Indian characters are largely silent, as the audience rarely hears from the Indian soldiers escorting the train. And the young Prince Kishan's words are few.

In one of the first scenes in which Van Layden is introduced to the audience his abrasive demeanour, especially toward the British, is apparent. His comment to Captain Scott about a book he says is titled 'The Decline and Fall of an Empire' demonstrates that he has a chip on his shoulder. He remains antagonistic toward all the other passengers throughout the film. Toward Bridie and Lady Wyndham he creates debate regarding Britain's place in India. He maintains that Britain should go home "and maintain order there." Lady Wyndham is critical of his views, but he often has a sardonic yet educated answer for her such as "truth is like God, not always on the side of the British." She returns with rhetoric typical of old imperial values: "half the world mocks us, and half the world is only civilised because we have made it so." From the beginning of the film, Van Layden is established as the critical voice toward British colonialism.

Van Layden shows similarities to traditional antagonistic stock types from earlier imperial adventure films. However, while still the fanatic, the fact that he is amongst the passengers is a major change in and of itself from many earlier imperial-themed films. Normally, 1930s films gave a rather two-dimensional portrayal of the

fanatical antagonist, with no character development whatsoever. The perfect example lies in *Gunga Din*, where the antagonist is barely characterised, except as a madman. In *North West Frontier*, Van Layden's perspective is examined, and while his opinions are often introduced belligerently he is permitted to make some valid points. Moreover, what has not been mentioned yet is that he is of mixed race. Although he pretends to be Dutch Indonesian the audience finds toward the end of the film that he is actually Dutch Indian. He therefore has a very intimate relationship with the issues in the film. The visual strategy of the film, however, adopts some traditional methods used in 1930s imperial adventure films. Namely, it has a scene in which Van Layden is sitting in the dark plotting to kill the Prince. His face, aside from his eyes, is withdrawn into the dark while he looks forward with a frenzied expression. (Figure 5.1) This is almost identical to the forms of lighting and cinematography used to present the Kali cult leader in *Gunga Din*.



5.1 Herbert Lom as Van Layden waiting for Prince to Kishan and Eduardo Ciannelli as the Kali cult leader.

This is not the only old imperial adventure drama device adopted. The Press Book for the film includes some familiar images particularly the posters of the Muslim separatists on horseback yelling and waving their swords and guns.²⁹² This image is nearly an exact replica of posters from films such as *The Four Feathers*

²⁹² Press Book for *Northwest Frontier*, 1959, The BFI Library.

(1939) and *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1936). Moreover, Gupta seems little more than a 'friendly native' character common in many imperial dramas of the 1930s. One critic of the film pointed out that "the screen-play, based on a story by Frank Nugent ...is vaguely Kiplingesque in that its hero accepts the White Man's Burden."²⁹³

It is not only these characterisations that lead critics to cynically scrutinise the film but the way in which the plot progresses. Regarding the uprising in particular, the film assumes that the rebels' driving motives are mainly due to religious differences. The province is being attacked because it was loyal to Kishan. By rescuing the Prince the British officers maintain that they are saving the Province but what it equates to is siding with the Hindu majority in India. The film simplifies the uprising by making religion its scapegoat. However, the only case it makes for the rebels' perspective is from Van Layden, who is a Muslim himself. And he is the one to put more context to the Prince's place in the uprising: "I like children as much as you do but that one boy. My god don't you understand that one boy he's a symbol, he's an unwanted tradition that stands between my country and freedom." He is referring to the British Raj system, which traditionally favoured Hindu rulers. He is the only one to point out the colonial injustice in the system. But the audience cannot make a balanced judgement based on his opinions because by the end of the film his fanaticism matches the rebels who pursue the train. He wants a chance to fight and possibly die for his country. Killing Kishan will prove he is a "true Muslim." That he is driven to kill a child underscores this.

²⁹³ Campbell, "Lucky Jim & the White Man's Burden," *Daily Telegraph*, 10 Oct 1959. The BFI Library.

Many reviewers recognised how much the film borrowed from the Hollywood Western. Two film review headlines read: "When East Meets Western ---Wow!",²⁹⁴ and "Eastern Western."²⁹⁵ If the reviewers didn't scorn the film for what they perceived to be its outdated imperial leanings, they criticised its use of the Western style. "It is that unusual adventure – a big British "Western" ... It shows an unabashed fidelity to those "Western" formulas which have served Hollywood so well for so long as Hollywood has existed."²⁹⁶ Another critic claims "the tribesmen might now just as well be Red Indians"²⁹⁷ Some reviewers were a bit more generous, recognising the eclectic use of various film styles:

North West Frontier seems to have borrowed its eccentric engine from *The General*, its hazardous expedition from *Stagecoach* and its background of tribal violence from North West Frontier films such as *The Drum*.²⁹⁸

Patrick Ford, John Ford's son, is credited as a writer for the film. This is significant when one sees the parallel between *North West Frontier* and the plot of John Ford's *Wagon Master* (1950), which was also co-written by Patrick Ford. This is a quintessential John Ford Western about a Mormon wagon train travelling to San Juan Valley. In both *Wagon Master* and *North West Frontier* a lone vehicle carrying human cargo travels across a hostile terrain to reach safety. Chibnall offers a very different interpretation of the appropriation of the Western template in an imperial context:

The American-coded visual perspective that this gives is re-enforced by Hollywood-identified Lauren Bacall's verbal sniping at the excesses of British militarism and cultural conceitedness. The consequence is a distancing from

²⁹⁴ "When East Meets Western --- Wow!," *News of the World*, 11 Oct 1959. The BFI Library.

²⁹⁵ Isabel Quigly, "Eastern Western," (1959). No Title Available. The BFI Library.

²⁹⁶ "Bang, Bang! And More Besides," *The Guardian*, 10 Oct 1959. The BFI Library.

²⁹⁷ "Film About the Old India," *Times*, 8 Oct 1959. The BFI Library.

²⁹⁸ "Film Reviews: 'North West Frontier.'" *Film Times*, 12 Oct 1959. The BFI Library.

the familiar messages and understandings of the imperial epic, and, to some extent, an internationalising of its significance.²⁹⁹

This suggestion conveniently ignores the parallels between Westerns and Indian imperial dramas of the 1930s, awareness of which cannot but weaken the argument that *North West Frontier*'s evocation of the Western betokens a revisionist agenda. However, there may still be some merit in the suggestion that this unusually overt and explicit appropriation of the Western formula in an imperial drama may have the intention of underscoring the parallels between the two genres and ideologies in order to affirm similarities in perceptions of both nationhood and entertainment amongst British and American audiences. One might suggest that the film fuses ideas of American manifest destiny with the colonial aspirations of the old British Empire. Peter Limbrick has demonstrated that there are multiple affinities between Westerns and Imperial epic dramas, and that the former is ideologically derived from the latter.³⁰⁰ However, the distinction to be made here is that this film is unprecedentedly emphatic in highlighting the analogies.

Chibnall is right to suggest that the film offers a form of critical perspective upon imperial values. The film introduces some very critical points on the injustices of British colonialism, mostly in the character of Lady Wyndham. In one scene Bridie says of Lady Wyndham that she is "old school," meaning her perspectives and mannerisms are a remnant of an older outlook on colonial India. A very short scene of Lady Wyndham shows her building a house of cards, until the top falls over. She barely reacts but begins rebuilding it. This represents a reoccurring theme in the film that Britain is building an Empire that shows signs of great instability. Another element staring the audience in the face regarding the crumbling Empire is the train

²⁹⁹ Chibnall, 217-8.

³⁰⁰ Peter Limbrick, *Making Settler Cinemas: Film and Colonial Encounters in the United States, Australia and New Zealand* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

itself. Appropriately named the *Empress of India*, it is also affectionately called Victoria. The most obvious feature about the train is that it is falling apart. Gupta says of it, "Victoria is old, I confess that, but she has experience sir, if she has experience nothing can go wrong." Of course, Gupta has to keep the train together because it is so decrepit. However, the train represents the Empire itself, racked with problems but experienced and reliable in the end. Within the train ethical and moral debates ensue that comment on the nature of colonial India. The discussion between Van Layden, Peters and Captain Scott regarding the Muslim rebels touches on the ethics of arms dealing. Captain Scott maintains that the rebels should not have guns so the British can keep order. Peters points out the obvious flaw "You think we should be like God, always on the side of the British?" Van Layden chimes in with the fact that these men are fighting for the freedom of *their* country. Captain Scott likens the rebels to children though, assuming their inability to determine what is right and wrong. Chibnall claims the film answers this debate when Catherine brings up the issue. She asks Van Layden what good the killing will do:

As he is about to finish off Scott with his revolver, Van Layden is shot dead by Catherine, as if answering her own question about the justification of killing. She takes a life to save others in a moment that sums up the film's concerned but ambivalent attitude to violence.³⁰¹

What has been neglected in this discussion thus far are the two main characters, Captain Scott and Catherine. As will be discussed further on, this film has something in common with *The Rains of Ranchipur* in the way that it explores the place of the empowered American woman in the new international community.

³⁰¹ Steve Chibnall, *J. Lee Thompson, British Film Makers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000). 223.

Played by Lauren Bacall, Catherine's character takes on some bold characteristics.³⁰² Critics of the film made some interesting comments regarding Bacall's character. The fiery character of Bacall was praised as one of the redeeming factors of the film. "On the whole, it is only the cool, sensible, twentieth-century presence of Miss Lauren Bacall which reassures you that you have not wandered into some old far off, pre-Kipling nightmare."³⁰³ Catherine criticises British colonialism but at the same time embraces an alliance with the British to counter the rebels. Bacall's character is more than this though; she represents a shift in how women were portrayed in the post-war, post-colonial film. One critic comments:

"I was shaken by the character of the heroine. In the old days she was a general's daughter from an old country family: she arranged flowers, attended Hunt Balls... Today we have a doctor's widow, and an American as well; she doesn't even approve of the Army as a profession."³⁰⁴

This sums up the paradoxical nature of Bacall's character. As mentioned before, Davinia Thornley demonstrates that a typical female character in imperial dramas was measured by her sacrifice for the male protagonist.³⁰⁵ This is not the case in *North West Frontier*. She is independent and mobile and presents a celebration of the individualism so symptomatic of modernity. However, Caren Kaplan suggests that the emancipated Western female character does just as much to "reproduce the imperial

³⁰² Bacall was labelled a troublesome actress for her refusal to play certain roles she felt were bad for her and had a reputation for being independently minded. Her roles in films such as *Designing Women* (1957), *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953) and *Young Man with a Horn* (1950) tackled traditional roles women had played in American film and society. Her characters can be argued to have helped champion new ways in which to view women in America. See Lauren Bacall, *By Myself* (Dunton Green: Coronet, 1979).

³⁰³ David Robinson, "North West Frontier Film Review," *The Times*, 12 Oct 1959. The BFI Library.

³⁰⁴ Powell, Dilys. "A Spot of Bother Among Lesser Breeds" *Sunday Times*, 11 Oct 1959.

³⁰⁵ Davinia Thornley, "Conceptions of Empire: Three Colonial War Films," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* XXI, no. 2 (2004).

discourse.”³⁰⁶ The free woman is an extension of the Western power intruding on colonial space.

One of the most interesting relationship developments in the film is between Catherine and the Indian child characters, Prince Kishan and India, the baby. As the film progresses, Catherine becomes more nurturing toward them. Her attentions to Kishan are unwaveringly protective and the audience constantly sees her tending to him. She also braves the sight of hundreds of dead bodies to rescue a baby hidden in the refugee train. Aptly, the child is named India (figure 5.2). If the audience takes this to be a metaphor, then it could be read to show the increasing American influence in postcolonial affairs during India’s birth pangs. One can even see the justification of paternalistic intervention in Indian affairs in the relationship between Catherine and the two children in the simple fact that they are children. Her constant nursing of the characters in the film challenges Van Layden’s assumption that Americans are isolationists. The traditional isolationist stance of America came to a dramatic end when they entered the Second World War and was a thing of the past when the film came out. Moreover, the Suez Crisis, which took place only three years before the film was released, consciously demonstrated America’s new role in the world when intense diplomatic pressure from the US, UN and the Soviet Union ended the conflict. Bacall makes a serious intervention in the film when she decides to shoot Van Layden. Despite her predicament and obvious reservation she kills him to save Scott. One can see how it echoes America’s own bold new status within the international community after the war. If one follows this line of thought, the film also shows America allying itself with the British. Catherine justifies Captain Scott’s position as

³⁰⁶ Caren Kaplan, "Getting to Know You: Travel, Gender, and the Politics of Representation in 'Anna and the King of Siam' and 'the King and I,'" in *Late Imperial Culture*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan, Româan De la Campa, and Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1995).

overseer of the Empire by allying herself to his cause and by serving as protector herself.



5.2 Lauren Bacall with baby India

Catherine's character is used, to some extent, to balance Captain Scott's character. By the conclusion of the film they both comment that they understand each other a bit more. Catherine and Captain Scott have taken to criticising each other's life choices throughout the film: she takes issue with his blind faith in the army while he takes issue with her independent spirit. Scott is the embodiment of a British colonial soldier, loyal to the Empire. The evidence of this is not only his comments about maintaining order in the Empire but the final scene in the film sums up a typical mindset of a British soldier on colonial rule: appropriately he quotes Kipling. "Be thankful you're living and trust your luck. March to your front like a soldier." When Catherine queries who said this, Scott returns with "another tea drinker." This is a nod at the fact that perhaps Scott is all too aware of the outdated imperial views he helps

to maintain, by making a joke referencing Catherine's own criticism of the British early on in the film. The film thus demonstrates a high degree of self-consciousness concerning its "anachronistic" qualities. It flirts with a sceptical stance on Empire in order to lend credence to the implication that a British presence in India is unavoidable and necessary. The concluding scene in which Prince Kishan asks Scott if it is true that they will have to fight each other in the future reinforces a message that the British are always unwanted and unappreciated in India even when they have shown themselves to be essential to its future survival. Chibnall suggests that although *North West Frontier* is guilty of "ignoring the most repressive aspects of British rule in India and allowing its light satire of the Raj to shade into an equivocal celebration of British indomitability and sang-froid... it stops well short of being an apologia for empire."³⁰⁷ This may be true, but the film's careful fusion of old and new approaches to imperial drama seems ultimately directed to the purpose of suggesting that Britain has always been and will always be required to keep the peace in India. The explicit use of Western tropes underlines the message that Britain's role in India anticipates, echoes and complements that of America in post-war international affairs more generally. Essentially, it promotes the idea that India still needs oversight by Western powers during its transition into democracy.

Hollywood and the New India

Turning to *The Rains of Ranchipur*, this film received little praise when it was released in 1955. *Time* described it as 'garbage':

A lemon that has been squeezed is generally regarded as garbage. Not so in Hollywood. There the discarded lemon can be stuffed with colourful yegg

³⁰⁷ Chibnall, 227.

(sic) and luscious tomato, wrapped in the right sort of cabbage, and served to the public as something called a rehash.³⁰⁸

Another reviewer remarked, "I can't fully understand why *The Rains of Ranchipur* was made..."³⁰⁹ And yet another references its leading man Richard Burton's famous dislike for the film in the *Evening News*: "Richard Burton is credited with wishing his Hollywood contract was over. I do not wonder after inspecting *The Rains of Ranchipur*."³¹⁰ The reporter goes on to say that the "soggy predecessor was more impressive."³¹¹ The original, *The Rains Came*, received mostly acclaim from its critics upon its release in 1939. *Kinematograph Weekly* remarked that "the story, (shows) the moral fibre of a number of people, both Oriental and Occidental..."³¹² It was also praised by *The Cinema*, which said the film "is not only a notable adaptation of a tremendously successful novel but it is first-class general entertainment with a cast which ensures a record breaking attendance at the box office." *Motion Picture Herald* called it "very sound entertainment."³¹³ Given these reviews it is fair to conclude that film critics did not approve of *The Rains of Ranchipur* as a remake. However, it is not just that the critics simply didn't like the new version of *The Rains Came*; they also wondered why the second film was made. Issues in the novel and first film were long since resolved in the eyes of contemporary critics, so why bring them up again?

³⁰⁸ "Doubie Trouble," *Time*, 9 Jan 1956. The BFI Library.

³⁰⁹ "Review: The Rains of Ranchipur," *Saturday Review*, 21 Jan 1956. The BFI Library.

³¹⁰ J. Harmon, "Review: The Rains of Ranchipur," *Evening News*, 16 Feb 1956. The BFI Library.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

³¹² "Reviews: 'The Rains Came'," *Kinematograph Weekly* 1700 (1939). The BFI Library.

³¹³ "Reviews: The Rains Came," *The Cinema* 53, no. 4339 (1939); "Showmen's Reviews: The Rains Came," *Motion Picture Herald* 136, no. 11 (1939). 46. The BFI Library.

One answer to this may simply be that the producers of *The Rains of Ranchipur* wanted a picture to compete with its new competition: television. The beginning of the 1950s saw the advent of affordable television, giving theatres competition for the public's leisure time. One thing the film was praised for was its special effects. *Variety* claimed "Director Jean Negulesco's earthquake and flood sequences alone make the picture worthwhile."³¹⁴ Even *Motion Picture Herald* states "when 'The Rains' first came, it had neither color nor CinemaScope, which the new version uses to magnificent advantages."³¹⁵ Having been produced by Twentieth Century Fox, who had just two years earlier unveiled CinemaScope, *The Rains of Ranchipur* was filmed in this format, as widescreen cinema had begun to draw audiences back into the theatres. According to John Belton, "the appeal of widescreen in the 1950s rests as much upon its production of greater spectacle as upon that of greater realism."³¹⁶ Films such as *The Rains of Ranchipur* were made to expose the audience to a new theatre-going experience. The post-war "socioeconomics of the entertainment industry" changed in a way that allowed widescreen cinema to develop where it had failed before in the 1920s and 30s.³¹⁷ With colour and widescreen, the exotic location of India could be brought to life in a new way not available in 1939. In this respect, the answer to why this film was made is easier to understand.

The Rains of Ranchipur can also be seen as both timely and distinct from its predecessor at the level of narrative context. The change of characters' nationality

³¹⁴ "Review: The Rains of Ranchipur," *Variety's Film Reviews* (1955).

³¹⁵ "The Rains of Ranchipur: Torrents of Emotion," *Motion Picture Herald* 201, no. 12 (1955). The BFI Library.

³¹⁶ John Belton, *Widescreen Cinema* (Cambridge, Mass and London: Harvard University Press, 1992). 2.

³¹⁷ Ibid. 52. For a more complete discussion of Widescreen Cinema see Belton's monograph. See also, Charles Barr, "Cinemascope: Before and After," *Film Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1963).

And, Andre Bazin, "The Myth of Total Cinema," in *What Is Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

clearly makes a statement about the new post-war world. The story is recognisably the same as its 1939 predecessor but with key differences that make it worth exploring. Plot elements shared by the two films include the arrival of Lady Edwina (Myrna Loy in *The Rains Came* and Lana Turner in *The Rains of Ranchipur*) and her husband Lord Esketh (Nigel Bruce / Michael Rennie) to Ranchipur, a city in India. The Maharani (Maria Ouspenskaya / Eugenie Leontovich) overseeing the city welcomes them with a dinner party and Lady Edwina instantly takes an interest in one of the guests: Dr. Rama Safti (Tyrone Power / Richard Burton). Rama is an Indian with a Western education and an esteemed doctor in the city. Moreover, he is like a son to the Maharani. The Eskeths' arrival coincides with a natural disaster that hits the city. Flooding and damage to the city's dam causes widespread disaster and requires the characters to pull together to quell the damage and rebuild the city. The love story between Edwina and Rama plays out differently in each film. However, both films show the two falling in love but being tragically separated in the end. While this plays out there is a subplot woven into the main story of Tom (George Brent / Fred MacMurray) and Fern (Brenda Joyce / Joan Caulfield). In both films Tom is a disillusioned drunk who is enveloped in various scandals. The young Fern falls in love with him and as he warms to her he learns to set aside his disillusion.

This is obviously a very brief introduction to the story; as pointed out before there are significant differences. *The Rains Came* follows the novel closely whereas *The Rains of Ranchipur* deviates, especially with the new ending, which sees Edwina leaving the city with her husband instead of dying in Ranchipur.³¹⁸ Its earlier version is more invested in concerns surrounding India and its relationship to Britain, despite

³¹⁸ This is, in part, because of G. Shurlock's insistence that the marriage remain intact. Breen often had problems with themes of adultery and the breakdown of marriages in films. See Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS, MPPA: PCA: *The Rains of Ranchipur*, Geoffrey Shurlock to McCarthy, 9 Mar 1955.

its American production and American authorship.³¹⁹ In *The Rains Came* the audience watches Lady Edwina, a spoiled woman in both films, make a dramatic character change. While she chases after Rama she finds herself caring for Ranchipur and its people. The flood causes not only widespread damage but leads to an outbreak of the plague. Consequently, Edwina becomes a volunteer at the hospital and begins to change her outlook. It is this character transformation that prompts Rama to return Edwina's affections. When the Maharani notices this she wants to send Edwina away. The Maharani tells Tom that Rama is the chosen heir, and she is therefore sending Edwina away so she does not interfere with Rama's duty to Ranchipur. However, what is known only to Edwina is that she has contracted the plague and is certain to die. She falls ill and is put into hospital care. Rama, who feels conflicted but ready to give everything up for Edwina, tells her he will take her away when she is well. However, before they can act on their love she dies. Soon after Rama takes his place on the throne.

The Rains Came is set during colonial rule, and was produced while India was still under the British Raj system. Prem Chowdhry says of *The Rains Came* that it represents a shift in the "well established popular, market-tested high military adventure genre..."³²⁰ She is right in that the story departs from the typical male soldier-centred imperial adventure. She goes on to claim that, "there is a reworking of otherness" in this film, gender issues are introduced and the "oriental ruler change(s) from lecherous to Western enlightened and educated."³²¹ In this way, *The Rains Came* was quite structurally unique in its time. She does maintain however, that *The Rains*

³¹⁹ Louis Bromfield, "The Rains Came: A Novel of Modern India," (Harper & Brothers, 1937). http://www.wikilivres.info/wiki/The_Rains_Came/Part_IV.

³²⁰ Prem Chowdhry, *Colonial India and the Making of Empire Cinema: Image, Ideology and Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000). 242.

³²¹ Ibid. 246.

Came still “upholds British colonial enterprise as superior, civilising and modern.”³²² Frederic Cople Jaher and Blair King make a very strong assertion regarding *The Rains Came*: they claim it promotes Indian self-determinism, while sympathising for Britain in the face of fascism. Anxieties about the war, it is suggested, moved American filmmakers to present the empire in a more admirable light.³²³ At the same time, Americans “sympathized with subordinate nations’ yearning for self-determination.”³²⁴ This observation suggests the need for propaganda during the war to marginalise the racism of British colonialism and project a unified Empire which was embracing change. Chowdhry points out that films “had emerged in the 1930s as an arena for debate and discussion on matters of imperialist concern and thus as a new site for the formation of public opinion.”³²⁵ Moreover, the novel seems to subtly promote Indian self-determinism as well. One passage at the end is particularly revealing: “As Ransome and Homer Smiley left to return to the office of the Ministry of Public Welfare, they encountered at the very doorway the figure of a plump little man with a pot belly, the pallid skin of the Englishman who has been too long in India.”³²⁶

Hence, *The Rains Came* was made at an important moment in Hollywood history, which accounts for the many complexities and contradictions within the film. It does not straightforwardly endorse the Raj system of colonial rule, but nor does it oppose it. The film presents an attitude of paternalism. Hence, the system of paternal

³²² Ibid. 242.

³²³ Frederic Cople Jaher and Blair King, "Hollywood's India: The Meaning of RKO's *Gunga Din*," *Film & History* XXXVIII, no. 2 (2008).

³²⁴ Ibid. 34.

³²⁵ Chowdhry. 45.

³²⁶ Bromfield.

oversight, compatible with the British Raj system, was advocated.³²⁷ The film clearly promotes British rule as valuable, especially toward the end of the film when the viceroy delivers a message that he is going to help rebuild Ranchipur. Furthermore, in the scene in the hospital when Tom is speaking to Rama of his duties he is speaking of his obligation to serve under the viceroy. However, this speech takes on the rhetoric of leadership. Tom is encouraging Rama to think of his country and be a symbol for all of India. It may very well be that it was this message of self-determinism with oversight as well as the alliance with the Western world that prompted filmmakers to return to this story in 1955. Whilst some reviewers could not see the relevance of a film about India from 1939 in the new world order of 1955, it would seem feasible to suggest that the source text may have been attractive to the filmmakers precisely because it envisaged a form of Indian independence which existed within a framework of Western paternal oversight. In this respect, it offered a narrative framework which allowed the case for a form of neo-colonial stewardship to be made which addressed and accepted the reality of the end of the Raj.

In *The Rains of Ranchipur*, Edwina, still a spoilt character, does not undergo the same transformation as the previous Edwina. Furthermore, she is no longer *English*. Lana Turner gives Edwina a new character persona, as she is now a wealthy American woman. She is not the woman who married a lord for his wealth, though she gains his title, but the symbol of the emerging affluent female consumer burgeoning in the Western world at the time the film was made. In this version, Edwina does not fundamentally change her perspective on life. Lana Turner's Edwina comments after she recovers from a serious illness that she could use "a manicure."

³²⁷ For discussion on colonial and neo-colonial attitudes of paternalism see Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994).

Moreover, she is more worried about why Rama did not come to her while she was ill than the state of disaster in the city. Hence, the change Edwina goes through in *The Rains Came* is not shared by the new film's lead character. The most profound example of this is that Edwina in *The Rains Came* gives her life in the service of the people of Ranchipur. Turner's Edwina ruthlessly chases after Rama, who returns her affections and declares his love for her almost immediately. It is only after a bout of sickness and the realisation that Rama is devoted to Ranchipur that Edwina gives up her pursuit and leaves the city. As he is dealing with the effects of the plague he gives up going to her side while she is sick, instead tending to the people of the city who need him. He is not heir to the throne in this case, but is still considered important to Ranchipur's future. He explains his duty to the sick and his hopes for the future of Ranchipur, saying he wants Ranchipur to be an "example for all of India."

This is not the only significant change; Edwina's husband is not the painfully unaware and ignorant Lord Esketh that the audience sees in *The Rains Came*. Moreover, his character survives the floods, compared with the previous Lord Esketh who is killed when the dam breaks. Instead, Alan is a man who has married Edwina for money and is well aware of her affairs with other men. He is, unlike Edwina, still English, but the dynamics are completely changed from the previous film. The new Alan Esketh does not share the conservative prejudices of his predecessor. In *The Rains Came*, Lord Esketh is an insufferable relic of old colonial England. This Alan Esketh is a man who berates his servants and insults the leaders of Ranchipur, commenting to the Maharani's husband that he is "pleased to find that you people have so many of the modern conveniences and the blessings of civilisation." His minor role in the first film promotes the idea that his outdated perspectives on the colonies no longer represent the modern view of the other characters. The second

Alan Esketh is more worldly and open-minded. Alan is actually quite a complex character in the remake. It is legitimate to suggest that his character may be commenting on England's new place in the post-war world: worthy of a continuing role in power, but somewhat emasculated and at the mercy of America for survival.

Tom is also no longer English but American as well. He is not the cynical artist of the first version but a disenchanted architect. There is one common scene between Fern and Tom in the two films. This is the scene in which Fern runs away from home and comes to Tom's place, trying to induce a scandal in the community so her parents will send her away. In *The Rains Came*, Fern runs away from home mainly out of boredom; she is embarrassed by her mother and wants to run off and become an actress. In the second film she wants to be sent away to school. Regardless of her reasons, in both films she believes Tom will help her. In the first film the scene is played humorously with Fern's melodramatic behaviour countered by Tom's sarcastic humour. However, in *The Rains of Ranchipur* this scene is different in an important way; Tom goes on a tirade about the effects of the Second World War:

There was a woman in my life. I had a mistress once, a soft-eyed seductive mistress. Her name was idealism. I thought I was quite a fellow when I joined the air force. Tom Ransome: dreamer! There were dragons to be slain and I was going to slay them. After that we start building a good world... I thought if you were lucky enough to survive you ought to have learned something, you ought to be bigger than you were before. I was wrong. The cars were bigger, the people who drove them were smaller...

Fern replies to this outburst with "I wish I'd known you then." Tom's anger at the post war world stems from his disillusionment that the men who returned from the war didn't come back to the world they believed they were fighting for. Therefore, he sits in Ranchipur and drinks his problems away. However, he is the one that blows up the dam to make the floods subside, something it seems no Indian could do. The film

requires a Western educated man armed with knowledge of engineering to save the native population. This shows a return to ideas of paternalism that were so prevalent in 1930s imperial dramas. This is a common theme Ella Shohat describes. She asserts that Eastern peoples are often represented as underdeveloped while the Westerner is productive, intelligent and creative.³²⁸ Under the surface of this event is the idea that post-colonial countries cannot survive without the paternal-like oversight of a Western power.

Tom seems particularly averse to women like Edwina as well. His outburst seems directed at what she represents, specifically when it comes to the emphasis on consumerism. It is evident that while Edwina is a bold character in both films, she is certainly more ostentatious in the 1955 version of the film. She is not just an independent American woman but the symbol of everything Tom is ranting about, a woman with unhealthy acquisitive desires for both expensive objects and men. She is also a woman who constantly belittles her husband. In the opening sequence she tells him that he may “squander as much of her money as he likes” as long as when they disagree she will have her way. In this regard, the 1955 Edwina is identified with all that Tom thinks is wrong in the post-war world: she is responsible for social upheaval in the home, emasculation of her husband, and is at the centre of a city’s political scandal. Jaikumar states that female characters in post-war films were often used to “expose the vulnerabilities of empire.”³²⁹ In this case however, the representation of Edwina as a troubling disruptive siren seems to have a different purpose. It may reasonably be asked why a film that, on one hand, seems very keen to demonstrate the

³²⁸ Ella Shohat, "Gender and Culture of Empire: Toward a Feminist Ethnography of the Cinema," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* XIII, no. 1-3 (1991). 32.

³²⁹ Jaikumar. 63. Jaikumar argues that in *Black Narcissus* (1947, Great Britain) female characters are associated with colonial loss because of their lack of control over the environment.

important role that America might play in the affairs of modern India should refashion its source text to present such a deeply unflattering portrait of American womanhood and its disruptive consumerist desires. One feasible answer to this question lies in advice given to Hollywood film producers who addressed international themes by the industry's main trade body, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA). David Eldridge has documented how when Eric Johnston became President of the MPPDA in 1947 he systematically set out to provide "advisory services to producers with respect to the sensibilities of foreign film audiences." Eldridge notes that Johnston was keen to convey the message that overt criticisms of certain problems in American society provided a good advertisement for democracy over Communism, and that foreign audiences had told him they liked American films because "They don't try to hide the faults in your society. If anything, they explore these faults and try to solve them. They show us that you know how to criticise yourselves. That's why we respect your films."³³⁰ In this way, we might see Edwina as a convenient scapegoat which the narrative utilises to demonstrate just how honest and candid American films could be. In this respect, its paternalistic concerns about post-war femininity perfectly complement its patriarchal vision of the future relationship between America and India.

India's place in an Anglo-America cinema

The final case study in this chapter demonstrates an even more overt impulse to tie a Cold War ideological agenda to the representation of post-war India. A co-production between the United States and Great Britain, *Bhowani Junction* (1956) was filmed on location in Pakistan. Set during British withdrawal from India, it is the story of a woman, Victoria Jones (Ava Gardner), born to an Indian mother and

³³⁰ David N. Eldridge, "'Dear Owen': The CIA, Luigi Luraschi and Hollywood, 1953," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 20, no. 2 (2000).

English father, who feels lost for an identity in the changing India as it moves to self-rule. The film is narrated by Colonel Savage (Stewart Granger) who is stationed at Bhowani Junction to help oversee the departure of British troops from the area as well as deal with the troubles that have arisen from dissident groups who have gone beyond passive resistance to violent means. Communists who disagree with Gandhi's strategy and wish to institute their own form of government are identified as the primary antagonists. As he narrates, a flashback structure is adopted. At Bhowani Junction Victoria is arriving back in India after four years of active service as a member of the Women's Army Corps (WAC). She arrives to a chaotic station filled with both passive resistant and Communist protestors. Victoria meets her long time friend Patrick Taylor (Bill Travers), also an Anglo-Indian. Col. Savage arrives on the same train with orders to protect the station. As Col. Savage takes command he orders Victoria back on active duty to help liaise with the Indian community. It is not long before trouble arises as explosives go missing from a military ammunition train. A group of soldiers is dispatched to search for the explosives. However, they fail because of a passive resistance demonstration on the tracks at Bhowani Junction. Protesters lie on the tracks in a sign of resistance but Col. Savage successfully disperses them by getting lower-caste untouchables to dump raw sewage on the high-caste protestors. As a result of this action, riots and unrest erupt on the streets that same night. In the confusion, Lt. McDaniel (Lionel Jeffries) follows Victoria and tries to rape her. In self-defence she kills him. Ranjit Singh Kassi (Francis Matthews), a fellow Indian worker at Bhowani Junction, finds her in this predicament and takes her to his mother's home. His mother has a man take care of the body while Victoria is looked after by Ranjit's mother. She dresses Victoria in a sari and gets her thinking about her Indian heritage. Victoria begins courting Ranjit shortly thereafter and she

continues to dress in a sari. She later finds out the man who has buried Lt. McDaniel has also killed the sentry on duty and is the man who has stolen the explosives from the ammunitions train. This man, Ghan Shyam or Davay (Peter Illing), is a member of the Communist party and is married to the idea of violence for the cause of a Communist India. He plans to blow up a train shortly thereafter, and he is successful. Victoria is called to help aid the victims and begins to feel conflicted about her recent decisions. However, it is not long before Ranjit talks Victoria into becoming a Sikh, but as she is going through the ceremony she finds she cannot finish it and runs out. It is afterwards that she grows close to Col. Savage. She tells him what happened the night of the riots and the two begin courting. In a climactic finish Davay kidnaps Victoria and takes a train to a tunnel frequently visited by trains running across the country. Col. Savage and Patrick rush to save Victoria and learn that Davay is trying to blow up the tunnel. They thwart his attempt but Patrick is killed in the process and as Col. Savage looks up at the oncoming train, it becomes clear what Davay's intentions were, as Gandhi is a passenger in the passing train. The film concludes with Col. Savage asking Victoria to marry him and return with him to England, but she says she cannot leave India so he agrees to return to India and marry her there.

An article in the *Sunday Express* reflects on the fact that "*Bhowani Junction* ... indicates that the last days of British rule in India were more complicated than we had been led to believe."³³¹ The reviewer goes on to say:

But if the story edges close to melodramatic hysteria there are some vividly impressive scenes that catch the awesome atmosphere of exultant nationalism bursting into violence. Rabid fanatics throwing their bodies across railway tracks to stop a train; pillaging mobs in an orgy of frenzied violence; a

³³¹ Milton Shulman, "No Holds Barred for Miss Gardner," *Sunday Express*, 2 Sept 1956. The BFI Library.

wrecked train lying on its side like a dead rhinoceros – these are terrifying images of the reality of revolution.³³²

The tone of this article interprets the film as realism. One of the main issues addressed by the film which seems designed to accentuate its claims to authenticity is set up in a significant scene in Victoria's home when she and Patrick get in an argument over what the fate of the Anglo-Indians will be after the British leave. Patrick is angry at the British leaving saying "Do you think a ruddy Congress government will go on keeping jobs open for us on the railway, like the British do?! ...If the Indians took over we'd be left with nothing. Our schools, our positions they'd take the lot!" Victoria is more open to change, pointing out that Anglo-Indians are "only a drop in the bucket" compared with the major concerns most of India has. She also states "at least we'll stand on our own two feet." However, she is also aware of her and Patrick's lack of place in the new India as Anglo-Indians. Her perspective is enlightened, particularly by her time in the services where she has discovered that the English and Indians who worked alongside her "know who they are, we don't."

The situation of Anglo-Indians in India has been widely addressed by historians from the early days of Indian colonialism, well into contemporary India. Allen Grimshaw shows how the Anglo-Indian community was instrumental in the mid to late 19th century in securing and maintaining territory for the British.³³³ During East Indian Company trade wars, Grimshaw states that the Anglo-Indians were called upon, under threat of being arrested as traitors, to the war effort. And notably the World Wars called upon the services of the Anglo-Indian community again. However, in the 20th century, Britain still maintained a distance from this community by excluding them from social organisations and political decisions. And with Hindus

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Allen Grimshaw, "The Anglo-Indian Community: The Integration of a Marginal Group," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 18, no. 2 (1959).

ostracising the Anglo-Indians based solely on their “mixed blood,” the mixed race community became withdrawn but also systematically organised, beginning their own schools and publishing several journals and books within their community.³³⁴ The conclusion many scholars reach is that mixed-race Anglo-Indians, from a very early point in the British Empire, felt disconnected from any identity and thus formed their own community, but also struggled to define themselves.³³⁵ In this respect, the film can be seen to represent the concerns of this community with a degree of historical accuracy. By the 20th century most Anglo-Indians did in fact hold posts within the railway network around India and were “singled out for special protection” by the British before they left India.³³⁶ However, it is important to note that special treatment continued to be extended to Anglo-Indians concerning education, as well as the position of Anglo-Indians in the railways, customs, and in the postal and telegraph services:

In effect, the provisions extended pre-Independence privileges of the community. They were to be systematically reduced until at the end of a ten-year period from the commencement of the Constitution differentials in the treatment of Anglo-Indians were to cease.³³⁷

Essentially, the special benefits were to continue but gradually decrease until the community could establish itself. The suggestion made in the film that this community faced imminent discrimination then is curious, as it seems to be raising issues that were actually no longer a concern. It also brings up an important

³³⁴ Ibid. 228.

³³⁵ See Alison Blunt, “‘Land of Our Mothers’: Home, Identity and Nationality for Anglo-Indians in British India 1919-1947,” *History Workshop Journal* 54, no. (2002).

³³⁶ Grimshaw. 235.

³³⁷ Ibid. 234-5

possibility, that the filmmakers are hijacking an Anglo-Indian character to play out their own version of Indian history with a seemingly non-British bias.³³⁸

This is mainly due to the fact that the theme of the half-caste is also a politically useful metaphor for the condition of India in transition. It points out how deeply embedded the British are in Indian history, with a concrete legacy of the Raj manifest in the very bodies of the Anglo-Indian. This theme plays out in Victoria's character as she tries to find her place. When she is attacked by Lt. McDaniel she briefly renounces her English side to steep herself in her Indian heritage. This is represented by her romantic interest in Ranjit. It is also demonstrated by her change in attire. She takes what Ranjit's mother says to heart:

Why should you support the British law? You are half Indian ... What do you think we (Indians) are going to do with Anglo-Indians? We are going to make you realise that you are Indian, inferior Indians, possibly disloyal Indians because for the last hundred years you have been licking England's boots and kicking us with your own boots. ... Why don't you see that you are an Indian and act like one?

It is she who suggests that Victoria consider her son as a partner. Her willingness to convert to the Sikh religion promises to seal her transition into an Indian woman, but as she is converting she realises she cannot and runs from the ceremony.

The scene in which she does so is significant in the way it is filmed. When Victoria looks around to see the faces of the others in the room she becomes scared. The faces are stern and disconcerting; some of them are shown with eyes wide open,

³³⁸ There is another film, released in 1953 that mirrors some of the issues in *Bhowani Junction*. *King of the Khyber Rifles* (1954) is an American production about a mixed race military officer in the Khyber Rifles. Both *Bhowani Junction* and *King of the Khyber Rifles* attempt to negotiate the past with present awareness of the injustices done during colonialism. However, both films promote the marriage of Western ideals to the success of the post-colonial India. Muslim extremism in *King of the Khyber Rifles* and Communism in *Bhowani Junction* offer justification for the continued alliance between the post-colonial India and Britain, and now America as well.

looking frenzied and fanatical. A scene similar to this in style is the dramatic finale in which Davay is under the bridge planting explosives. A close up of Davay waiting in the dark is closely reminiscent of the way in which Indian antagonists were filmed in 1930s high adventure films (figure 5.2). A perfect parallel lies again in *Gunga Din* when the fanatical leader of a Kali cult (Eduardo Ciannelli) speaks to a large group of followers. The Kali cult leader is sitting in the darkness and his face is unusually dark, with his eyes extremely white and wide. The deliberate absence of backlighting creates an effect reminiscent of an animal stalking its prey. The effect also causes Davay to look darker in hue than he actually is and implies, according to Richard Dyer's analysis in *White*, a moral inferiority.³³⁹ Darker skin seems to imply, as it did in the 1930s, moral inferiority. This would explain why Col. Savage is the only one able to stop Davay, just as Tom is the only one who can save Ranchipur, because of his Western expertise. This also justifies Victoria's selection of Savage as her ideal partner.



Figure 5.3 Waiting in Darkness: Peter Illing in *Bhowani Junction*

³³⁹ Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997). See particularly pages 56-7.

It is telling in this respect that in the novel she chooses to marry Patrick. *Saturday Review* comments that it gives the film a “conventional ending in an otherwise highly unconventional and engrossing story.”³⁴⁰ For the meaning of the film, it implies that a continued close relationship with Great Britain is best for India, rather than fully disregarding India’s British past. It furthermore shows an alliance of ideology between the Western world and the Eastern world against Communism. Communism was one of the ideas Indians turned to in the 1930s as an alternative to British rule but it is important to note that more dominant ideas played at the centre stage of the protest, namely Gandhi’s passive resistance and Muslim separatism.³⁴¹ “News of the Russian Revolution and the ideal of Communism fired a few, like one of the founders of the Indian Communist Party, Muzaffar Ahmed, who later admitted how superficial was his knowledge of Marxism...”³⁴² Ahmed was arrested several times for his political affiliation and accused of conspiracy. And while the Communists were initially accepted as a political party directly after Indian partition the movement was later outlawed.³⁴³ In fact, Communism fundamentally contradicted many Islam and Hindu ideologies and never really grew into a large movement. Moreover, scholars argue that Communism contradicted the democratic model that Western educated Indians had learned.

The film’s exaggeration of the Communist threat in India represents another means by which it makes the case for the continued close involvement of the West in Indian affairs. This strategy of treating India as a Cold War battleground complements

³⁴⁰ “East India and West Bronx,” *Saturday Review*, 9 June 1956. The BFI Library.

³⁴¹ See Dilip M. Menon, *Caste, Nationalism, and Communism in South India: Malabar, 1900-1948*, Cambridge South Asian Studies, vol. 55 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

³⁴² Judith M. Brown, *Modern India: The Origins of an Asian Democracy*, 2nd ed., Short Oxford History of the Modern World (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). 240.

³⁴³ *Ibid.* 371.

the approach to India taken by British and American envoys in the 1950s. America and Britain worked together to make a financial plan for India and Pakistan. Their goal was to set up a stable economy that would rely on trade and capitalist economic structures to ensure that India would therefore not turn to Communism.³⁴⁴ Furthermore, after Communist rule was declared in China, Britain planned to support other South Asia nations economically to prevent the spread of Communism, but this created a political conundrum the British had with their own post-colonial stance:

The task of eliminating control; “strengthening”, that is the achievement of administrative and economic stability, postulates Western aid. The task of eliminating control while intensifying assistance is a delicate one for history, and indeed common sense, points to the conclusion that the acceptance of assistance implies some degree of dependence.³⁴⁵

Bhowani Junction engages with the same delicate issues. But in partly attributing the success of India’s independence movement to the valour of the British military against Communist extremists threatening Ghandi, the film clearly implies that India cannot move forward to sovereignty without Britain’s aid.

Critics swallowed this anti-Communist propaganda pretty well. This is demonstrated in the above referenced *Sunday Express* article.³⁴⁶ Furthermore, historians such as Wendy Webster have persuasively argued that the British and American Cold War alliance was used to facilitate and justify a joint neo-colonial role for both countries, postulating:

A continuing world role and power, authority and influence for Britain through a ‘special relationship’ with America. The idea of a ‘special relationship’ produced a heroic, public rhetoric of national destiny in which

³⁴⁴ See Foreign office letters, reports and memos that discuss economic aid to South Asia with the specific intent to dissuade Communism in these countries in National Archives, DO 35/2921. The National Archives.

³⁴⁵ Wakeley. Letter to Sir G. Laithwaite, National Archives, DO 142/454. The National Archives.

³⁴⁶ Shulman.

America and Britain jointly provided the world with moral leadership, representing freedom and democracy.³⁴⁷

It may seem a stretch to suggest that film offered itself as an instrument of propaganda to popularize and facilitate these political goals, but there is evidence to suggest that links between Hollywood and the American government were substantial and meaningful when it came to the representation of America's role in international affairs. Letters from an unidentified executive of Paramount show direct interaction with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) regarding how Hollywood should be making films to reflect pro-American/anti-Communist beliefs. David Eldridge identifies this unknown as Luigi G. Luraschi, who was Paramount's Head of Foreign and Domestic Censorship.³⁴⁸ Since "an increasing number of films in the 1950s depicted American characters abroad" it was a major point of interest to portray them in the 'right' way.³⁴⁹

The work of the film historian Ruth Vasey has demonstrated that the Hollywood film industry established careful measures back in the silent era to try and ensure that their films did not cause offence in commercially important overseas territories. What has been shown in this section is evidence of a more systematic synchronicity across representations of India's post-war relationship with the West produced by British and American filmmakers. We find a similar message propounded across all three films discussed here: that Britain and America share the same vision of a continued role for the West in providing military and technical assistance to a region defined by political instability and lacking the basic infrastructure of a modern nation state. What is more, this theme closely mirrors the

³⁴⁷ Webster. 16.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ David N. Eldridge, "'Dear Owen': The Cia, Luigi Luraschi and Hollywood, 1953," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 20, no. 2 (2000). 154.

efforts being made by British and American diplomats to extend Cold War political strategies to the Indian sub-continent, and the films' constant stress upon a unity of purpose between British and American interests in this regard complements the contemporaneous efforts made to forge a 'special relationship' between Britain and America that might sustain a significant semblance of old colonial power structures in the name of a fight against Communism.

Chapter Five

Modern Africa According to Hollywood and British Filmmakers

During the 1950s a handful of the British African colonies achieved independence or saw the beginnings of national movements.³⁵⁰ The Suez incident, in which control of the Suez Canal reverted back to Egypt, cemented the perception that British imperial power was waning. This is not to suggest that western power and authority was easily relinquished. The post-war history of colonial Africa is filled with bitter conflict and controversy. One of the biggest events after the Second World War in African colonial history was the Mau Mau revolt in Kenya. The Kikuyu population in Kenya had long suffered as a result of British colonial policy. The greatest issue was loss of land, as well as policies which forced the Kikuyu population into wage labour. One may argue this was only a mild step up from slavery. When the situation came to a head in the early 1950s the Mau Mau revolt saw the brutal killings of settler farmers. The British colonial office and Kenyan settler population answered with policies which can only be characterised as draconian. The history of the detention camps, mass murder, torture and brutal treatment of the Kikuyu population is still being revealed, as records which had been “missing” since Kenya’s independence resurfaced at the behest of the Kikuyu detention camp survivors. The Foreign Office was compelled to produce these archival documents at the start of 2011. These records reveal the extent of British brutality.³⁵¹ Hence, the history of Kenya’s independence movement is still being pieced together, and the picture of the uprising must be reexamined with this new information. The view held by the British public

³⁵⁰ For example, Libya achieved independence in 1951, Eritrea in 1952, Sudan in 1956, the Suez canal in 1956. By the end of the 1960s most other African colonies followed and gained sovereignty.

³⁵¹ Ian Cobain, Owen Bowcott, and Richard Norton-Taylor, "Britain Destroyed Records of Colonial Crimes," *The Guardian*, 18 April 2012.

during the revolt was shaped highly by propaganda. Descriptions of the Mau Mau as brutal savages appeared in the British and Kenyan press during the conflict and portrayed a very uneven picture of what was actually happening in Kenya.³⁵² Hence, the British public had a very skewed vision of the Mau Mau. When evidence of the detention camps and torture did reach the public, it was generally through the left wing minority newspapers, such as *The Daily Worker*, and could easily be dismissed as Communist misinformation. Furthermore, when the public did question unfair policies, the response from policy makers was often to deny the allegations, or more reprehensibly, to justify them.³⁵³

At the same time independence movements were burgeoning in Africa, the West was preoccupied with the Cold War. As had been the case with India, nationalist movements such as the Mau Mau revolt were often accused of being Communist fronts.³⁵⁴ Additionally, the growing civil rights movement amongst the African American community in the US represents another important proximate political context to consider in relation to the simultaneous unravelling of imperial rule in Africa. In 1955 Martin Luther King Jr. led a boycott against the Montgomery Bus Company for racial segregation. This was an early protest that would mushroom into the civil rights movement that spread all over America by the 1960s. African Americans, taking action against a number of injustices which included racial segregation, economic inequality as well as the failure of the American government to

³⁵² See Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning* (New York: Henry Holt, 2005). 46.

³⁵³ See *ibid.* 86. Elkins explains that some actions taken on part by the British government during the Mau Mau revolt was sometimes justified as protection from attacks on the settler populations but most allegations were denied.

³⁵⁴ See example of the Kenyan student in America, Joel Foreman, "Mau Mau's American Career, 1952-57," in *The Other Fifties: Interrogating Midcentury American Icons*, ed. Joel Foreman (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1997).

react to lynching rampant in the American South, began to demand action and equality.

In my earlier discussion of the screen treatment of Africa in the 1930s, I observed that the interest of Hollywood filmmakers in the continent was largely confined to those more politically neutral spaces defined by jungle and wilderness. The attraction of wild Africa as a spectacular setting only intensified after the war. The 1950s saw a plethora of African set films with big name actors. Films such as *The African Queen* (1951), *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* (1952), and *Mogambo* (1953). These films bypassed politics in favour of spectacular Technicolor landscapes. Many such films clearly owe their genesis to increased competition from monochrome television.

British filmmakers occasionally used African settings as a convenient source of uncomplicated action and spectacle. For example, *Men Against the Sun* (1953) has a clear kinship with the first feature-length Hollywood film made in 3-D: *Bwana Devil* (1952). They are two films with a similar story line. *Bwana Devil* employed the African setting as merely a backdrop for a 3D experiment.³⁵⁵ Both tell the story of lion attacks in Africa during the late 19th century while workers were trying to build one of the country's first railways. These were popular films that exhibit Africa as a setting but make no significant statement on political, colonial or race issues.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁵ In an interview the director, Arch Oboler, states that the film was mostly an experiment. See Richard Koszarski, "'A Lion in Your Lap - a Lover in Your Arms': Arch Oboler and 'Bwana Devil'," *Film History* 12, no. 1 (2000).

³⁵⁶ There is one very important film that explores racial and imperial issues in the 1950s but differs greatly from the case studies here *Cry the Beloved Country* (1952). Based on a novel of the same name [Alan Paton, *Cry, the Beloved Country* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1948)], this film tackles the racial issues which were still leaving its mark on South Africa. With a careful attention to both the settler and native population, this powerful story of two men's meeting over the death of their sons can only be categorized as a journey into the scars colonialism has left on South Africa. Directed by Zoltan Korda, the film is a long way from *Sanders of the River* and can

There are other 1950s British films set in Africa which are firmly situated within colonial frameworks but make no attempt to address present day political challenges. *Storm Over the Nile* (1955), for example, a remake of *The Four Feathers*, casts its face so firmly back towards the 1930s and duplicates its predecessor so completely that it even reuses footage originally shot by Zoltan Korda in 1939. This chapter will focus upon a number of British films which make some form of attempt to engage with the politics of imperial governance in post-war Africa: *Men of Two Worlds* (1946), *Where No Vultures Fly* (1951), *West of Zanzibar* (1954) and *Simba* (1955). In all four cases it will be shown that attempts were made to acknowledge and engage with a more liberal agenda within colonial politics, by respectively dealing with the issues of healthcare provision, wildlife conservation and the degree of legitimate social injustice at stake in the Mau Mau rebellion. But I will argue that this effort was largely geared towards trying to find more ideologically palatable ways to re-articulate the need for continued British involvement in African affairs. Although I will address the significance of the treatment of Africa in the 1951 remake of *King Solomon's Mines*, one of Hollywood's biggest box office hits of the decade, the only clear instance of an American film which seeks to adopt a contemporary perspective on African imperial politics is *Something of Value* (1957), another screen treatment of the Mau Mau uprising. My analysis of this film will confirm and develop arguments

truly be seen as a cinematic exploration of the colonial injustices in South Africa. This film does not address post-colonial themes of breaking from the Empire, nor does it demonstrate the fight for continued Western presence in the postcolonial African country. It is more a personal vision of the plight of the contemporary South African. Hence, this film belongs to another study. However, it is worthy of mention because of its social significance and the fact it is a Zoltan Korda production so far removed from the cinematic expressions Korda created regarding Empire that came before. Furthermore, it is lamentable that further British and American portrayals of Africa after the 1950s is not within the historical scope of this project. It was in the 1960s that most of the African colonies gained independence from Britain. African epics made in the 1960s such as *Zulu* (1964) and *Khartoum* (1966), were made at a time when de-colonisation of the continent reached its peak of intensity.

developed previously in the thesis by showing how post-war British and American films of Empire tend to increasingly share very similar perspectives on the problems and priorities that need to be faced by the West in its dealings with the Third World. The explicit parallels which *Something of Value* draws between the politics of white rule in Africa and domestic civil rights issues will also be adduced to offer further confirmation of my argument that the screen representation of imperial Africa provoked a very distinct liberal dilemma for American filmmakers.

Britain and Africa after the War

The first of the British films under consideration in this chapter, *Men of Two Worlds* (1946) might fairly be described - in terms of its genesis at least - as the product of political initiatives and film production policies of the recent past. As Wendy Webster explains,

The film was initially suggested by the head of the empire division of the Ministry of information Gervais Huxley as Empire propaganda during the Second World War. He sent the script to the Colonial Office and wanted the film to be a documentary regarding how science could defeat the sleeping sickness in East Africa.³⁵⁷

Although it was ultimately incarnated as a feature-length fiction film, it did, however, fulfill what Huxley saw as a cinematic representation of “social and economic reform in the empire” through science.³⁵⁸ We might therefore fairly describe it as the only fiction film to be made with the direct blessing of the Colonial Office. Tony Shaw argues that the reasons behind this were because “the Attlee administration had immediately recognized the need to sell the new-look empire commonwealth based

³⁵⁷ Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). 69-70.

³⁵⁸ Tony Shaw, *British Cinema and the Cold War: The State, Propaganda and Consensus*, Cinema and Society (London and New York: I.B. Tauris 2001). 52. And, Webster. 69.

on ‘partnership’ to the British public, to the Americans, and to the indigenous peoples themselves...”³⁵⁹

The film opens on a map of Europe and Africa in which England and the territory of Tanganyika are highlighted. The camera zooms in on Tanganyika, yet opens the story in London 1944. Kisenga (Robert Adams) is playing piano at a concert. After the concert Kisenga gets a notification bidding him back home to Africa. His fans object, saying he has a duty to English music, but he states that he has a “duty to Africa.” He travels back to Taganyika, his birthplace, which he has been away from for 15 years, with the intent of teaching his people. Upon his return though, he realises that the people are afflicted by tsetse flies carrying disease. After he is informed that the British are trying unsuccessfully to move his people to a new land in which they will be free of the tsetse fly, they task him with convincing his people to move to the new area for their own safety. When Kisenga arrives in his home village he is met with resistance from the tribe, especially from the witch doctor, Magole (Orlando Martins), who has convinced the rest of the tribe to remain in the area despite the danger. He promotes superstition and faith in spells to get rid of the sickness afflicting the people over the science that Dr. Caroline Munro (Phyllis Calvert) is trying to bring to the tribe. Magole endeavours to unbalance and discredit Kisenga by attacking him and his family with insults and spells. Psychologically, Kisenga becomes unhinged when his father dies and he believes that it is his own fault for not supporting Magole. Moreover, Kisenga’s sister, Saburi (Eseka Makumbi) goes missing. The tribe begins to distrust Kisenga and the British until Commissioner Randall (Eric Portman), who has brought Kisenga home to aid in the resettlement plan, convinces him to retake authority. This occurs at the same time the Doctor finds

³⁵⁹ Shaw, *British Cinema and the Cold War: The State, Propaganda and Consensus*. 52.

proof the tribe is afflicted with sleeping sickness. Kisenga's faith in Western medicine renewed, he confronts Magole and the people finally side with Kisenga, burning Magole's hut, banishing him and moving to the new land provided by the British.

The first aspect of this film to note is its striking parallel to the 1936 Paul Robeson *Song of Freedom*; even the names of the two main characters sound very similar, Joe Zinga and Kisenga. Both of the main characters in each film are musicians in Britain, and they return to their African homes to resolve a crisis. They both even wear pith helmets upon their return to their respective African homes and both narratives involve the invocation of music to restore the main character's authority. It is unclear whether this narrative parallel is deliberate or not, but a strong resemblance between the two films cannot be denied.³⁶⁰ Paul Robeson's character is undoubtedly stronger and more independently resourceful, as he acts on his own in the film whereas Robert Adams, who was in *Song of Freedom* as Monty, seems to doubt himself and his ability to convince his people to move to a safer location. He continually requires the help of District Commissioner Randall to help him. In the psychological war between Randall and Magole for Kisenga's sanity, Randall's final success comes when he is lying at Kisenga's bedside telling him "he is going to live" and that "his people need him." Magole's power lies in how he plays on the people's superstition. In a scene in which Kisenga wanders into one of Magole's rituals, Magole is shown drinking Kisenga's blood, which scares Kisenga into losing faith in himself. It is only when Randall restores his confidence that Kisenga overcomes Magole's power and the film comes to a satisfactory conclusion. Essentially, Kisenga relies on white colonial support for the strength to overcome African "witchcraft."

³⁶⁰ Kenneth Cameron also notes the parallel between the two films; "It is impossible that *Men of Two Worlds* was conceived without Robeson in mind or without *Song of Freedom* as a model."

Kenneth Cameron, *Africa on Film* (New York: Continuum, 1994). 105.

Moreover, the people in the village rely on the British to save them from the sleeping sickness. They require Western medicine and administrative initiative and support to help them move to a better location and deal with the disease afflicting their village. There is an important scene in the film which attempts to discredit "liberal" support for the idea of a fully independent Africa as bereft of rational logic and compassion. When four British characters, Randall, Caroline, Mrs. Upjohn (Cathleen Nesbitt) and Professor Gollner (Arnold Marle), discuss the situation in the village, Mrs. Upjohn states that "missions, same old story: destroying the soul of a race, giving them what?" She is quickly castigated for this sentiment. Caroline answers her with "the chance at a decent life." Mrs. Upjohn goes on to state that the primitive African people are "closer to nature" and that science doesn't understand their soul; she further laments that their way of life is being eroded. But, in what is perhaps a veiled allusion to political debates over the introduction of a National Health Service in Britain, her lack of faith in the need for continued commonwealth administration is shown to rest upon old-fashioned imperial perceptions of class and race superiority, when she betrays her perception of Africans as best suited for cheap labour. Randall argues for an "improvement in standard of living." This insinuation can be extended to suggest that the African population needs the British to oversee their well-being. This implication is taken a step further in the final images in the film: in the last scenes which show Randall and Caroline helping African children and villagers into the truck to take them to their new location, Kisenga is nowhere to be seen. The focus at the end on images of African children is a telling demonstration of the paternalist ideology which underpins the film.

Men of Two Worlds was not reviewed kindly. *The Daily Telegraph* stated that the film "might have been a landmark in the history of the screen," but showed little

sign of the scale of achievement that might be expected from a film that was three years in the making.³⁶¹ The *Tribune's* reviewer was in agreement suggesting that "The final judgment on this film is that it gives too little in return for the money and time spent on it."³⁶² The fact that the film was seen as inadequate to its task by critics of all political persuasions is further demonstrated by a fascinating controversy about it which appeared in the letters pages of *The Times*. M.C. Peterside, an African living in England as a student, wrote to *The Times* wishing to address issues within the film. "What is puzzling me and many of my fellow-Africans" he suggested, was any clear sense of what was the "object of the new film..."³⁶³ He went on to criticise the portrayal of witchcraft in the film, calling it a "European concept." He also called the main character, Kisenga, an African which "exists in the imagination of some people", and asserted that an African returning to his homeland would not be so desperately out of touch with the community he left. Most pertinently though, Peterside presents the readers of *The Times* with some very important questions:

"Is the object of the new film to boost up British rule in Africa? If so, is it a credit to Britain to advertise to the world that after over half a century of British rule Africa is still one vast mass of jungle and naked people living in round huts [sic]? Surely British genius is capable of presenting its case less crudely? ...Or is it necessary to sacrifice the truth entirely in order to entertain? Is this type of film going to contribute towards creating the commonwealth of free peoples under the British Crown envisaged in the future, or is it meant to postpone it?"³⁶⁴

Letters which followed this initial criticism agreed that the representation of Africa in the film was incomplete and unbalanced, saying that the audience would be in

³⁶¹ Campbell Dixon, "Africa as It Really Is: Old and New in Conflict," *Daily Telegraph*, 22 July 1946. The BFI Library.

³⁶² Frederic Mullally, "Films," *Tribune*, 19 July 1946. The BFI Library.

³⁶³ M.C. Peterside, "Men of Two Worlds," *The Times*, 11 Sept 1946. The BFI Library.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

“danger of thinking that witchcraft still dominates African life.”³⁶⁵ Another letter from the same date stated that Eric Portman’s role was antiquated and that the film had “propaganda value against Africa...”³⁶⁶ Thorold Dickinson wrote a letter to the editor to respond to the attacks on the authenticity of the film. He took a very defensive stance and cited his experience making films in Africa as qualifying him to comment on African life. He states that “as a gesture to local opinion we first presented *Men of Two Worlds* in public in Dar-es Salaam...” and goes on to report that the reception of the film was positive.³⁶⁷ Some letters did come to the defence of Dickinson, articulating opinions that men from colonial countries who were educated in Great Britain often felt conflicted.³⁶⁸ However, those who did defend the film also referred to the peoples in the colonial nations as “backward” and thus reproduced ideas to which M.C. Peterside took issue in the first place.³⁶⁹ Peterside responded to the letters by stating: “I cannot see how our two peoples can cooperate together for common good in the new colonial partnership if (we) continue to misunderstand and misrepresent each other...”³⁷⁰

The film failed to offer any meaningful evolution beyond the screen treatment of Africa presented in the 1930s. The obvious comparisons with *Song of Freedom* are, in fact, unflattering to any progressive impulses driving *Men of Two Worlds*, since the film lacks both the charisma of Paul Robeson and the autonomous narrative agency

³⁶⁵ John Grimwade, "'Men of Two Worlds'," *The Times*, 13 Sept 1946. The BFI Library.

³⁶⁶ John Mahoney, "'Men of Two Worlds'," *The Times*, 13 Sept 1946. The BFI Library.

³⁶⁷ Thorold Dickinson, "Men of Two Worlds," *The Times*, 12 Sept 1946.

³⁶⁸ A.G. Dickson and John Harrison, "Men of Two Worlds," *The Times*, 16 Sept 1946.

³⁶⁹ See for example, N.A. Kenyon-Slaney, "Men of Two Worlds," *The Times*, 19 Sept 1946.

See also, Thorold Dickinson and N.A. Kenyon-Slaney, "Men of Two Worlds," *The Times*, 25 Sept 1946.

³⁷⁰ M.C. Peterside, "Africa and the Africans," *The Times*, 27 Sept 1946.

granted to his character in the earlier film. It was clear that advocacy for continued British governance in Africa needed a new ideological and dramatic template to make itself appear credible and relevant. And just such a template was discovered by Ealing Studios at the start of the following decade by exploiting a new public interest in nature conservation.

Where No Vultures Fly (also released as *Ivory Hunter*) (1951), and its sequel *West of Zanzibar* (1954), offer a different perspective on colonial oversight in the post-war world. These films offer a partly critical outlook on the problems colonisation brought to African wildlife and the land itself. *Where No Vultures Fly* begins by explaining that before the settler population arrived an equilibrium between wildlife and mankind was in existence, but when the British came too much hunting and grazing began to deplete the wildlife population. The film then focuses on one man's attempts, Bob Payton (Anthony Steel), to restore the wildlife population by setting up a game reserve. He fights opposition from the government, farmers and poachers. The primary antagonist is not one of the native population but a settler intent on continuing the ivory trade. In this way this film takes on a point of view that gives credence to contemporary criticisms of the legacy of colonialism. However, a game reserve established by the settler population that regulates traditional activities of the native population is, of course, another form of colonisation and interference in native land. Setting aside land for the use of native animals represents a contradiction in that it designates land for the protection of native life but often at the expense of the native peoples.³⁷¹ This is aptly demonstrated in the film by the treatment of the Maasai tribal farmers, who must be kept off the reserve to keep their

³⁷¹ See Jane Carruthers, "Nationhood and National Parks: Comparative Examples from the Post-Imperial Experience," in *Ecology and Empire: Environmental History of Settler Societies*, ed. Tom Griffiths and Libby Robin (Edinburgh: Keele University Press, 1997).

animals from infecting the native wildlife with agricultural viruses. The very idea behind national parks is based upon land policies originally designed to reinforce a territorial nationalist consciousness in the West.³⁷² “In establishing the game parks of Africa, European law turned indigenous human inhabitants of the ‘nature reserves’ into poachers, invaders in their own terrain, or into part of the wildlife.”³⁷³

A key scene toward the end of the film between Mannering (Harold Warrender), the villainous English poacher, and Bob anticipates the growing nationalism in African countries.

Mannering: “Why waste your time preserving wild animals, as if it matters. Does anything matter in this godforsaken country? ... You still think Africa’s a fine place, a place to be saved... Africa’s finished there’s nothing here for the white man. Someday that black scum is going spread over the face of it and blot us out. The only thing to do is take all you can as fast as you can now, before it’s too late and get out while the going’s good.”

Payton: “You’re out of date, this is the new Africa and there’s no place for you...”

Mannering: “And what has [Africa] ever done for you? Don’t waste your time defending Africa, it won’t thank you.”

This exchange presents a curiously skewed perspective on the politics of decolonisation. Here retreat from Africa is presented as the route taken by bigoted mercenaries, whilst the continuation of white stewardship of the continent's natural resources is a wholly noble course of action. However, the manner in which Payton participates in the “new Africa” is in many ways parallel to the way in which Africa had existed, since the settlers arrived, taking land for purposes beneficial to the British community. That is, while his intentions seem noble, he is looking after the “Empire’s

³⁷² Ibid. 125

³⁷³ Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991). 223.
Also, cited in Webster. 72.

great resources,” with little interest in what the African community wants or needs from their own land.

The critical and commercial success of *Where No Vultures Fly* led to the production of a sequel, *West of Zanzibar*, in which support for wildlife conservation is more manifestly a smokescreen pretext for the justification of nakedly colonialist attitudes. The story is based around the same characters, who are still staving off ivory poachers. The film opens on scenes of ships sailing around the coast of Africa. The narration, provided by Bob Payton (played by Anthony Steel again), explains how the historical slave trade between Africa and Arab nations has been replaced by an equally destructive form of commerce: “Not long ago these vessels traded in slaves, black gold...now it is ivory.” Payton is now involved with helping the Galana tribe move to a new location because the land they currently live on is no longer fertile and not conducive to farming. The members of the tribe vote to move closer to the coast however and closer to the urban centre, rather than the new land recommended by the settlers and preferred by their tribal leader, Ushingo (Edric Connor). The tribe moves to the new land, but it is not long before they enter into the ivory trade due to the money that can be made. Payton finds some of the Galana tribesmen poaching on the game reserve he oversees and returns them to the tribe but scolds Ushingo for allowing his men to poach. Ushingo challenges Payton to find the man responsible for “tempting” his men into the trade. Payton begins his own investigation into who is behind the ivory trade and finds that an Arab trader, the Dhow Captain (Sheik Abdullah) as he is known, is largely responsible for the ivory trade. After several failed attempts to prove he is behind it, Payton and his warden, M’Kwongi (Orlando Martins, who played a minor role in *Where No Vultures Fly*), chase after the poachers and eventually catch the traders on their ship but not before

Ushingo is shot by poachers and dies. The film ends with Ushingo's son, Bethlehem (Bethlehem Sketch) taking up the role as leader over the Galana and moving the tribe to higher land, the more fertile land that had been recommended to them by the settlers.

The film clearly resembles *Men of Two Worlds* in major plot points as well as thematically. The tribe in *West of Zanzibar* need to be looked after under the paternal care of the British settler community. When Payton is speaking to the tribe about where to move he says that the white man must tell them where to go and recommends the fertile land the settlers have laid out for them but Ushingo agrees that his tribe is "not ready for civilization." This sentiment is reiterated several more times to Payton that "we need you more than the animals." When Bethlehem states at the end of the film "we need to learn to walk before we can run," he is referring to the inability of the Galana to cope with urban life. Payton prefaces this comment with "Look after them [the Galana], it's your job as much as ours..." This can almost be directly taken as a metaphor of the settlers guiding the African native community to a Western democratic model of living.

The film also revisits a theme that was present in *Sanders of the River*: the deflection of blame for the slave trade. In this instance the beginning narration implicates the Arab traders for the slave trade in East Africa. It furthermore charges the settler community to help the African natives from outside corruption. As Ushingo begs Payton, "remove the temptation." He refers to the money that can be made by joining the ivory trade, perpetuated by the demand in the Arab world. Therefore, when Ushingo suggests later in the film that he has lost power within the tribe because his people "will not listen" the implication is that the tribe needs Payton. This is underscored by the conversation between Payton and the District Commissioner

when Payton is pressing the District Commissioner to make arrests regarding the ivory trade. The District Commissioner, after relating the hard task of catching ivory traders, asks of the Galana “Are we to blame that they have become money conscious?” The blame for bringing a capitalistic system and then reducing the African community to the status of cheap wage labour is otherwise placed entirely on the legacy of Arab exploitation.

At one point in the film, Payton confronts the lawyer for the Arab traders, who states that the “world cannot wait for the primitive black man... they are doomed to be savage.” Even though these sentiments are projected by the antagonists in the film, the narrative nevertheless underscores such sentiments repeatedly. A scene in which M’Kwongi is arrested for grabbing a woman sexually illustrates the way in which the film portrays the African characters as irredeemably primitive. There are many scenes of Payton and his wife embracing and kissing; all of these scenes are filmed in bright daylight and last no longer than a few moments. The scene which builds up to M’Kwongi being arrested shows M’Kwongi in the dark, so dark in fact that his features can barely be made out (figure 6.1). The woman is African and smiling shyly but dancing wildly. He dances exuberantly with large motions, and laughs as if drunk; before chasing after her until, taking it too far, she cries for help and he is arrested. The discrepancy between the scenes showing Mary and Bob expressing affection and M’Kwongi showing affection toward the young woman equates to a binary opposition between civilised and uncivilised cultures.



6.1 Orlando Martins dancing in *West of Zanzibar*

Whilst *Where No Vultures Fly* had been applauded as an ideal family film, *West of Zanzibar* received largely negative reviews. Wendy Webster attributes this to the timing of its release: "...the major image of Kenya was one of fear, showing a savage and murderous place where no white settler could feel secure against the atavistic Mau Mau."³⁷⁴ The sequel's failure to adequately deal with the realities of Kenya's political turmoil in the mid-1950s is also demonstrated by the fact that it was banned in Kenya, being considered offensive to the native community. The final British film under consideration in this chapter escaped such condemnation by adopting a more avowedly "honest" look at the crisis of British rule in East Africa.

Simba deals directly with the Mau-Mau rebellion which began in 1952, and only ended in 1960, five years after this film was released. The unsettling beginning of the film opens on the Kenyan landscape, as an African man on a bike rides across the road. When the man hears the desperate calls of a badly beaten farmer on the side of the road, he dismounts from his bike, walks over to the injured man and takes out a

³⁷⁴ See "Film Reviews," *Daily Mail*, 6 Nov 1951. The BFI Library. And "Film Reviews: 'Where No Vultures Fly'," *Daily Telegraph*, 6 Nov 1951. The BFI Library. Webster. 125.

machete and strikes the farmer until he is dead. He then returns to his bike and rides back the way he came. The man killed was David Howard, a man of British descent. His brother, Alan Howard (Dirk Bogarde), arrives from Britain to find his brother has been killed by the Mau Mau and becomes bitter toward the native population. Mary Crawford (Virginia McKenna) his childhood friend and a friend of the family defends the native population, suggesting that the inequities of colonial rule have brought the rebellion upon the British. A scene a little later on introduces Dr. Karanja (Earl Cameron), a Western educated Kenyan man who runs a dispensary for African people. Mary assists him in the dispensary. They discuss the recent events of David's death, while outside the police are interviewing African men about David's murder and the uprising. Karanja's father, Simba (Orlando Martins), is acting as a translator for the police.³⁷⁵ As the interview is taking place one man tries to run away and is shot by the police. A later scene shows a secret meeting taking place in the wilderness as men in tribal wear take an oath and are marked (a cut on the chest) for the rebellion against the British settler group. Back on the Howard farm, Alan is trying to rebuild his brother's farm and a little native boy arrives. The boy, Joshua, does not speak, and Alan's farm hand says that the boy's parents were killed by the rebels.

Meanwhile, Alan is getting death threats from the rebel group to leave Africa. He is attacked in his home, and his cattle as well as some of his farm hands are killed. His growing distrust of the native population comes to a head when he has an outburst in front of Dr. Karanja. Soon after, Mary's parents are attacked by the rebel group; her father is killed and her mother (Marie Nay) is taken to the hospital. This prompts Dr. Karanja to confess to the police that the leader of the rebel group is actually his father. The police set out to search for Simba but he has prepared for this and the

³⁷⁵ Martins has featured in most of the films discussed in this chapter, including having played Magole in *Men of Two Worlds*.

rebel group readies itself to destroy the farm. The doctor comes to warn Mary and they realise a mob is on its way to Alan's farm. Meanwhile, Alan finds Joshua and is desperately trying to defend himself and the boy against the rebels. When Mary and Dr. Karanja arrive, Dr. Karanja steps out between his father and the group in an effort to stop them. However he is shot and dies in Mary's arms as the police arrive. The final scene shows Alan and Mary holding the doctor in their arms as Joshua walks up and silently looks on with a face of bewilderment and confusion.

Trying to represent a liberal view of the Mau Mau uprising, the film boasts an avowedly "balanced" portrayal of each groups' grievances.³⁷⁶ An article published when the film was in production documents how Anthony Perry, the scriptwriter, was sent to Kenya in secret to research for the film. The goal was to write the script with an unbiased view of the conflict. The article states that Perry went there so "that the settlers, not knowing such a film was planned, would speak more freely."³⁷⁷ The article then goes on to describe the view of the various settlers that the filmmakers encountered. The article empathises with the "less belligerent settlers" while showing "disgust" with the more unreasonable, violent and fear-driven settlers.³⁷⁸ While the article acknowledges how sensitive the subject matter of the film is, it does not express any interest in the point of view of the native population.

Many of the reviews for the film echoed sentiments in contemporary newspaper articles on the Mau Mau revolt, using rhetoric that reflected the panic felt by the settler population in Kenya. The words "horror", "tragedy", and "terror" were used time and again by critics of the film, often to describe the real life situation in

³⁷⁶ Matt White, "Rank Begins Mau Mau Terrorist Film: 'We Must Take Great Care'," *News Chronicle* 9 June 1954. The BFI Library.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ For example, the two main actors, Dirk Bogarde and Virginia McKenna, showed disgust when a settler asked them to go out shooting members of the Mau Mau.

Kenya, which many felt was aptly and sympathetically handled by the film. The *Daily Telegraph* called it an "honest film on [the] Mau Mau..."³⁷⁹ A review which appeared in the *Daily Mail* also hailed the film as offering the "truth."³⁸⁰ Other critics identified a blend of satisfying genre spectacle and sobering authenticity, with one reviewer characterising *Simba* as a "cowboy-Indian epic" while noting the present reality of the Mau Mau situation.³⁸¹ The film provoked a lot of press discussion on the film itself as well as the Mau Mau situation in Kenya in general but few critics found fault with the film; many in fact praised its bold exploration of the uprising.³⁸² Probably the most provocative critical voice on the film was an article published in the *Tribune* which excoriated the racism of the settler community in Kenya before praising the film for offering alternatives to conventional Kenyan settler attitudes. It did, however, note that *Simba* falls short of appropriately demonstrating the entire reason for the uprising. And it perceptively notes that the tone of the film promotes "benevolent paternalism."³⁸³ However, overall the tone of the reviews can be said to parallel the attitude presented in the propaganda and attitudes in press in Britain at the time. The Mau Mau were presented as savage terrorists and the press largely sympathised with the Kenyan settlers' fear of the revolt.

³⁷⁹ C. Dixon, "Mau Mau Laid Bare," *Daily Telegraph*, 22 Jan 1955. The BFI Library.

³⁸⁰ Fred Majdalany, "If You Were ...Kenya's Night," *Daily Mail*, 21 Jan 1955. The BFI Library.

³⁸¹ Whitley, "Now - Tough Guy Bogarde!," *Daily Mirror*, 21 Jan 1955. The BFI Library.

See also, W.D. Hove, "Stand up and Cheer - for a Picture That Shows How to Handle a Horror Story," *Evening Standard*, 20 Jan 1955. The BFI Library.

D. Powell, "Film Review: *Simba*," *Sunday Times*, 23 Jan 1955. The BFI Library.

³⁸² *The Daily Worker* and *Saturday Review* give a less than favourable review but most mainstream British papers praise the film.

Thomas Spencer, "This Film Disgraces Britain," *Daily Worker*, 19 Jan 1955. The BFI Library.

"Film Review: *Simba*," *Saturday Review*, 15 Oct 1955. The BFI Library.

³⁸³ "Mau Mau - on the Screen," *Tribune*, 28 Jan 1955. The BFI Library.

In actuality horrors were perpetrated on both sides of the conflict. While settler farmers, their families, and small children were hacked to death with machetes, there was equally vicious violence done toward the Kikuyu population. Anyone suspected of aiding the Mau Mau revolution was rounded up, and put in detention camps, and often tortured.³⁸⁴ The stories of torture according to Caroline Elkins display more than just wartime tactics but the acts of men with a sadistic nature.³⁸⁵ *Simba* does not reveal the torture taking place in the detention camps. However, it may also be said that little was publically known of the torture going on, and hence the filmmakers may not have been aware of these circumstances.

The film does attempt a liberal agenda, inviting the audience to be critical of racist settlers, particularly Mary's father. At the beginning of the film, Mary talks to Alan about her love of Kenya, "her home." However, she also laments the path that the country has taken lately, referring to the Mau Mau uprising. Mary is unwaveringly sympathetic to the Kikuyu population, even when her parents are killed by the Mau Mau. An important conversation at the beginning of the film demonstrates how set apart her attitude is from that of her parents and the general settler population. While her father states that the Africans are like children, "barely down from the trees" when the settlers arrived, Mary argues for greater sympathy for and understanding toward the native community. In a later scene, at a meeting of settlers discussing how to protect themselves from the dissident Mau Mau group, Mary's parents state that they feel betrayed by the Africans, implying that the British have brought nothing but positive benefits to the Kenyan population. In fact, Kikuyu land was stolen by the

³⁸⁴ See David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: Britain's Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2005).

See also, Wunyabari O. Maloba, *Mau Mau and Kenya: An Analysis of a Peasant Revolt* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

³⁸⁵ Elkins. 80-1.

settler population and a system of forced wage labour introduced. But, whilst it is clear that the audience is meant to take a partly critical view of Mary's parents, Mary herself never satisfactorily explains her alternative outlook. Christine Geraghty points out that "Mary's liberal position is based largely on emotion and she cannot articulate a clear political way forward."³⁸⁶

Mary wishes to bridge the cultural discontent between the Kikuyu and the white settlers. When Karanja states that her working with him is an important symbol to his people, she replies "and mine." Yet, the dispensary is also a symbol of benevolent Westernisation. Moreover, Mary ends up coming to Alan's farm to defend it from attack; as a demonstration of her final ideological marriage to Alan's way of thinking. Much like Anna Carpenter in *Rhodes of Africa*, Mary offers a liberal view of the Mau Mau situation but then embraces the dominant discourse by aligning herself to Alan. The discourse between the settlers shows a psychological battle to not give into racism while protecting their farms and families.

Mary states in the film that she feels caught up in a flood: this statement is followed by the infamous oath scene. The ceremony shows men drinking blood and eating raw flesh, which is only partially historically accurate. In reality eating goat flesh was an important part of the oath, but little is known of the actual ceremony, as few former Mau Maus will talk about it. Therefore, the ritual is largely a work of imagination.³⁸⁷ It would not be a stretch to argue that this conception of the oath ceremony is a return to the 1930s portrayal of the African witch doctor. Additionally, the way the oath ceremony is lit is particularly important in contrast to the way the

³⁸⁶ Christine Geraghty, *British Cinema in the Fifties: Gender, Genre and the 'New Look'* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000). 121.

³⁸⁷ See Elkins. According to Elkins former members of the Mau Mau do not discuss the oath ceremony as it is forbidden to do so. Hence, there are very few accounts of what it actually consisted of.

rest of the film is lit. It is filmed in “velvety blackness in which the limited light sources fall sideways across shadowy, watching faces.”³⁸⁸ This scene, as well as the scene in which the Mau Mau attack Alan’s farm, shows the Mau Mau members surrounded in darkness or emerging from it. This lighting strategy associates the Mau Mau with darkness, fear and terror, while the white settlers are often filmed in daylight or lit so that their features are more distinguishable (figure 6.2).³⁸⁹ Moreover, the violence in the scene suggests that the Mau Mau are uncivilised, especially when compared to the scene in which the settlers gather together to discuss the Mau Mau protests in an organized, democratic manner. The contrasting perspective of the situation as well as the differing manner in which they are filmed offers sharp distinctions in how the characters are to be viewed. While the settlers at the meeting are in a well lit, white room sitting calmly, the characters at the oath ceremony are minimally lit by fire, sitting on the floor looking upward to Simba, suggesting they are metaphorically on unequal ground with their leader and that they are mere followers of the cause, not on par with their leader as the settlers are with one another. Furthermore, the oath takers’ positions or reasons for partaking in the revolt are not examined: while many settlers in the film voice opinions, the native characters are largely silent.

³⁸⁸ Geraghty. 122.

³⁸⁹ It may be added that the witch doctor scenes in *Men of Two Worlds* shares a similar lighting strategy.



6.2 A contrast between meetings in *Simba*

The film also misrepresents why the Mau Mau killed Kikuyu loyalists. Most loyalists belonged to either the militia which participated in the torture of other Kikuyu or to the elite chiefs who were given fertile land to push other Kikuyu off settler land. These individuals had a lot to lose if the Mau Mau were successful and therefore joined the British counter fight. In the film, Alan asks Kimani why the Mau Mau killed his family, and the answer is that it is because he wouldn't join the Mau Mau. Moreover, the film plays up the superstition of the native population. In the scene in which Karanja's father is nearly killed by the lion, Inspector Drummond (Donald Sinden) tells Alan that the native people believe that if Simba is killed by the lion his spirit would live on in the lion. He states later that Simba has made the Mau Mau believe that the white man's bullets will not harm them. Statements like these perpetuate an idea that African people are childlike, and by extension incapable of governing themselves. The traumatic ending to the film, in which Karanja states "Maybe we do not deserve peace, but he (Joshua) has done nothing wrong" crystalises this idea.

The ending of the film offers a powerful image in favour of continued Western oversight in Africa. The two white settlers, Alan and Mary, caring for the dying doctor, are also now burdened with the responsibility of the orphaned Joshua. This

strong image of the child being cared for by white settlers is a conventional emblem for the idea that the African native population still need to be cared for by the British. It is an image of paternalism that undermines the more liberal signals that the films sends out. We may thus conclude that *Simba* merely gestures towards a critical view of the legacy of Empire. It acknowledges the political complexity of the situation, and thus earned credibility as a serious work of realism, but it ultimately ends up endorsing the same paternalistic ideology as *West of Zanzibar*.

Hollywood and African Nationalism

The appeal of Africa for Hollywood film producers in the 1950s is perhaps best summed up in a memo written by 20th Century Fox vice-president Darryl F. Zanuck concerning the production of *White Witch Doctor* (1953):

... We do not want a picture based on the “exploits of an African missionary.” We do not want a picture of a woman “struggling for courage in the African jungle.” We want a picture about two interesting, exciting people, a story full of physical excitement, physical violence and sex. We do not want a picture about a woman’s struggles to cope with sickness and locusts and other depressing things. We want a story of sex attraction and conflict between a man and a woman, against the background of this exciting country...³⁹⁰

The mindset illuminated here is clear: Africa was useful as a source of exotic and colourful scenery, but the opportunity for exploration of colonial politics was not part of its core attraction.

That core attraction was definitively established in an enormous box office hit made at the start of the decade: MGM’s 1950 remake of *King Solomon’s Mines*.³⁹¹

The *King Solomon’s Mines* of 1950 only vaguely resembles the 1937 version and if

³⁹⁰ Rudy Behlmer, ed. *Memo from Darryl F. Zanuck: The Golden Years at Twentieth Century-Fox* (New York: Grove Press, 1993). 208.

³⁹¹ *King Solomon’s Mines* was MGM’s biggest success of the year, grossing just under \$10 million at the domestic box office. David Eldridge, *Hollywood’s History Films* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 44.

two films did not share the same source text and title they would barely resemble each other at all. The later version begins by promising a new level of visual authenticity, with its on-screen declaration of gratitude to the governments of the Protectorate Belgian Congo and the Tanganyika Uganda Protectorate, Kenya Colony for allowing this to be the first American fictional feature film to be shot in Africa in colour. However, unlike the 1937 version, native Africans are firmly relegated to the background of the drama. The key character of Umbopo, previously played, of course, by Paul Robeson, is allocated a fraction of Robeson's screen time, and is played by a non-actor member of the Watusi tribe. The Breen Office's censorship records for this film show a determination to avoid any reference which may be deemed relevant to the politics of imperialism. Thus a scene in which the villainous (but crucially white) character of Van Brun kicked a native tribesman was expunged to avoid any suggestion of interracial cruelty.³⁹² It is perhaps more telling that even a line of narration simply characterising Africa as indomitable - "Nothing could conquer her. Not even time" - was ordered to be removed, presumably because some form of comment concerning the strength of British imperial authority could have been inferred.³⁹³

King Solomon's Mines became the template for Hollywood films about Africa for the remainder of the decade. Zanuck's determinedly apolitical *White Witch Doctor* made three years later follows the exact same narrative formula and similarly features: an adventure in uncharted and unconquered territory, a white hunter protagonist weary of Africa and the plundering of its wildlife, and a white woman who journeys to Africa out of guilt, is frequently chided for being out of place there,

³⁹² Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS, MPPA: Rudy Behlmer Papers: Joseph Breen to LB Meyer, 8 Aug 1949, 85.

³⁹³ See Script notes, Andrew Marton Papers, Margaret Herrick Library.

but ultimately earns the respect and love of the hero through the way she copes with adversity. Although there was a relative boom in African set A-class Hollywood films in the first half of the decade compared with the 1930s (for example, *The African Queen* (1951), *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* (1952), *Mogambo* (1953)), their complete avoidance of the subject of colonial governance ultimately constitutes a clear continuity with pre-war production policies. Direct treatment of, and reflection on, the rule of whites over blacks still apparently remained a taboo subject.

Chapter Three suggested that this abstinence was a logical consequence of the obvious political parallels to be drawn with political controversies over America's denial of basic rights and liberties to its own substantial population of black descendants of African slaves. The fact that American filmmakers were deeply conscious of the analogies to be made can be definitively established through analysis of the one Hollywood film made in this decade which does take on the politics of colonial Africa and directly confronts the subject of Britain's faltering hold on its colonies. *Something of Value* (1957) is the Hollywood counterpart of *Simba*: a drama set amidst the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya. Based on a novel of the same name by Robert Ruark, the film follows the novel closely in some ways but varies in other important respects. Joel Foreman argues that the 1955 novel was heavily influenced by the press's reporting of the situation, particularly in *Time* magazine. The Mau Mau was accused of being a Communist front by Elizabeth Hoyt, in "Dark Road to Kenya."³⁹⁴ This was one of several articles published by *Time* that shaped not only Ruark's novel but general American opinion of the uprising. Foreman therefore argues that the novel was shaped by the "same discursive forces that informed *Time's*

³⁹⁴ Foreman. 84-5.

reportage.”³⁹⁵ Yet, the film takes a far more liberal and sympathetic view than the novel, which frequently portrays the main Kiyuku character in a less than flattering light, as a weak man seduced by gambling and drinking. The film, as I will show, takes a very different approach to the characterisation of Kimani, aided by the strategic casting of Sidney Poitier in the role. One would expect a more liberal approach than that taken by the source novel from *Something of Value*’s writer and director Richard Brooks. Brooks's previous films such as *The Brick Foxhole* (1947), *Brute Force* (1947), *Storm Warning* (1950), *Crisis* (1951), and *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), all explore liberal perspectives and a sympathy for minority groups. *Storm Warning* and *Blackboard Jungle* in particular treat issues of race with sensitivity and embrace the liberal agenda for race equality.³⁹⁶ *Something of Value* seems to have been embarked upon with similar motivations.

The film opens on scenes showing everyday life in Kenya, switching from the native African people carrying out labour and farm work for the British settlers. At the start of the film it is revealed that Peter McKenzie (Rock Hudson) and Kimani Wa Karanja (Sidney Poitier) have been raised together like brothers. Peter’s family owns a farm and Kimani’s family works for the farm as a paid labourer. Shortly into the narrative, Kimani’s father (Ken Renard) is put in jail for killing his newborn child; according to the belief system held by the Kikuyu in the film, since the child entered the world “feet first” it is a demon and should be killed. Henry McKenzie (Walter Fitzgerald), Peter’s father, tries to defend Kimani’s father, on the grounds that he was adhering to his own customs, but he is still held to the law and so remains in prison. Soon after, Kimani flees the farm and joins the Mau Mau. Five years go by and Holly

³⁹⁵ Ibid. 85.

Robert Chester Ruark, *Something of Value* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1955).

³⁹⁶ Ibid. 93-4.

(Dana Wynter), Peter's lover, returns from England after being away at school. She and Peter get married around the same time the Mau Mau partake in an oath ceremony. Kimani then leads an attack on the McKenzie farm, killing Peter's brother-in-law Jeff Newton (Robert Beatty), injuring Elizabeth Newton (Wendy Hiller), Peter's sister, and killing their children. In retaliation the settlers take up arms and raid the Mau Mau camp; and then torture a Mau Mau member to obtain the name of the leader, Njogu (Juano Hernandez). Njogu reveals the local membership of the Mau Mau as well as telling Peter that it was Kimani who led the attack on the McKenzie farm. Peter goes looking for Kimani to offer him terms of a peaceful surrender. However, one of the other settlers hears of this meeting, beats Peter to it and begins attacking Kimani's group. Many of them are killed and Kimani flees with his infant son. Peter finds him but Kimani will no longer agree to a peaceful surrender. As he tries to attack Peter he falls into a trap he has made and is impaled on spikes. His dying wish is that Peter bury him with his son. Peter denies him this and takes Kimani's son to be raised with his sister's newborn child, hoping that the future will be better for them.

As with *Simba, Something of Value* demonstrates a conflicted value judgment on the Mau Mau situation. It is clear the film attempts to understand the Mau Mau uprising from a sympathetic liberal perspective. For example, Peter's father states that imposing Western laws on the Kikuyu is unfair. He makes the point that "We take away their customs, their habits, their religion. We stopped their tribal dances, we stop them circumcising their women. Then we offer them our way of life, something they can't grasp." He therefore highlights a fundamental flaw in colonial justice: that Western values are imposing themselves onto a native population with its own set of values. He subsequently brings up the subject of unfair wage practices. The film also

does not hold back on showing the dark side of settler justice when a settler tortures a member of the Mau Mau to obtain knowledge of who their leader is. This more balanced approach goes a step further than *Simba*, evolving from showing the settlers' angry and fearful outbursts to showing the actual violent response to the Mau Mau uprising. The scene is quite graphic in the manner that the audience hears the screams of the man being tortured and then sees his physical condition afterward, suggesting he has been violently beaten and had an eye removed. The film also endeavours to explore the native side of the uprising through the scene in which Adam Marenga (Frederick O'Neal) speaks to the Mau Mau members. He emphasises the underlying reasons why they have cause for the uprising: the desire for freedom. He also speaks of the historical violence imposed on the Kikuyu by the settler population, as well as the unfair policies that were used by the settlers to steal the land from the Kikuyu.

However, there are various other narrative and textual strategies employed by the film which serve to undermine these liberal impulses. The opening credits emphasise the main characters as the settlers within the film, and do not give significant recognition to the African characters. Moreover, Edward Wiltse points out that the scenes in the beginning of the film showing the native workers and the black school children in their "British-style school uniforms" are contrasted with the later scenes of the Mau Mau, who are portrayed as savage and primitive. Such imagery effectively categorises the British influenced Africans as "good" and the ones resisting British culture as "bad."³⁹⁷ Moreover, the oath ceremony, as with the one in *Simba*, is riddled with problematic images. The ceremony is again characterised by low-level lighting and superstition. The ritualistic nature of the rite contrasts with the

³⁹⁷ Edward Wiltse, "The "Mau Mau" in Hollywood: 'Something of Value' and Counterinsurgency from Algiers to Alabama," in *Ngugi Wa Thiong'o: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Charles Cantalupo (Trenton: African World Press, 1995). 73.

settlers' way of life, not just in the way it is lit but in the way settler life is conceived of as normal. In the scene in which Holly and Peter's family come to Holly's room and speak to her about marrying Peter, they sarcastically suggest she act like a Kikuyu wife and shave her head. This scene highlights the disparity between settler and native life and creates sympathy and identification for the former at the expense of the latter.

Kenneth Cameron identifies frequent "juxtapositions" within the film which present binary oppositions between the races. The "happy family scenes of wedding planning" within Holly and Peter's family is contrasted with the primitive savagery of the oath ceremony scenes.³⁹⁸ Moreover,

The combination of immaturity and terror situated the Mau Mau at the negative pole of the savage/civilized binary opposition, one that the U.S. public had seen acted out frequently in filmic encounters between whites and peoples of color in the American West. The generic elements of the western – a wilderness, the bloodthirsty primitives, the irrational slaughter of innocents, the noble white defenders of law and order – are deployed in the account of the Mau Mau: Africa was like the frontier, the Mau Mau were like the 'Indians,' the Kenyan Euro-settlers were like cowboys and sodbusters.³⁹⁹

Envisioned in this way, the film can be seen as yet another defence of Empire achieved by dressing it in the garb of the American West.⁴⁰⁰ However, as other scholars have previously noted, *Something of Value* is evidently much more preoccupied with exploring another parallel with the Mau Mau uprising in contemporary American history: the American Civil Rights movement. Americans

³⁹⁸ Cameron. 120.

³⁹⁹ Foreman. 80.

⁴⁰⁰ Peter Limbrick, *Making Settler Cinemas: Film and Colonial Encounters in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand* (New York, N.Y. and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

saw the Mau Mau in terms of “pre-existing categories” and therefore gave specific “American meanings” to the Mau Mau revolt.⁴⁰¹

The analogy is highlighted in various ways. Winston Churchill’s quote at the end of the film underscores it: “The problems of East Africa are the problems of the world.” This quote clearly invites the audience to make comparisons with the predicament of the African American community and their struggle for civil liberties in the United States. The question of black civil rights is insistently foregrounded in the opening scenes when Kimani is shown to be denied the same social privileges as Peter and is slapped and humiliated as punishment for minor insolence. Although the film clearly aims to use a crisis of British imperial governance to highlight racial injustice on American soil, and thereby urge greater tolerance on both fronts, this liberal agenda is most forcefully undermined by *Something of Value*’s narrative climax. In emulation of the ending of *Simba*, Peter takes Kimani’s child to be raised alongside his nephew. Again an African child is allegorically presented as the most apt symbol of its people and thus as the continuing responsibility of a British/settler character. When Kimani says to Peter that his people have made previous attempts for their liberties and that violence has become their last resort, Peter only retorts that they must “try again, and again, and again.” This sentiment does little to acknowledge the violence imposed on the native community, nor the inequality and dehumanizing treatment they have endured. The film is therefore very conflicted: while it makes an attempt to show inequality in colonial life as a means also of examining African American injustices, it ultimately endorses paternalism and condemns violence as acts of terrorism, robbing the colonised protagonists of all moral authority and definitively transferring the cause of justice to their white counterparts.

⁴⁰¹ Foreman. 81.

Joel Foreman argues that:

Up until its closing moments the Brooks film works to construct and sustain this possibility [of equality and interdependence], at which point the narrative reverses its ideological polarity and reveals how much it is constrained by the same discursive forces that shaped Robert Ruark's novel.⁴⁰²

We might explain the film's compromised politics in a different way and say that *Something of Value* ends by disavowing its own liberal intentions as a result of the fact that it so closely follows exactly the same narrational and ideological strategies as its direct British forbear *Simba* (and, by extension to *Men of Two Worlds*, *Where No Vultures* and *West of Zanzibar*). I would further like to suggest that the similarities between these two groups of films represent perhaps the most profound example of how British and American screen representations of the British Empire came to share an almost symbiotic unity of ideological purpose in the post-war era. In my previous chapter, I identified an increasing confluence and synergy in the approach of these two film industries to the subject of India, and I explained this with reference to the increased post-war alignment between Britain and America in the geo-political sphere, and the degree to which America's foreign policy aims were becoming congruent with Britain's vision of the political role of the Commonwealth. *Something of Value* represents an instance where Britain's colonial legacy was used to shine a light on the most pressing issue in American *domestic* politics. It seems particularly momentous, therefore, that in this case also such strong sympathy for the burdens and responsibilities of an imperial power is so keenly felt and expressed.

⁴⁰² Foreman. 52.

My final chapter will examine how the politics of representation were negotiated in the case of another thorny imperial problem which has always been particularly close to American hearts: Ireland.

Chapter Six

Hollywood, Britain and the IRA

“At the turn of the century Britain was the foremost world power and the British Empire stretched over two-thirds of the globe. Despite the extent of its power its most troublesome colony had always been the one closest to it, Ireland.”

- Neil Jordan, *Michael Collins*

One of the most complicated postcolonial imperial-themed film groups to deal with must be those concerning Ireland. Éire, having gained independence from Britain in 1921, remained a Commonwealth country until 1948, when it became the Republic of Ireland. However, ‘the Troubles’, which began after 1921, were a direct result of a section of the population’s discontent with the partition of the country.⁴⁰³ The civil war and acts of violence that have followed throughout the 20th century are a consequence of this controversy. It may appear problematic to classify the Irish-themed films as ripe for study in the same manner as Indian and African-themed films are considered postcolonial. However, considering Ireland remained a Commonwealth country until 1948 and was still struggling for unification well into the 20th century, this should qualify it as a postcolonial nation being addressed on film in the post war era. There are other reasons to consider as well. For example, dissident groups in Ireland most prominently represented by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) predicated violence on the political grounds that Ireland was still occupied by Britain. Furthermore, reactionary groups, including the Loyalists, have committed acts of terrorism in response to the aggression of the IRA.⁴⁰⁴ What emerges is a tense political situation that is comparable to other sites of postcolonial conflict. Acts of terrorism are a common by-product of fights for political sovereignty, and more than

⁴⁰³ The ‘Troubles’ is a term used to refer to the guerrilla warfare fought between the IRA and Northern Irish loyalists, as well as British forces, during the late 20th century.

⁴⁰⁴ The Loyalists are a militant group in Northern Ireland dedicated to promoting the continued stance of Northern Ireland as under British Rule.

a handful of countries reacted similarly to Ireland in response to their colonial status under British rule.

Stephan Howe makes the case, in his introduction to *Ireland and Empire*, that considering Ireland as a former colonial holding is inherently problematic. He argues that since Ireland was integrated into the British Empire over 700 years ago, it must be considered gradual integration rather than colonialism.⁴⁰⁵ He is essentially measuring colonialism as a modern phenomenon. However, even if he is right to assume that colonialism is a product of the modern era, his theory is fundamentally flawed because despite the circumstances in which Ireland was pulled into the British Empire, it remained in the Empire long after Irish resistance to British power in their own country was established. Furthermore, the nature of colonialism is still a fiercely debated topic and scholars disagree as to what fully constitutes colonialism and nationhood. Howe is not the only one to remove Ireland from colonial discussions. Even within film scholarship many avoid discussion of Ireland as a postcolonial nation. Jeffrey Richards does not bring up Ireland at all when discussing colonial cinema and Marcia Landy has barely a page dedicated to the issues surrounding Irish colonial cinema in her otherwise exhaustive monograph. The discussion of Irish imperial film is particularly complex because Ireland's indigenous race is very similar to Britain's in the simple matter that both are racially white. This is perhaps the most notable difference from the native populations of other British colonies. Aside from the Scots and the Welsh, no other native population in the British Empire is of the same race. However, it is clear that from the Victorian era onwards British scholars and social clubs desired to portray the Irish as an inferior race from the British, in much the same way Victorians did to other non-white races. Scholarly journals

⁴⁰⁵ Stephan Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.) 1-6.

charted in a Darwinian manner how the Irish were racially inferior to the British. One such journal has an illustration that shows the Irish race as physically and mentally similar to African races and, following this logic, inferior to the English race (Figure 7.1).⁴⁰⁶ This all contributes to the complexities behind colonial Ireland and the Irish Question.⁴⁰⁷



Figure 7.1 *Harper's Magazine* Illustration of Irish Iberian, Anglo-Teutonic, and Negro

The final part of this thesis constitutes a special case study of British and American film treatments of Ireland in the post-war era. It is first necessary to contextualise this discussion with reference to the complex and controversial history of the representation of conflict in Ireland in pre-war cinema. While it has been shown that Africa was a very sensitive setting for American filmmakers, the statement can be made that both American and British filmmakers considered Irish terrorism an even more sensitive subject. It is often presumed that since many Americans can trace their heritage to Irish roots that Americans felt an empathy for the Irish cause; certainly more than they did for Indian nationalism. However, 1930s censorship records indicate that not only did the BBFC prevent films dealing with the IRA from being

⁴⁰⁶ Originally published in *Harper's Magazine* 1860. Found in L. Perry Curtis, *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature*, Rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997). 9.

Also found in Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997). 53.

⁴⁰⁷ The 'Irish Question' is used to refer to continual issues surrounding Irish nationalism and IRA terrorism. It remained a common term well into the late 20th century.

exhibited, the MPPDA also undertook very careful scrutiny of such films. During the Second World War films concerning Ireland all but disappeared. However, after the war, what can be seen is British and American filmmakers considering IRA themes in a very derogatory fashion. As in the two preceding chapters of this thesis, it can be reasonably speculated that the intensification of the Anglo-American 'special relationship' in the political domain may have had a significant bearing on this development. It is perhaps harder to answer the question of why filmmakers suddenly began taking an interest in Irish terrorism as a cinematic theme. One can hypothesize that censorship policies were relaxed.⁴⁰⁸ One may also guess that after 1948, when Ireland left the Commonwealth, the cause of Irish nationalism became ripe for criticism. It may also stem from the resentment of the British toward the Irish for being the only Commonwealth nation to declare neutrality during the war. Whatever the cause, what is evident is that American and British filmmakers came to develop a particular fascination with the "Irish question." This chapter will show that both groups of filmmakers adopted a dismissive and indignant response to Irish nationalism as will be seen in such films as *I See a Dark Stranger* (1946), *Odd Man Out* (1947), *The Gentle Gunman* (1952), *Shake Hands with the Devil* (1959), and *A Terrible Beauty* (1960).

A Tradition of Censorship: The IRA in the 1930s

The obvious biases which emerge in most Empire films relating to indigenous peoples often highlight religious, colour and educational differences. Concerning the Irish, these differences are not as prominent and hence the management of Irish characters brings up a complex set of associations. What is significant, however, is that the Irish 'troubles' were treated with a degree of special handling on the part of

⁴⁰⁸ See Conclusion in James C. Robertson, *The Hidden Cinema: British Film Censorship in Action, 1913-1972* (London: Routledge, 1989).

the British censors, and consequently the American censors as well. During the 1930s the BBFC showed a predilection to refuse certification to any films referring to the Irish problem. *The Man with the Gun*, an American script, was submitted for approval at the beginning of 1933 and was sternly rejected. The film was about the IRA independence movement in 1921 and featured violence between IRA guerrilla fighters and the Black and Tans. The reviewer cites the reason as being the fact that the film reproduces

...A very controversial period and I strongly urge that the sad and unpleasant memories which both sides to the conflict share, are best left alone and not raked up through the medium of the screen. No matter how the subject is treated, one side or the other will be angered and much harm might result.⁴⁰⁹

A British film which dealt with a similar story, *The General Goes too Far*, was also denied approval three years later in 1936 with the comment “I consider this story impossible for production as a film as the plots and counter-plots are thoroughly sordid and the British officers are portrayed as murderers, blackmailers and thieves.”⁴¹⁰ As Jeffrey Richards has demonstrated, in the 1930s the BBFC had a policy against allowing films to be exhibited if they dealt with current political turmoil.⁴¹¹ This being the case, one can see how the Irish problem would not receive approval. Irish independence had only been achieved roughly a decade earlier. Films dealing with different aspects of Irish independence and the IRA were similarly shot down. A film with the tentative title of *Covenant with Death* or *Love Your Enemy* depicted internal IRA violence. This, too, was considered too politically heated and

⁴⁰⁹ *The Man with the Gun*, BBFC Scenario Report, 8th Feb 1933. The BFI Library.

⁴¹⁰ *The General Goes too Far*, BBFC Scenario Report, 15th May 1936. The BFI Library.

⁴¹¹ See Part 2 in Jeffrey Richards, *Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society 1930-1939* (London and New York, Routledge 1984).

was even passed on to Lord Tyrrell of the Foreign Office to solicit his views, which were firmly disapproving.⁴¹²

The only British film which addressed Ireland in the 1930s, in regard to its colonial past, is *Ourselves Alone* (or *River of Unrest* in America) (1936). The phrase “ourselves alone” is a translation of Sinn Féin. Directed by Brian Desmond Hurst, the film is the “first British film on the War of Independence.”⁴¹³ The film aroused much controversy and was banned in Belfast. John Hill states that this film being granted an exhibition licence was extraordinarily rare as both the BBFC and the MPPDA were keen to prohibit films with this particular theme. The film was even brought up in Northern Ireland Parliamentary debates and Police Committee meetings.⁴¹⁴ As a result of these meetings the film was banned across Northern Ireland. The film was definitively pro-Unionist and pro-British, which may be the reason it received initial approval. However, the result of the controversy surrounding this film left behind a legacy of self-censorship and most filmmakers in the 1930s left the topic alone.

Most British projects dealing with the IRA or Irish independence did not get approval until the very last years of the 1930s.⁴¹⁵ Yet, there were severe restrictions placed upon Hollywood projects as well. The observation by Richards that the treatment of colonial themes in Hollywood scripts met with less scrutiny in the 1930s is not applicable to projects about Ireland, because when it came to this particular topic the BBFC seemed to show no distinction in its criticism. In 1939, an American

⁴¹² *Covenant with Death* or *Your Enemy*, BBFC Scenario Report, 3rd April 1936. The BFI Library.

⁴¹³ Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons, and John Hill, *Cinema and Ireland*, Studies in Film, Television, and the Media (London: Routledge, 1988). 60.

⁴¹⁴ John Hill, *Cinema and Northern Ireland: Film, Culture and Politics* (London: BFI, 2006); *ibid*; Rockett, Gibbons, and Hill. 69-70.

⁴¹⁵ For example, *The Rising*, BBFC Scenario Report, 29th July 1938. The BFI Library. Although it appears that this film was never made, the theme dealt with the “abortive” attempts by the early Fenians in 1866-7 Ireland.

script titled *Irish Story* did not get BBFC approval because it dealt with the civil war that ensued after Irish independence. The reviewer commented, “A very unhappy page of Irish history, and I think would be quite unpopular with the Free State Government. This time the Irish are not fighting the ‘English Invader’, but their own Free State Government.”⁴¹⁶ He strongly recommended not making the film. However, a new script was resubmitted with the story completely reworked and all political tensions and implications stripped. The new scenario was approved with only a bit of reservation: “There is one point of possible doubt, as to whether it would be advisable to publish a film on this subject while the recent outbreak of IRA outrages in Great Britain persist.”⁴¹⁷ The finished product was nothing like the original and was approved and released under the title of *Dr. O’Dowd*.⁴¹⁸ The story was now nothing more than a pastoral fantasy. Furthermore, Louisa Burns-Bisogno shows how production was “deliberately stalled during development.”⁴¹⁹

A film by MGM called *Parnell* (1937) was meant to tell the story of the infamous IRB leader, Charles Stewart Parnell.⁴²⁰ The film was not approved when the script was first submitted, and received a comment that underscores the BBFC’s attitude to such films: “I think we must associate ourselves with the Lord Chamberlain’s views on this stage play and take the line that it is undesirable.”⁴²¹ The second scenario submitted implemented a significant change to the plot which portrays Parnell “broken” at the end of the film; yet the censors still demanded some remaining political implications be removed and only then was it approved. However,

⁴¹⁶ *Irish Story*. BBFC Scenario Report, 8th May 1939. 28. The BFI Library.

⁴¹⁷ *Irish Story*. BBFC Scenario Report, 8th May 1939. The BFI Library.

⁴¹⁸ *Dr. O’Dowd*. BBFC Scenario, 1939. The BFI Library.

⁴¹⁹ Louisa Burns-Bisogno, *Censoring Irish Nationalism* (Jefferson, NC and London, McFarland 1995), 95.

⁴²⁰ The Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) was one of the first organised Irish rebel groups, later many of the IRB members formed the Irish Republican Army (IRA).

⁴²¹ *Parnell*. BBFC Scenario Report, 29th May 1936, The BFI Library.

there is more to the story of how this film developed which sheds light on how American filmmakers dealt with sensitive Irish topics. Joseph Breen was aware of the BBFC's expectations regarding films portraying Ireland. *Parnell* was followed closely by Breen during production, who had learned how to anticipate the BBFC's reaction to topics surrounding Irish independence, hence before it even reached the BBFC it was already heavily stripped of political implications and reduced to a love story starring Clark Gable. Even before Breen was involved the director, John Stahl predicted Breen's reaction to the film and so he had already self-edited the story to a certain extent.

The reason for all this self-editing comes from an experience Breen and the film community in Hollywood had with a labour of love project by John Ford, *The Informer* (1935). When Ford announced he wanted to make the film it threw into motion a reaction which would shape how Hollywood censors subsequently monitored films that touched on contentious Irish issues. Burns-Bisogno investigates the records from the MPPDA, the BBFC, the Legions of Decency, studio memos and communications to demonstrate how the making of *The Informer* "reveals the ultimate effect the influence [such agencies] had on the interpretation of Irish political images."⁴²² A story about a former IRA member who betrays a friend in the organisation, Ford had to fight bitterly to even jump start the project; it took him 5 years to find a studio willing to make the film and when the project was started Breen "monitored (Ford) every step of the way, making suggestions for changes and deletions. So did the BBFC."⁴²³ More than a handful of political scenes or lines were removed from the script before production began. In short, the film was scrutinised

⁴²² Burns-Bisogno, 67.

⁴²³ The BBFC was sent a shooting script directly after Breen received one for approval. Burns-Bisogno, 71.

every step of the way to ensure that it would be passed by both the MPPDAA and the BBFC. After *The Informer* was successfully overseen to production, other films that dealt with controversial Irish topics were hence treated similarly by the MPPDAA and the BBFC. One example is *Parnell* as mentioned before, as well as Ford's *The Plough and the Stars* (1936). These films were stripped of political implications and rewritten to avoid any issues which would offend.⁴²⁴ This led to a tradition of self-censoring and/or highly monitored film projects on the part of American filmmakers right through to the early 1950s when it came to Irish politics. Therefore the majority of films made during the 1930s regarding the Irish were devoid of politically contentious issues.⁴²⁵ The impact of these restrictions is evident in *Border Story* (1937) which portrays the life of an Irish family living on the border of The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The title of the film is misleading and very few political implications were found in the story.⁴²⁶ This film was approved but never made.

There are several films which portray the Irish in the 1930s but are not directly concerned with the Irish or Ireland. These films offer a glimpse into how filmmakers habitually treated Irish culture. Concerning the 1937 version of *King Solomon's Mines*, *Films in Review* commented in passing that "more barbed insults are hurled at the Irish in this particular film [rather than the African characters]."⁴²⁷ Within the film Kathleen and Patsy are just as superstitious as the African tribe they encounter, as shown by their faith in the shamrock necklaces they wear. Moreover, they lie to get aboard Quartermain's wagon, although he is already aware of this and says only, "I know, I've met the Irish before." What is the meaning of including them in this role?

⁴²⁴ This did not stop the film being banned in Belfast until late 1938. Hill. 74.

⁴²⁵ For example, see the *Old Mother Riley* films released. The *Old Mother Riley* films were based on a musical hall act. Seventeen films were released between 1937 and 1952 centring on the character which relies heavily on negative Irish stereotypes.

⁴²⁶ *Border Story*. BBFC Scenario Report, 2nd July 1937. The BFI Library.

⁴²⁷ "No title available." *Films in Review*, 1937. The BFI Library.

One possible reason could be to further demonstrate the effective nature of British colonial rule. Since the two Irish characters are rescued by the English group, this metaphor can be extended; it can be used to demonstrate that English imperial oversight of both the Irish and Africa continues to be both necessary and benevolent. The press materials for the film show Kathleen in a white sleeveless, deep swooping V-neck top (Figure 7.2).⁴²⁸ She wears many pieces of jewellery, which appear to glow. Hence, at a quick glance, she seems to have a white beam around her.⁴²⁹ It may be argued that she is, as the treasure she wears, the object of desire herself. If colonial ideologies are to be applied here, then it can be said that she represents a feminisation of the land just as the original novel implies.⁴³⁰ Anne McClintock argues that this effectively objectifies the land, making colonisation a masculine and positive endeavour. Therefore the use of the Irish in this film serves to reinforce the justification for colonial involvement in Africa.



Figure 7.2 King Solomon's Mines Press Book Advert

⁴²⁸ Press Book for *King Solomon's Mines* (1937), The BFI Library.

⁴²⁹ Dyer. 127.

⁴³⁰ Anne McClintock, "Maidens, Maps and Mines," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 87, no. 1 (1988).

A film mentioned briefly in an earlier chapter is the British production *High Command* (1938). It begins in Ireland during Ireland's fight for Independence in 1921, but the setting moves to Africa to play out a drama whereby a crime of passion committed by a general stationed in Ireland comes back to haunt him a decade later when he is posted to West Africa. The manner in which he is forced to confront his past despite having seemingly cleanly escaped from it to another continent serves to imply a continuity between Britain's current role in Africa and its previous stewardship of Ireland.

Given the stringent censorship policy in the 1930s, British films of this era deal with the Irish question so fleetingly as to make a meaningful comparison with contemporaneous American productions impossible. This was the legacy of censorship that the 1930s left to the next generation of filmmakers. There were very few projects submitted to the BBFC for approval concerning Ireland and the IRA during the Second World War. A few British comical films regarding the Irish could be seen as the product of both wartime mistrust as well as Britain's bitterness that Ireland chose to remain neutral during the war.⁴³¹ As far as surviving records seem to indicate, the only script submitted for approval concerning the IRA was a film called *Twilight on the Border*. The film was to be about a man who repents for his involvement in the IRA.⁴³² Here British filmmakers focus on the horrific nature of IRA violence and the suffering the organisation causes without exploring possible motivations for the formation of the IRA. The film invalidates Irish motivations for the formation of the IRA and chooses to focus mostly on the huge negative impact the

⁴³¹ *One of Us*, BBFC Scenario Report, 9th March 1942 and 4th Feb 1944, The BFI Library.

Meet the Enemy, BBFC Scenario Report, 21st Jan 1944, The BFI Library.

⁴³² *Twilight on the Border*, BBFC Scenario Report, 31st May and 2nd June 1944, The BFI Library.

IRA had at the time; the records do not indicate if it got final approval or not but it was never made.

There are no BBFC records relating to the treatment of Ireland on film after the Second World War, so the detailed analysis which follows of various post-war British and American films dealing with the subject of Irish republicanism cannot document the degree to which these productions were shaped by the intervention of British censors. The films that deal with the Irish question in the post war years chosen for case study in this chapter are *I See a Dark Stranger* (Great Britain, 1946), *Odd Man Out* (Great Britain, 1947), *The Gentle Gunman* (Great Britain, 1952), *Shake Hands with the Devil* (United States, 1959) and *A Terrible Beauty* (Great Britain and United States, 1960). What becomes immediately obvious from the study of these films is the continuation of cultural denial on the part of the British, despite the fact that certain censorship restrictions had clearly been relaxed. A feature of the cinematic treatment of the IRA conflict is the way that contemporary British film culture dismissed its urgent relevance and overtly refused to recognise its topicality. For example, an article on *The Gentle Gunman*, "Mr. Mills Drags up the Irish Question (but why?)" , ponders why the Irish question is being brought up at all. The article is mostly a scathing film review but the article writer, Milton Shulman makes a striking comment: "there is little drama in passive indifference."⁴³³ Of course, the most intensely violent phase of The Troubles did not commence until the 1960s, so these comments may at first seem to suggest that the Irish question essentially disappeared from British public discourse in the 1940s and 50s. However, it must be emphasised that while this time period is not famous for the scale of IRA violence, the organisation was by no means dormant. The war years *did* include some bombings

⁴³³ Milton Shulman, "Mr Mills Drags up the Irish Question (but Why?)," *Evening Standard*, 23 October 1952. The BFI Library.

in England; these were largely ineffective and unsuccessful but should not go un-noted.⁴³⁴ Moreover, the activity of the IRA in the post-war years was rooted in a number of transitions taking place, which contributed to terrorist acts. For one Ireland became more than the Free State in 1948, leaving the Commonwealth and being named the Republic of Ireland. In the 1950s the “ill-fated border campaign” took place in Northern Ireland.⁴³⁵ The Border Campaign was, as the name suggests, a campaign on the border of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland that lasted from late 1954 to early 1962, with the majority of violence being in the years from 1956-62. IRA volunteers carried out shootings, bombings, robberies and other acts of guerrilla warfare in an effort to unite Éire under one Irish government. The IRA suffered serious setbacks because of this campaign and did not re-emerge as an effective force again until 1963.

Secret documents concerning the IRA activities during the Border Campaign show a general lack of control over the situation on the part of British authorities, great frustration, misinformation and a great aggravation with the Republic for their seeming lack of interest in tempering IRA activity. Correspondence in 1956-7 show many pleas from the British government to Eamon de Valera, the Taoiseach of Ireland at this time, to quash IRA activity on his side of the border, where volunteers were recruited.⁴³⁶ De Valera invoked Emergency powers, detained individuals without cause and implemented new laws in an effort to foil the IRA.⁴³⁷ However,

⁴³⁴ See Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (London: Macmillan, 2003). 53.

⁴³⁵ Ibid. 73. The border campaign, taking place between late 1956-1963 was an attempt to liberate sections of the north. While attacks resulted in much damage and lives, it was deemed a failure.

⁴³⁶ See correspondence in DO 35/7813-14, January 1957 - December 1958. The National Archives.

⁴³⁷ See information in DO 35/7812, January 1957 – December 1957. The National Archives.

much as de Valera propounded taking action for an end to IRA violence, the British Dominions Office believed he was not active enough.⁴³⁸ Intelligence reports along with numerous arrest records suggest that the 1950s was not a peaceful time in Ireland and what is important to note here is the amount of press that the IRA got at this time. Almost every month, often several times a month (especially in the summer) between 1954-62, the people of England could open a newspaper and expect to read about IRA activity; this included graphic descriptions of those killed, reports of the hundreds of weapons found, bombs being constructed, and numerous arrests made.⁴³⁹ Hence, while there was no terror campaign on English soil at this stage, the English were well aware of the violence across the sea. There was also press that wrote about possible threats to London by the IRA, even though this never came to fruition. It is important to note that English citizens were aware of possible danger and fear dominated perceptions of the IRA. One article in 1958 reported that two IRA men were loose in Britain:

And one of the biggest manhunts ever organised by M.I.5 and the Special Branch of Scotland Yard has been started to find them. For the Secret Service and the Yard believe that the presence of the two men means an all-out attack in Britain for arms.⁴⁴⁰

Toward the later years of the campaign, as desperation to end the violence mounted, the British Parliament imposed more severe measures to control IRA activity, including threatening trade sanctions against the Republic of Ireland.⁴⁴¹ They also lent

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ For intelligence reports and numerous newspaper clippings see DO 35/7809 – DO 35/7817 and DO 35/4983- DO 35/4994, January 1955 – December 1959. The National Archives.

⁴⁴⁰ "Two IRA Danger Men in Britain," *Empire News*, 11 May 1958. The National Archives.

⁴⁴¹ See reports and newspaper articles regarding trade restrictions threats made by Home Secretary of the time Richard Butler. DO 35/7817, January 1959 – December 1960, The National Archives.

British troops to help control violence on the border.⁴⁴² Moreover, throughout this phase of the conflict controversial measures to address IRA activity were used, such as internment and, reportedly, torture.⁴⁴³ In response hunger strikes were a popular reaction by volunteers held in prison. The major point here is that while the conflict was still not as violent as it eventually grew to be, it appears that, in fact, IRA terrorism was very active.

What then, is to be made of the British ambivalence toward films portraying Irish nationalism and IRA violence? The suggestion that British post-war films about Ireland were stoking embers long since extinguished is widespread. The *Spectator* starts its review on *The Gentle Gunman* with the comment that “Ealing has now turned its brisk eye towards Ireland and the actions of the IRA in 1941, a year in which England suffered not only bombs from the air but bombs concealed in suitcases;” the word ‘brisk’ is clearly intended ironically.⁴⁴⁴ The *Daily Herald* comments of the film, “But who could think that a long, rollicking wrangle between Irish Republican gunman and the rights of free-born Englishmen to be left alone to fight their world war in 1939-45 could be of interest to us now that we are waging world peace.”⁴⁴⁵ This denial of a continuing Irish crisis was a strategic ideological response to the Troubles in this period. Moreover, it is actually an attitude propagated within the films themselves. It will be argued that whilst one might expect to see considerable disparity between the ways in which British and American filmmakers deal with this issue – given the sympathy for the Irish nationalist cause amongst the

⁴⁴² See "British Troops Patrol on Ulster Border," *Daily Telegraph*, 15 August 1957. The National Archives.

⁴⁴³ See "Reluctant Use of Internment in Northern Ireland," *Manchester Guardian*, 18 March 1957. The National Archives.

See also articles reporting torture in DO 35/7814-15, January 1958 – December 1958. The National Archives.

⁴⁴⁴ "Cinema: The Gentle Gunman," *Spectator*, 24 Oct 1952. The BFI Library.

⁴⁴⁵ "Plain Uneasy," *Daily Herald*, 24 Oct 1952. The BFI Library.

substantial émigré settler population of the US – similar representational strategies are also at work in American post-war films which deal directly with the Irish question, especially in *Shake Hands with the Devil*.

The IRA in Post-War British Cinema

The first Irish-themed British film released directly after the war in 1946, *I See a Dark Stranger* is a comical spin-off of the spy film noir. Bridie (Deborah Kerr), the protagonist, believes herself to be the daughter of a noted IRA leader. However, the film establishes that her father was not in fact who she believes him to be and hence she predicates her motives on a false identity, which shapes the tone of the film. Desiring to follow in his footsteps, a very spirited Bridie journeys from the rural backwater of her upbringing to Dublin to join the IRA. She is met, however, with condescending laughter from an ex-IRA leader and veteran of the Easter Rising, Michael O'Callaghan (Brefni O'Rourke), who explains that there is no more purpose for the IRA because diplomacy is now the way to address Ireland's concerns:

O'Callaghan : "We're not at war with Britain."

Bridie retorts : "I know they've a separate war on with somebody else and that we're neutral but that's no reason we shouldn't carry on our own private war that's been going on for 700 years."

O'Callaghan : "But in 1921 Ireland signed a treaty with England...We got a good deal of what we wanted."

Bridie : "Ireland is still partitioned."

O'Callaghan : "But I believe when England and Ireland come together on a friendly basis partition won't last very long."

O'Callaghan goes on to say that he is "more in touch with reality" and that she should give up her "wild notions." More than disappointed by this answer, Bridie decides to become a Nazi spy. She travels to England and acquires secrets from British officers. However, it is not long after that she has a change of heart. Partially brought on by her

love for a British officer, Lt. David Baynes (Trevor Howard) as well as a sudden attack of conscience, Bridie withholds important information about D-Day from the Nazis. This results in some comical fight/chase scenes as the Nazis try to get the information from her. The film concludes with Bridie marrying Baynes while maintaining some extent of her Irish nationalism as the film concludes with an amusing scene of her marching out of a hotel because it is named the Cromwell Arms.

The film is a bit awkward in its treatment of the national and international themes. Antonia Lant points out that Gilliat and Launder typically gravitated towards contentious social issues whilst simultaneously defusing them through humour: “as canny readers of the national barometer, they deliberately sought out sensitive political topics, combining them with verbal humour and visual jokes in order to baffle the ideological ripples that the subject matter produces.”⁴⁴⁶ The film “adapts British habits of representing Ireland by marking Bridie’s independent spirit as a sign of innate unruly Irishness, as the product of a problematic national identity.”⁴⁴⁷ It is hard to know whether Gilliat and Launder see Bridie as a headstrong independent woman or a straightforwardly silly character. Certainly she exhibits both characteristics. Moreover, the film bears significant similarities to Hitchcock’s *39 Steps* (1935). Therefore, one might suggest that its familiar generic framework betrays an impulse to use the Irish setting for cosmetic ‘refreshing’ rather than making a significant attempt to interact with the political issues. While the film is meant to be more comical than anything else, it seems deliberately at the cost of Irish stereotypes. For example, Bridie’s headstrong attitude plays on the Irish fiery temper stereotype. While reasserting old stereotypes, the film also attempts to come to terms with Irish

⁴⁴⁶ Antonia Lant, “The Female Spy: Gender, Nationality, and War in ‘I See a Dark Stranger’,” in *Resisting Images*, ed. Robert Sklar and Charles Musser (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990). 180.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid. 183.

nationalism, especially with how it applied to the Second World War. The IRA was active during the war, including bombings inside England as well as dealings with the Nazis.⁴⁴⁸ However, the film avoids any suggestion of direct violent threat on Bridie's part and presents the more serious consequences of her actions as unintended. What the film ends up projecting is an indulgent and dismissive viewpoint toward the IRA: that their motives and fight are essentially ridiculous. Like the former IRA member who laughs at Bridie, the film expresses a sense of absurdity concerning the IRA's agenda. It presents Irish nationalism as a fully achieved cause, with the few remaining kinks resolvable through civilised dialogue. Rebellious patriotism is presented as foolhardy and out of touch with the modern world.

Gilliat and Launder made another film regarding Irish themes the year after *I See a Dark Stranger*. *Captain Boycott* (1947) did a bit more to justify the Irish cause. However, the film is not about the 20th century conflict but rather late 19th century colonial conflict between the wealthy landowner, the infamous Charles Boycott (played by Cecil Parker), and his tenants. Burdened by unfair rent prices, the community fights back not with violence but by refusing to economically support Boycott, historically giving rise to the verb 'to boycott'. In the film, the violence that would be targeted at the wealthy land-owner is tempered onto passive resistance by Hugh Davin (Stewart Granger) and his love interest Anne Killain (Kathleen Ryan). The safer setting of the 19th century and the deviation away from intense political strife within the film is probably what gave the film the right to be exhibited. It also successfully diffuses conflict by refocusing aggression as humour and passivity.

Odd Man Out was released the same year and invests a far more serious look at the Irish question than the Gilliat and Launder films. Filmed partly on location

⁴⁴⁸ English. 53.

amidst the slums of Belfast, Northern Ireland, the film tells the chaotic story of Johnny McQueen's (James Mason) delirious and tragic attempt to escape from the police after his botched robbery for an Irish independence organization (not named as the IRA but inferred as such). Wounded and disoriented, he wanders the streets of what can be understood as Belfast (also never specifically mentioned but clearly inferred), encountering a variety of characters, including an artist who wants to paint his portrait in his confused state. Johnny experiences several hallucinations, which are no doubt attributable to Carol Reed's experimentation with expressionism. A parallel narrative develops with Johnny's partner Kathleen (Kathleen Ryan), in which she speaks with Father Tom (W.G. Fay), who knows the two lovers and their situation. Father Tom tries to convince Kathleen to help Johnny by giving him up to the law and renouncing the violence of their cause. Kathleen, who does not like this suggestion, sets out to find Johnny on her own. When the two lovers finally meet, Kathleen desperately tries to get Johnny away, but the police close in on them. She fires two shots at them and they return fire, killing them both. It is assumed that she shoots in desperation to get the police to return fire, to avoid being arrested. The latter suggestion is posited by Lance Pettit who suggests that Kathleen draws fire so she does not have to shoot Johnny and herself by her own hands.⁴⁴⁹ Her earlier conversations with Father Tom suggest this may be the case as she expresses determination to not let Johnny fall into the hands of the police. She more than hints to Father Tom that she would rather they were both dead than caught.

⁴⁴⁹ Lance Pettitt, *Screening Ireland: Film and Television Representation* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press 2000). 61.

It has been suggested that *Odd Man Out* is a film which “does not invite a political reading but neither does it positively exclude one.”⁴⁵⁰ In a way it is like *I See a Dark Stranger* in that it uses the IRA story for the setting of a morality tale, but this would be a generalization. While it is certainly not a politically-charged film, the film’s story is overshadowed with political clashes. Moreover, the story would not be set into motion without the premise of Irish terrorism and British colonial rule. Lance Pettitt argues that the film can be read “as imaginatively prefiguring and morally underpinning the legislative incorporation of Northern Ireland into the British state.”⁴⁵¹ He primarily predicates this thesis on the basis that:

The over-riding fatalism associated with the film’s stylistic preferences, coincide neatly with the dominant British view of Anglo-Irish political history. When carefully historicised, the stability of the state and the moral invincibility of the law represented in the film narrative is critically shadowed by the anxious, contingent authority exercised by Stormont during 1945-8.⁴⁵² This, combined with the passive nature of Johnny, who can be seen as representative of the overwhelming pessimism of the cause, creates the impression that British colonial rule was succeeding very efficiently in Éire when the border was still fiercely contested at this time. In reality British sovereignty was enforced in increasingly strained and desperate ways, but the film presents it as inevitable and immutable.

Some critics and scholars find that the film shows a degree of sympathy for the IRA. The *Irish Times* states that the film glorifies the IRA: “All the romance is on the side of ‘the organisation.’”⁴⁵³ Brian McIlroy argues it is the romance of the film that creates sympathy for the IRA cause: “(Kathleen) and Johnny become the doomed lovers of many a romantic melodrama, but they also become part of the republican

⁴⁵⁰ John Devitt, "Some Contexts for 'Odd Man Out'," *Film/Film Culture* 1, no. (2005). 65.

⁴⁵¹ Lance Pettitt, *Screening Ireland* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000). 64.

⁴⁵² Ibid. 63 Stormont refers to the Northern Ireland Parliament.

⁴⁵³ "An Irishman's Diary," *The Irish Times*, 15 March 1947. The BFI Library.

mythology of blood sacrifice.”⁴⁵⁴ However, McIlroy also acknowledges the prevalent “British ideology that runs throughout the film.”⁴⁵⁵ Indeed, the film shows a less sympathetic view of the IRA if examined carefully. One important point is that Johnny’s character shows no free will: he is essentially moved around the film like a rag doll to meet the needs of outside characters. His political cause, which he is seen to be losing faith in rapidly, is shown to be a waste of time. In fact, conflict is presented as being not simply futile but unnecessary. This is highlighted by a few notable elements of the film. One is the friendly nature of the English police. While they are hunting Johnny they show no trace of the notorious attitude of the Belfast police who used brutal force to achieve their ends in Ireland and Northern Ireland. When a policeman comes to question Kathleen and her mother, although he is stern, he is sympathetic to Kathleen. Even her mother must admit, “That wasn’t a bad feller as them fellers go... he spoke fair and what he said was true.” This helps to diffuse any threat of judicial violence and casts an unfavourable light on Johnny more than anyone else. Furthermore, there is the climactic scene in which Johnny has a moment of clarity when he proclaims loudly a biblical verse: “though I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have no charity... I am nothing.” This sums up the tone of the film in which the goal of his duties for the organisation is nothing more than foolish and futile.

Not many characters take Johnny seriously, save Kathleen. The characters he encounters are often indifferent to his plight, or worse, seek to make a profit from his misfortune. In fact, the few characters that actually try to care for Johnny are English. There is a scene in which Johnny is treated for his wounds by two English women.

⁴⁵⁴ Brian McIlroy, "History without Borders: Neil Jordan's Michael Collins," in *Contemporary Irish Cinema: From the Quiet Man to Dancing at Lughnasa*, ed. James MacKillop (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999). 65.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid. 59.

These two contemplate what to do with him, aware that there is a £1000 reward for his capture, but they dismiss this idea saying “I wouldn’t lay a finger on it.” Even the husband of one of the ladies, who wants to put him out, shows a degree of sympathy to Johnny by giving him a swig of alcohol before he leaves and gets rid of his gun for him. This all leads to an interpretation that there is no sense of support for his cause from the community. Belfast in the film is seen to be a community lacking in ethnic/religious divides; especially since there is no attempt to mask the English accents in the film. The English actors speak without trying to sound Northern Irish at all. A telling detail reinforces the message: the fact that the film ends where it began, with the Belfast clock ringing out across the city. Hence, no progress has been made and Johnny, Kathleen and the organisation’s actions have not transformed Ireland as they had hoped. Their cause is represented as simply a nihilistic attempt to change an Ireland that does not want to be changed.

The Gentle Gunman (1952) is not as ambiguous in its message as *I See a Dark Stranger* and *Odd Man Out* but is just as fatalistic in its tone, and more explicitly so. It offers only one option for Irish terrorism and that is that it cease for the island’s own prosperity. The film opens with two men playing chess, one from England, the other from Northern Ireland. The two men argue about the politics of the Irish question over a heated but ultimately friendly game. The action of the film begins in London during the war: Matt Sullivan (Dirk Bogarde) tries to bomb a London Underground station but is thwarted by his brother Terrence (John Mills). The two have a run-in during Matt’s escape in which Terrence advises Matt to renounce his life of crime. The background to this situation is that Terrence himself was once a terrorist but has since given up his IRA activities. For this, along with his abandonment of the IRA, he is deemed a traitor by the organisation. When Matt

returns to the group, its leader, Shinto (Robert Beatty) sets about planning a new terrorist scheme. Meanwhile, Terrence's old lover, Maureen (Elizabeth Sellars), questions Matt about his failed job as well as Terrence. Since Terrence has become a traitor, Maureen loses interest in him and turns her affections to Matt. Maureen's younger brother, Johnny (James Kenney) is eager to contribute to the cause in some meaningful way and appeals to Shinto for a chance, which Shinto grants him. Mrs. Fagan, Johnny and Maureen's mother, objects to the violence Shinto and his band espouse, despite the fact that her late husband was killed by the British. It is strongly implied that he was part of the IRA as well. Maureen, at the other end of the spectrum is for the violence of the group and in an odd character development is often the one encouraging such violence. Terrence eventually comes back to Maureen, who scoffs at him for being weak and a deserter. Terrence, taking this in his stride, has actually returned to bring his brother out of the organisation. The remainder of the film revolves around the plot to rob a shipyard Johnny works at. The plan unravels when Johnny is shot during the robbery. He dies in the hospital while Shinto and his gang try to put Terrence on trial but are forced to flee when the police come after them. Maureen's mother returns utterly demoralised to deliver the news that Johnny has died and while Maureen remains contemptuous, Matt leaves with Terrence to lead a life un-associated with the IRA. The film then returns to the two old men playing chess. It seems that while they will never agree on certain political issues, they remain friends and abide by the rules of chess and politics.

The majority of reviews for this film were not favourable, criticising the structure as sloppy. Moreover, some reviewers were scathing about the thematic content. The best example of this is contained in the *Manchester Guardian* with a review aimed more at the IRA itself than the film:

The trench-coats of the I.R.A. have, in short, become either a musty, puerile uniform or a garment of shame – according to taste. And this it is (sic) which makes so difficult the task of any film-maker who would use the modern I.R.A. as his theme. Roger MacDougall, the script-writer, Basil Dearden, the director, and their colleagues of Ealing have done about as well as it would be reasonable to expect. They have made an honest-to-goodness thriller which attempts, at the same time, to hint at the unreality of the present-day mystique of the I.R.A.⁴⁵⁶

The article, in an interesting twist on the politics of British identity makes the claim that, “It would be little wonder then, if the English (not to mention the Scots and the Welsh) were stirred to astonished indignation...”⁴⁵⁷ Such sentiments represent a throwback to the Second World War propaganda which endeavoured to portray Great Britain as unified in its political agenda while negating past strife with Wales and Scotland. It is unclear how ordinary English citizens saw the IRA but a left-wing critic writing for the *Daily Worker* suggested that there were clear limits to any sympathy they may inspire:

The Irish Republican Army was fighting a just cause, but there were many things wrong with the attempt to win the Six Counties away from the British rule by planting bombs in the London railway stations. It caused unnecessary suffering to the ordinary working people in Britain...⁴⁵⁸

The film itself speaks against the IRA from a slightly different perspective, emphasising not English or international opinions but the social and family breakdown within Ireland as a result of IRA violence. The film advocates the idea that the IRA is only hurting the Irish people through their violence, hence making their cause not only reckless, but ideologically misguided. So while the film critics argue that terrorism is deplorable because of its violence against others, the film itself

⁴⁵⁶ "New Films in London," *Guardian*, 25 Oct 1952. The BFI Library.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ "Review: 'The Gentle Gunman'," *Daily Worker*, 26 Oct 1952. The BFI Library.

claims that the violence is leading to a break down within the country itself. Moreover, the fatalist tone of the film offers up the opinion that the Irish Question no longer exists in any meaningful sense. Mills's character is well travelled and propagates the idea that he has a broader perspective of such issues. He tells Maureen and Shinto that he felt like "an anarchist in the middle of an air raid with a parcel of homemade bombs and a bag full of answers to questions people have stopped asking." Shinto retorts that "maybe the question of Ireland's freedom is out of date in England, but we're still looking for the right answer over here." Mills's character is endeavouring to show the IRA members that the world does not care about Irish nationalism. As mentioned earlier, *The Spectator* and *The Daily Herald* published scathing reviews about the contemporary relevance of addressing Irish nationalism at all. In this respect, the film served to inspire amongst reviewers the same kind of weary frustration towards itself which it had directed at the IRA.

American Screen Representations of the IRA

Shake Hands with the Devil came out just a few short years before IRA activity really entered the notice of the broader international community, but when the Border Campaign was still in full force. The film was one of the first to be produced at Ardmore Studios (in Bray, Ireland), itself one of the first national Irish studios. However, it is important to note that while the studio's founding was intended to serve the commercial interests of Ireland, the studio, which "promised much in terms of indigenous production ... became fairly quickly a hireable facility monopolised by British and US studios as a production space."⁴⁵⁹ The film was directed by an Englishman, Michael Anderson, with American scriptwriters and featured a mixture of British, Irish and American actors. *Shake Hands with the Devil* was technically an

⁴⁵⁹ Pettitt, *Screening Ireland*. 38.

American production for United Artists and “was the first American film to be made entirely in Ireland.”⁴⁶⁰ It was based on a novel of the same name, written in 1933.⁴⁶¹

James Cagney stars as Sean Lenihan, the second in command of a major IRA cell in 1921; he is also a distinguished surgeon and professor. The story revolves not around Cagney’s character however, but the character of Kerry O’Shea (Don Murray) a first generation Irish American who has come to Ireland to bury his mother as well as carry out her last wish to attend the University in Dublin for medicine. While there he becomes entangled in Ireland’s fight for independence from England. Beginning with a shootout, which he and a classmate happen to be around for, Kerry tries to save his friend, who has been shot in the crossfire. However, after his classmate’s death, the Black and Tans learn his identity. Kerry’s Professor, Sean Lenihan (Cagney), who has revealed himself as an IRA member to Kerry while trying to save his classmate, takes Kerry under his wing and gradually teaches Kerry to sympathize with the IRA cause. Kerry comes to embrace the ideals and sets about with their plans to smuggle an IRA member to Dublin. Lady Fitzhugh (Sybil Thorndike), also an IRA member, is caught during this botched plan and is sentenced to a term in prison. Defiantly, she goes on a hunger strike and her health begins to fail. In response to this the group kidnaps Jennifer Curtis (Dana Wynter), the daughter of a prominent British aristocrat. While she remains in their care, Kerry finds himself falling in love with her and begins to question the violence the IRA utilises for their ends. News of a treaty comes to ‘the General’ (Michael Redgrave) and Kerry believes this will facilitate the return of Mrs. Curtis to her father and an end to the violence. However, when Lady Fitzhugh dies and Sean disagrees with the terms of the treaty, which partitions Ireland and

⁴⁶⁰ "Review: 'Shake Hands with the Devil'," *The Film Daily* 115, no. 88 (1959). The BFI Library.

⁴⁶¹ Rearden Conner, *Shake Hands with the Devil* (London: JM Dent, 1933).

keeps it in dominion status, he plans to execute Mrs. Curtis. In a climactic finish, Kerry and Sean have a standoff, arguing about the different ways they see the treaty. When Sean tries to shoot Mrs. Curtis, Kerry reacts quickly and shoots Sean first. He then throws his gun away and the film ends with a close up of the gun on the beach.

The film had mixed reviews when it came out: while some hailed it as a triumph others saw it as contrived and “poorly conceived.”⁴⁶² However, what is more interesting is the way in which the reviews comment on the politics of the film. *Films in Review* says that the film is “not the authentic exposition of ‘The Troubles’ so many have been waiting for.”⁴⁶³ *Variety* called it “intellectually idealistic.”⁴⁶⁴ And *Hollywood Reporter*, while reviewing the film with a very sympathetic view of the IRA argued that the “politics are oversimplified.”⁴⁶⁵ In an article on films which represent the IRA, Joan Dean explores the typical qualities Hollywood ascribes to the IRA, which she credits largely to an Irish American fantasy of Ireland and the IRA struggle: “a fiction of the IRA served up by Hollywood largely for the delectation of the 45 million Americans who claim Irish ancestry.”⁴⁶⁶ One of her most important observations is the utter disregard for realism and “complexity of politics” in these films.⁴⁶⁷ Instead these films often choose to focus “less on the organisation (the IRA) than on a fanatical individual who, driven by the need for personal revenge, desperation, or monomania, betrays or operates outside the IRA.”⁴⁶⁸ This is certainly the case in *Shake Hands with the Devil*. She specifically states that *Shake Hands with*

⁴⁶² "Review: 'Shake Hands with the Devil'," *Films in Review* 10, no. 6 (1959). The BFI Library.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ "Review: 'Shake Hands with the Devil'," *Variety*, 13 May 1959. The BFI Library.

⁴⁶⁵ "Review: Shake Hands with the Devil," *Hollywood Reporter*, 18 May 1959. The BFI Library.

⁴⁶⁶ Joan Dean, "Screening the IRA," *Film West* (1995). 26. The BFI Library.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid. 27.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid. 27.

the Devil has a “cowboy ethos” suggesting that despite being filmed in Ireland, the sets look like the American Southwest and the costuming of Glynnis Johns in a sexual manner is reminiscent of an American Western. Her main conclusion sums up the American filmmakers’ attitude toward the IRA:

The IRA has been an especially alluring subject for non-Irish film-makers who recognise the appeal of a secret brotherhood of political and social idealists dedicated to overthrowing an oppressive colonial presence. For Hollywood, the possibilities for intrigue, romance, righteousness, violence, and devotion to a cause offer an almost irresistible formula. Even better, everyone speaks English.⁴⁶⁹

Dean has accurately identified the affinity that Irish Americans have with Ireland but also exposed its romantic inaccuracy. However, with regard to *Shake Hands with the Devil* she misses the mark. The film, while conforming to some degree to a typically romanticised American perception of Ireland, mostly mirrors British portrayals of the Irish, as will be demonstrated further on.

Lance Pettitt highlights similar ideas to Dean. His discussion of *The Quiet Man* (1952) outlines certain key features of the Irish American projection of Ireland. The film is the story of an Irish American returning to Ireland. This film, he argues, portrays a vision of Ireland at an important moment in Irish and Irish American history. Half a million Irish emigrated in the 1950s, many of them to America, in a third wave of Irish immigration across the Atlantic.⁴⁷⁰ The film celebrates “a way of life that was actually being rejected by Ireland’s sons and daughters.”⁴⁷¹ The film’s pastoralism, style, structure and “deployment of stereotypes” offers a “false vision of Ireland.”⁴⁷² The film idealises pastoral life in a way that has become typically

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid. 27.

⁴⁷⁰ Pettitt, *Screening Ireland*. 64.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid. 64.

⁴⁷² Ibid. 64.

associated with Ireland in Hollywood films. He points out, however, that the reason the film offers “one of the most popular representations of Ireland” is not only the time it was made but “the way its comic excesses articulate the trauma of loss, and by the way it portrays the romantic reintegration of an Irish émigré.”⁴⁷³

The same observations may be extended to the way in which *I See a Dark Stranger* was promoted. The American press book suggests building a hype around the film being set and filmed in Ireland with numerous Irish actors. Several contests and promotional stunts are suggested to play on the setting such as “Clan Gatherings,” a “Colleen Pop Contest” as well as “Accent Contests.”⁴⁷⁴ Clearly the Irish feel of the film is to be played on, particularly for the Irish Americans. In America the title was changed to *The Adventuress* and the press book includes suggestions of shamrock décor all over the theatre and adverts. Some adverts even feature Deborah Kerr surrounded by shamrocks. The potential of the Irish American audience was something the producers obviously felt they could exploit. Throughout the press book the producers encourage the “Irish Angle.”⁴⁷⁵

Scholars have pointed out that visions of Ireland in America are partially linked to the invention of Irish American nationalism. This concept is the idea that Irish and American patriotism interact in a way to engender a specific identity that is both fantasy but made real by its creation.⁴⁷⁶ The Irish American identity should not be underestimated when it comes to cultural identity and international relations. Americans led protests in response to some of the Border Campaign activities. One such article reports that “...(one) demonstration was to focus attention on the alleged

⁴⁷³ Ibid. 65.

⁴⁷⁴ “‘I See a Dark Stranger’ Press Book,” (1946). The BFI Library.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Kevin O’Neill, “The Star-Spangled Shamrock: Meaning and Memory in Irish America,” in *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, ed. Ian McBride (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). 121.

torture of captured IRA members and to obtain financial support for the prisoners' dependants."⁴⁷⁷ Moreover, it is well known that during the 1970s and 1980s a fair portion of Irish Americans raised funds for the IRA by virtue of their perceived common identity. Films such as *The Quiet Man* that marry the American Western to Irish nostalgia or *The Fighting Sullivans* (1944), which celebrate concurrently Irish and American patriotism during the Second World War, offer a glance at a kind of identity being forged that continues in Hollywood in the late 20th century.⁴⁷⁸ It is important to grasp this concept when analysing *Shake Hands with the Devil*.

Before evaluating the film itself, however, it is worth noting some major differences with the novel it was adapted from. In the book, written by Rearden Conner, Kerry is not American but grew up in England to an English father and Irish mother. The change made to his nationality in the film is significant. Instead of being an Englishman with a conflicted identity connected to his IRA actions, it is important to understand that he offers a specific American cultural lens through which to judge the IRA. Another important point of difference is that Kerry is killed by the Black and Tans at the end of the novel. Moreover, understanding Cagney's character, Sean, is key to understanding the film. At first, Sean's characteristics encourage a sympathetic view of him. He is a very charismatic character, with the ability to draw others to his point of view. His status as a brilliant surgeon and professor also cautions against the immediate suspicion that Sean is nothing more than mad. These characteristics, developed alongside evidence of the brutality of the Black and Tans, give his character a great deal of sympathy. The calculating logic he employs to push the cause forward appears to be the reasoning of an intelligent man. The scene in which

⁴⁷⁷ "Protest in New York over IRA Arrests," *Birmingham Post* 1958.

⁴⁷⁸ Charles Silver, "Ford and the Romantic Tradition," in *Ford in Focus*, ed. Kevin Stoeck and Michael Connolly (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Co., 2006).

he is speaking with 'The General' about the treaty seems to confirm this impression. If one carefully notes, Sean accurately predicts civil war in this conversation as if gifted with uncanny powers of political foresight. This anachronistic statement highlights just how much IRA members shared his convictions when the treaty was signed.⁴⁷⁹ This shows that close to half of the IRA members would have shared similar sentiments as Cagney's character during the war. But it is also possible to interpret Sean as a misguided character, driven to madness by the Cause. Kerry sympathises with the Irish cause but only until a treaty is offered by Britain. He fails to share Sean's perspective when the opportunity for peace arises.

As the film develops it becomes easier to read Sean as simply a madman, however. His actions often reveal an insularity that borders on dangerous indifference. He always remains firm in his convictions and never cites any other reason for this than his devotion to Ireland. In fact, patriotism is shown to be an obsession for Sean. In the beginning of the film this may be seen as passion, but as the film unfolds Kerry's willingness to compromise instead of seeing things in absolutes as Sean consistently does casts the latter's convictions in a different light. While Kerry grows to question the Cause and what it means, Sean never articulates a thoughtful reason for his motivations. This is seen most clearly at the end of the film when Kerry and Sean have a standoff, literally and ideologically, as Kerry sees the truce as an end to the fighting and Sean refuses to bend to the terms of the new treaty. It becomes clear at this point that Sean has become addicted to the violence in which he has been enveloped. Sean also has no sympathy for female characters, save Lady Fitzhugh, and is moreover quite needlessly aggressive with them. This is most clearly demonstrated

⁴⁷⁹ More Irish people were killed in the civil war than the war for independence. See Tim Pat Coogan, *The IRA: A History* (Niwt, CO: Robert Rinehart Publishers, 1994). See also, Tim Pat Coogan, *The Man Who Made Ireland: The Life and Death of Michael Collins* (Niwt: Roberts Rinehart, 1992).

by his interactions with Kitty (Glynis Johns) whose sexuality disgusts him. One of the first scenes of Sean revealed as an IRA member shows him scolding Mary Madigan (Marianne Benet), a woman who has inadvertently endangered the group. Later this character is killed and when the man sent to kill her is unnerved, Sean reassures him only with cold logic and a stony stance saying “a man died because of her.” This misogyny is reinforced by established facets of Cagney’s star persona associated with certain iconic scenes in *Public Enemy* (1931).⁴⁸⁰ It is also interesting to consider in this respect the character of Colonel Smithson, who may be Sean’s ideological opposite, who is shown to be characteristically alike. Both characters are stony in stature and action, coldly logical and care seemingly little about the violence they use to meet their ends. The Black and Tans are actually tacitly presented as a force unto themselves, distinct from the other British authority figures seen in the film. Finally, as Sean falls into madness his prediction of civil war can be seen not just a justified rationale for discontent but a self-fulfilling prophecy by a man married to the idea of violence.

Undoubtedly, Cagney’s ‘tough guy’ persona born from some of his earlier 1930s roles (*The Oklahoma Kid* (1939), *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938), *Public Enemy* (1931) for example) lent itself to his character in *Shake Hands with the Devil*. His ability to play a “scary character” was something that defined his roles at Warner Brothers during this decade.⁴⁸¹ Cagney’s attempt to update and develop this persona a decade later in *White Heat* (1949) overtly branded his trademark intensity as a form of psychotic insanity. This particular facet of his star image is clearly foregrounded in

⁴⁸⁰ Cagney’s character Tom is memorable for his misogynistic character, particularly the scene in which he shoves a grapefruit in the face of a female character.

⁴⁸¹ Andrew Bergman, *James Cagney* (New York: Pyramid, 1973). 22-31.

his portrayal of a despotic IRA leader.⁴⁸² When the film came out, the *Irish Times* said of Cagney's character, "that his quietly savage [role] as the IRA commandant was achieved by making his character a good deal larger than life."⁴⁸³

Similar representational tactics are used to demonise the IRA in an Anglo-American co-production made the following year called, *A Terrible Beauty*, also known as *Night Riders* to American audiences (1960). The film gets its name from a William Butler Yeats poem about the Easter Rising in 1916.⁴⁸⁴ Set in 1941, this film portrays the IRA in league with the Nazis and planning a joint invasion of Britain. There are several significant similarities with *Shake Hands With The Devil*, particularly in the characterisation of the IRA leadership. Don McGinnis (Dan O'Herlihy) is the commander of an IRA unit and is portrayed as a man driven by bloodlust, much like Cagney's character. The story revolves around the character of Dermot O'Neill (Robert Mitchum), who is recruited into the unit McGinnis commands. O'Neill and friend Sean Reilly (Richard Harris) are sent on an errand to steal arms; they are successful and are sent on another mission to destroy a power plant. This plan is unsuccessful and as a result Reilly is wounded and later captured. He is sentenced to ten years in prison; because of this McGinnis wants to attack a police building. O'Neill wants to rescue Reilly instead and threatens to leave the IRA if the attack on the police building is carried out. As a result, the IRA brand O'Neill a traitor and seek to execute him. While he is making his escape, his sister Bella (Marianne Benet) also McGinnis's love interest, is returning home wearing her brother's coat. McGinnis mistakes her for her brother and kills her.

⁴⁸² Ibid. 97.

⁴⁸³ John McCabe, *Cagney*, 1st ed. (London: Aurum Press, 1998). 314.

⁴⁸⁴ W. B. Yeats, "Easter 1916," in *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran and George Mills Harper (New York: Scribner, 1989).

The New York Times considered *A Terrible Beauty* an intriguing film but also stated that it

represent[ed] a miniature case history of a revolutionary movement with inadequate practical or intellectual motivation...the writer has not attempted to explore [the theme of civil revolt] in depth, and has confined himself to a surprisingly restrained and superficial treatment of the theme.⁴⁸⁵

This review highlights a very important aspect of the film: that it focuses on secondary reasons for Irish nationalism without exploring the motivations behind the Cause. The violence the IRA participates in equates to unreasonable aggression and malicious terrorism. Not once is the historical legacy of colonial suppression and violence against the Irish brought up. The idea being propagated by *A Terrible Beauty* is that the IRA practices violence for its own sake. This aspect of the film can also be observed in *Shake Hands with the Devil*; such simplifications play on the fear and misunderstanding with which the IRA may be interpreted by the general public. This message is fleshed out as a conflict between romantic love and “the cause,” in which the central character must choose between the violence of the cause or the love of a woman.⁴⁸⁶ The motivation behind, IRA nationalism is lost amongst the confusion of power battles and pointless violence. Within this confusion, Dermot comes to recognise the conflict between what the IRA is trying to achieve and what it is actually doing. In one scene, Dermot says to Sean, “We talk about fighting to make Ireland whole, and I sometimes wonder if we’re not helping to keep it torn apart.” The emphasis on aggression and violence overshadows any attempt at balanced political observation.

⁴⁸⁵ Eugene Archer, "'Night Fighters' Opens in Neighborhood," *New York Times*, 15 December 1960.

⁴⁸⁶ In *Shake Hands with the Devil* Kerry saves Jennifer Curtis, in *A Terrible Beauty* Dermot turns away from the IRA and absconds with Neeve. Rockett, Gibbons, and Hill. 165-6.

The film ultimately represents the primary antagonist as a madman, in a parallel manner to the way in which James Cagney's character is portrayed. Both Cagney and O'Herlihy's characters are unnecessarily aggressive, especially toward women. Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons and John Hill have already remarked upon this similarity.⁴⁸⁷ They observe that both characters' masculinity is challenged in some way. In *A Terrible Beauty* McGinnis is deemed unsuitable by his superior for action in the field. Furthermore, Bella is revolted by his sexual advances. The twisted and unnatural nature of his desire is dramatically confirmed by the fact that he (unintentionally) becomes Bella's executioner.

A Terrible Beauty also twists historical facts in a more extreme fashion than any of the other films discussed in this chapter by suggesting that Nazis and the IRA were training together and planning a joint invasion. While there is proof that Nazis and several factions of the IRA did indeed make contact and discuss the idea of collaboration, the joint military operation presented in the film is a complete fabrication. There is no proof that such an extreme example of hostility was ever planned. It seems plausible to suggest that the associations made between the IRA and the Nazis were intended to discourage sentiments Americans held toward the Irish national movement.

Conclusion

What seems true of the British films on the Irish Question is that they are highlighting a feeling that the conflict is reducible to a fatalist act on the part of the IRA. The IRA and its motives are portrayed as nothing more than ridiculous in *I See a Dark Stranger*. In *Odd Man Out* and *The Gentle Gunman*, a more sombre pessimism is adopted. What is at stake here is more than just a level of frustration with the IRA

⁴⁸⁷ Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons, and John Hill, *Cinema and Ireland* (London: Croom Helm, 1987). 164-7.

actions; it reveals an embarrassment on the part of the British. As the British Empire was crumbling around the globe and an effort to establish diplomacy between colonial and postcolonial countries was being developed it was a mark of failure on the part of Great Britain have provoked such an unstable political situation on their doorstep. It was a further stain upon their ability to proclaim themselves as stewards of democracy. Hence, this embarrassment and frustration seems to manifest itself in British films on the topic as denial. The films dismiss the conflict with the IRA as nihilistic or silly – an anachronistic hangover even - refusing to acknowledge how serious an international conflict it really is. This is not surprising, as even the rhetoric surrounding the IRA well into the late 20th century denied the conflict the status of a war. The British government and journalists refused to acknowledge the violence as nothing more than ‘The Troubles.’ The word choice alone states a great deal about how the British chose to deal with Irish violence.

What is surprising is that, despite how sympathetic many Americans are to Irish themes, the first post-war US film to deal with this topic, *Shake Hands with the Devil*, closely mirrors the tone of British films in the fact that the film presents the treaty of 1921 as a definitive settlement and suggests that current violence is useless. Louisa Burns-Bisogno makes the comment that the film “reinforce[d], rather than rejected, negative Irish political stereotypes.”⁴⁸⁸ Moreover, the characterisation of Sean as mad makes a case for the IRA cause being mad. There are two points worth making here. One is that the Irish American identity is predicated more on a remote connection with Ireland and often based on idealistic stereotypes. Hence, it may not be as surprising as one may first assume that Hollywood would dismiss the validity of the current Irish conflict in a superficial fashion. The second point is that the film is

⁴⁸⁸ Burns-Bisogno, Louisa, 118.

consistent with the penchant of post-war American governments to pursue a foreign policy informed not by its multicultural heritage but by its new superpower status. America's diplomatic policy changed after the Second World War from isolationism and supported many aspects of British postcolonial foreign policy in the name of preserving 'stability'. For its own continued prosperity the US involved itself in international affairs with new zeal. The special relationship during these transitional decades following the war helped to guide American decisions. Hence, that America began to develop a new policy of endorsing sovereignty while also electing to support a neo-imperial agenda in international affairs is not all that astonishing. Ireland, though still close to home, simultaneously became ideologically far removed.

Conclusion

“The problems of East Africa are the problems of the world.” The inclusion of this memorable quote from Winston Churchill’s book, *My African Journey* as the epigraph to *Something of Value* is worth considering in detail at the end of this thesis because it encapsulates some of the main arguments this project has set out to discuss.⁴⁸⁹ There is one obvious explanation of the intended significance of this quotation. Issues of black civil rights are so consistently emphasised in *Something of Value* that it seems clear that it is using the crisis in British-governed Kenya to draw attention to and comment upon the causes espoused by the African-American Civil Rights movement, which had been recently triggered by the arrest of Rosa Parks in December 1955. Churchill’s words take on a very particular meaning in this context, in that they seem to endorse the suggestion that the conflict presented in the film is as relevant to American domestic politics as it is to British imperial policy. One modern scholar has gone so far as to suggest that the film has no real interest in the politics of colonialism and is wholly preoccupied with looking at an “American crisis and its resolution, not at an African one.”⁴⁹⁰

It has been repeatedly suggested in this thesis that Hollywood films about the British Empire cannot be simply understood as a somewhat archaic cultural reflex born of the shared heritage of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant populations of both continents. Markedly different agendas and concerns are frequently evident in British and American films about the Empire even though they may appear very similar. It has been argued in Chapter Two, for example, that the Twentieth Century Fox production *Stanley and Livingstone* (1939) is a film that patently uses a famous story

⁴⁸⁹ Winston Churchill, *My African Journey* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910).

⁴⁹⁰ Kenneth M. Cameron, *Africa on Film: Beyond Black and White* (London: Continuum, 1994), 122.

of British colonial expedition to address the issue of what America's role should be in the impending European war. The fact that some cinemas in the anti-integration belt of America's Deep South purportedly refused to screen *Something of Value*, because it "hit too close to home,"⁴⁹¹ offers support to an argument which this thesis has frequently made in relation to the fact that Hollywood's proclivities for revisiting British imperial history were only rarely extended to Africa. It is reasonable to suggest that this might be explained by the fact that certain kinds of tales of Empire – i.e. those involving white governance of a black African population – were all too resonant and unpalatable for certain kinds of American audiences. As has also been shown, the potential for films about the British Empire to provoke incendiary controversy could be completely reversed in other contexts: as Chapter One makes clear, in the 1930s British films about India encountered far more resistance from British censors and Indian audiences than their Hollywood counterparts.

As H. Mark Glancy has convincingly demonstrated, it was undoubtedly the case that the commercial importance of English-speaking British and Dominion audiences to Hollywood studios encouraged the regular production of films featuring sympathetic representations of British history. Glancy reports how John T. Flynn, one of the leaders of the 'America First Committee', the pressure group which campaigned against America's intervention into the Second World War, denounced various 1930s American films as imperial 'propaganda' and chastised Hollywood for its production of "pictures glorifying the British Empire."⁴⁹² However, as Chapter One has shown, it is important to recognise that the form such 'propaganda' took was often starkly at odds with official imperial ideology. British critics deplored the

⁴⁹¹ David M. Anderson, 'Mau Mau at the Movies: Contemporary Representations of an Anti-Imperial War', *South African Historical Journal*, 48:1 (2003), 82.

⁴⁹² H. Mark Glancy, *When Hollywood Love Britain: The Hollywood 'British' Film, 1939-1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 63.

aggressive individuality and desire for thrills, glory and wealth that characterised the eponymous hero of *Clive of India* (1935), for example. A level of British resentment towards Hollywood representations of the Empire persisted for decades. Several of the British reviews of *Something of Value* were deeply suspicious and hostile. Jympson Harman of the *Evening News* complained vociferously at the fact that “Hollywood now butts in on the Mau Mau problem and many people will feel that they might have been better to keep out.”⁴⁹³ The *Daily Sketch* protested that “Coming from Hollywood this film is either tactless, trivial or impertinent – perhaps a little of all three.”⁴⁹⁴ The *News of the World* concluded that “Hollywood simply doesn’t understand what is happening in Africa.”⁴⁹⁵

It is very significant, though, that by the late 1950s this by no means represented the consensus British view of Hollywood’s take on imperial issues. The *Daily Express* found *Something of Value* to be a “balanced and sober appraisal of a British problem.”⁴⁹⁶ The *Evening Standard* found it to be a film which “shuns sensationalism for an impartial and frightening appraisal of a continent in trouble.”⁴⁹⁷ This offers a form of corroboration for the argument presented in different forms in Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six that differences in the screen treatment of the British Empire offered by British and Hollywood filmmakers became much less pronounced from the 1940s onwards. The greater prevalence of Anglo-American co-productions might partly help to explain this, but a crucial hypothesis presented in this thesis is that the progressive homogenisation of the Empire film must be connected to

⁴⁹³ Jympson Harman, ‘Keep Out!’, *Evening News*, 27 June 1957.

⁴⁹⁴ ‘Tactless’, *Daily Sketch*, 28 June 1957.

⁴⁹⁵ ‘Films’, *News of the World*, 30 June 1957.

⁴⁹⁶ *Daily Express*, 28 June 1957.

⁴⁹⁷ *Evening Standard*, 27 June 1957.

an important shift in the political relationship between Britain and America and the latter's enhanced role in international affairs after the war.

This brings us back to Winston Churchill. The brief epigraph with which *Something of Value* concludes is actually the substitute for a scene excised from the film and a residual trace element of the direct involvement of the retired British Prime Minister in its production. It was originally planned that the film would open with a monologue delivered direct to camera by Churchill, endorsing the significance and value of the production. The film's director Richard Brooks later explained that he chased after the retired Churchill for months to try and secure his involvement. The fact that the sequence was not included in final release prints came, according to Brooks, as a result of a hostile reaction from MGM executives after a test screening, one of whom apparently declared that: "I want to tell you something right now. You have got to get rid of this fucking Englishman..."⁴⁹⁸ It remains a matter of conjecture as to how Churchill was persuaded to appear in a Hollywood fiction film about Kenya. David M. Anderson, a leading historian of the Mau Mau uprising, has argued that Churchill's deeply held views on Kenya were very similar to those expressed in the novel, which the film was adapted from. Anderson plausibly speculates that Churchill was probably familiar with the novel and would have considered the fact that it featured a Russian agent who assists the Mau Mau fighters as offering a valuable propaganda opportunity to maintain American support for British foreign policy by showing that "the presence of a stabilising, European influence [in Kenya] and elsewhere in Africa was a necessary bulwark against the dangers of communist intrusion." Even if Churchill had seen a rough cut of the film or read the screenplay and was thus aware that the communist subplot did not make the transition from page

⁴⁹⁸ Quoted in Richard Toye, *Churchill's Empire: The World That Made Him and the World He Made* (London: Macmillan, 2010). 207.

to screen, Anderson suggests that “it may well have been in Churchill’s mind that his introduction would act as a check against hasty American assumptions that everything would be alright if only colonialism was brought to a speedy end.”⁴⁹⁹

As is the case with Anderson’s suppositions about Churchill, no archival evidence has been found which definitively authenticates the hypothesis presented in this dissertation that the changed relationship between British and Hollywood films about imperialism made during and after the Second World War is meaningfully connected to the intensification of the ‘Special Relationship’ between Britain and America in the international political arena. It is indisputably the case that a major strand of post-war British foreign policy consisted of enlisting American support for the idea that a continuance of white political authority in the de-colonized Third World was necessary for the continued security and prosperity of the First World. The passionate ideologue behind, and major architect of, this alliance was Winston Churchill. It was Churchill who coined the concept of a ‘special relationship between the British Commonwealth and Empire and the United States’ in a famous speech delivered in the USA in 1946, in which he argued that the avoidance of further international conflict would depend on “the fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples.” As Wendy Webster has explained, the idea of the ‘special relationship’ was designed to

maintain Britain as a world power. A racial community of Britons was increasingly subsumed into a wider global identity encompassing America – the English-speaking peoples. The ‘special relationship’ with America offered a story where Britain continued to provide the world with leadership, now

⁴⁹⁹ Anderson, ‘Mau Mau at the Movies’, 84.

joined by America, both representing the values of freedom and democracy against Communism.⁵⁰⁰

Churchill's personal involvement in the production of an MGM feature film treatment of the conflict in East Kenya, starring Rock Hudson, evidently demonstrates that he took this type of film very seriously as a vehicle for communicating his vision of the post-colonial New World Order to the general public. Richard Brooks' determination to arrange Winston Churchill's involvement in *Something of Value* offers clear evidence that the makers of films about the British Empire were keen to secure political endorsement. This thesis has hopefully demonstrated that in order to fully understand how the post-war, post-colonial settlement was achieved, we should do the same.

⁵⁰⁰ Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire 1939-1965* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 57.

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