

PHD RESEARCH

BÉNÉDICTE ROCHET

Newsreels at the Service of History. The Belgian Government's Audiovisual Propaganda During the War (1940-1945) - [Original Title :

Des actualités filmées au service de l'histoire. La propagande audiovisuelle d'un gouvernement belge en état de siege (1940-1945)]

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In September 1940, the Belgian government, which was reconstituted in exile in London, tried to impose and legitimize its existence by setting up an information and propaganda policy. Cinema quickly aroused the interest of Belgian propagandists. Newsreels, because of their – supposed – influence on public opinion, appeared as a formidable weapon. Building on the cinematic practices of their British allies and without any experience, Belgians embarked on a film propaganda adventure that would take them from London to Brussels and as far as the Congo. The newsreels were supposed to highlight the country's war effort, legitimize the authority and action of the Belgian government in exile and enhance national cohesion. The analysis of the production, distribution and reception of these newsreels, produced between 1940 and 1945, allows us to understand, on the one hand, film and propagandist practices, and on the other hand, reactions and successive stands of public opinion in wartime. The images broadcast on the screens in London and Brussels at the Liberation reveal the mental representation of the conflict and the mechanisms set to control public opinion. Beyond the historical problems, this thesis, which is anchored on a vast film corpus, highlights the contribution of the audiovisual source for the historical discipline. The latter is helpful for the development of methodological

protocols that combine film and non-film sources to allow a better comprehension of the historicity of the audiovisual source, to understand the whole cinematographic fact, and to contextualize it. This thesis also highlights the issues of audiovisual heritage access and rights and their impact on Belgian historiography, where research in the field of 'history and cinema' remains incomplete.