

THE GERMAN MILITARY PROPAGANDA DEPARTMENT BELGIUM (PROPAGANDA-ABTEILUNG BELGIEN) VIS-À-VIS “CULTURES OF SPECTACLE” IN OCCUPIED BELGIUM (1940-1944)¹

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During the Second World War, Belgium and Northern France were placed under the supervision of a German Military Administration with a complex hierarchical structure and numerous departments and services, each of which was responsible for controlling or influencing a particular aspect of life under German occupation. The German Military Propaganda Department Belgium (Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien, PAB) was tasked to control the media and to oversee every cultural aspect of occupied Belgium and Northern France. Mainly composed of German specialists, the offices of the PAB had a significant influence over diverse sectors such as cinema, theatre, literature, music, and visual arts. Several scholars have looked into some activities of the PAB, but so far there has been no overarching and comparative analysis of the aims and the methods of the PAB. This article partially fills this void by shedding light on the PAB's policy towards “cultures of spectacle”, with a focus on theatre, cinema, concerts, and cabarets.

I. Introduction

In German-occupied Belgium (1940-1944), the Propaganda Department Belgium (*Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien*, acronym PAB) influenced, or tried to influence, various aspects of public life. Print media, radio, cinema, literature, theatre, opera, music, other public performances, and/or cultural manifestations... The PAB was involved in many endeavours. By consequence, the PAB is referred to by many historians and other researchers who work in these fields. Els De Bens, who was one of the very first to write a PhD dissertation related to German-occupied Belgium (1940-1944), dedicated several pages of her monograph (published in 1973) to the PAB. Her account was based on both archival materials and interviews with some former members of the German Administration, who were still alive in the early 1970s². Most of what she wrote about the PAB was of course related to the PAB activities in the area she was investigating: the censored print press, more specifically the censored newspapers (1940-1944). The same pattern emerges in many other publications: historians and other scholars mention and study the PAB to the extent that is relevant to the focus of their more specialised investigations, but nobody focuses

on the PAB as such. By consequence, the history of the PAB remains to be written. The fact that nobody has yet attempted to do so is probably caused by a lacuna in the archival sources³. The PAB wrote reports about its activities twice a month and distributed them to various instances⁴. These bi-weekly reports are to be treated with caution, because they reflect how the PAB portrayed its activities towards its superiors (and potential competitors) and may contain information that did not correspond entirely to what actually happened. Nevertheless, the reports are an incredibly valuable source for any research in this area, including this article⁵. Unfortunately, the reports written between April 1942 and July 1944 are still missing.

Following in De Bens' footsteps, several students and other researchers have investigated wartime newspapers and periodicals (1940-1944) with a particular focus on the PAB in that context⁶. The activities of the German radio station that took over equipment and staff of the pre-war Belgian public radio and started broadcasting as *Sender Brüssel* (*Radio Bruxelles* in French, *Zender Brussel* in Dutch) has also been the subject of academic studies on both sides of the language border⁷. Other areas in which the activities of the PAB have been

1. This article was written in the framework of a new doctoral research project about the PAB: "War propaganda beyond borders. The activities of the German propaganda services in occupied Belgium and North-France (1940-1944)". Joint PhD research project Université de Lille, CNRS, UMR 8529, Institut de Recherches Historiques du Septentrion and KU Leuven. Supervisors: Prof. Stéphane Michonneau and Prof. Roel Vande Winkel. Researcher: Louis Fortemps.

2. ELS DE BENS, *De Belgische dagbladpers onder Duitse censuur (1940-1944)*, Antwerp, 1973.

3. The PAB is, however, extensively discussed in an unpublished PhD dissertation about propaganda in German-occupied territories: MARTIN MOLL, "Das Neue Europa". *Studien zur nationalsozialistischen Auslandspropaganda in Europa, 1939-1945. Die Geschichte eines Fehlschlages*, PhD Thesis, University of Graz, 1986, p. 610-646. We are indebted to Dr. Moll for comments on this article.

4. The reports would be sent to the OKW/WPr. (the Propaganda Department of the Supreme Command of the German Armed Forces), the German Ministry of Propaganda, but also various departments of the Military Administration of Occupied Belgium, the Propaganda Department in occupied Paris... See the distribution list at the end of each *Tätigkeitsbericht*.

5. Since late 2019, the reports can be consulted online at <https://www.cegesoma.be/en/reports-propaganda-abteilung-about-belgium>.

6. ROEL VANDE WINKEL, "Wetenschappelijk onderzoek naar de dagbladpers in bezet België (1940-1944): evolutie van een onderzoeksdomein (1966-2005)", in FRIEDA SAEYS and HANS VERSTRAETEN, *De media in maatschappelijk perspectief*, Gent, 2005, p. 2-29.

7. About Radio-Bruxelles, see the works of CÉLINE RASE, especially *"Interférences. Radios, collaborations et repressions en Belgique (1939-1949)"* Namur, 2021. Several master's theses studied the case of Zender Brussel like TANIA VANDEN BOSSCHE, *"Hier Zender Brussel!"*. *De stem van Het Rijk: 1940-1944*, master's thesis, Universiteit Gent, 1995-1996.

partially analysed are film⁸, literature⁹, or cultural policy¹⁰. In this context, we cannot say that historians have not paid attention to the PAB, but we can say that there is a need for more overarching and comparative research on activities that the PAB developed in various fields. This article takes a step in that direction and contributes to a general analysis of the activities of the PAB by focusing on its policy towards “cultures of spectacle”.

Obviously, the concept of “cultures of spectacle” was not used by the PAB. Nevertheless, the PAB paid strong attention to “spectacles”, which we define here as cultural attractions that were either performed or screened in front of an audience that physically gathered in one room (or building) to see and hear the performers. This includes theatre, opera, operetta, ballet, musical performances (cabaret, musical combos, concerts), and film screenings. One could argue that football games, box matches, and other sports events also fit this definition. Even though such manifestations could indeed be labelled as spectacles and even though such manifestations were sometimes also on the radar of the PAB, they fall outside the scope of this article. This article does not pay significant attention to events that were mainly organised for German military personnel stationed in Belgium (the so-called *Truppenbetreuung* or military entertainment) but rather focuses on cultures of spectacle that were aimed at the general, Belgian public.

First, this article will explain in some detail how the PAB was founded and how the organisation evolved throughout the occupation. It is important to provide both the organizational history and

a broader context in order to understand how the PAB, which did not come to Belgium with a detailed action plan in the spring of 1940, was established, functioned and developed its actions. Next, this article will zoom in on the various ways in which the PAB attempted to influence individuals, groups, or organisations that organised various kinds of spectacle. By conclusion, we will establish the (dis) similarities in the policy of the PAB towards various cultures of spectacle and try to set the agenda for future research in this area.

II. The Beginning : from Propaganda-Staffel B towards the Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien (1940-1944)

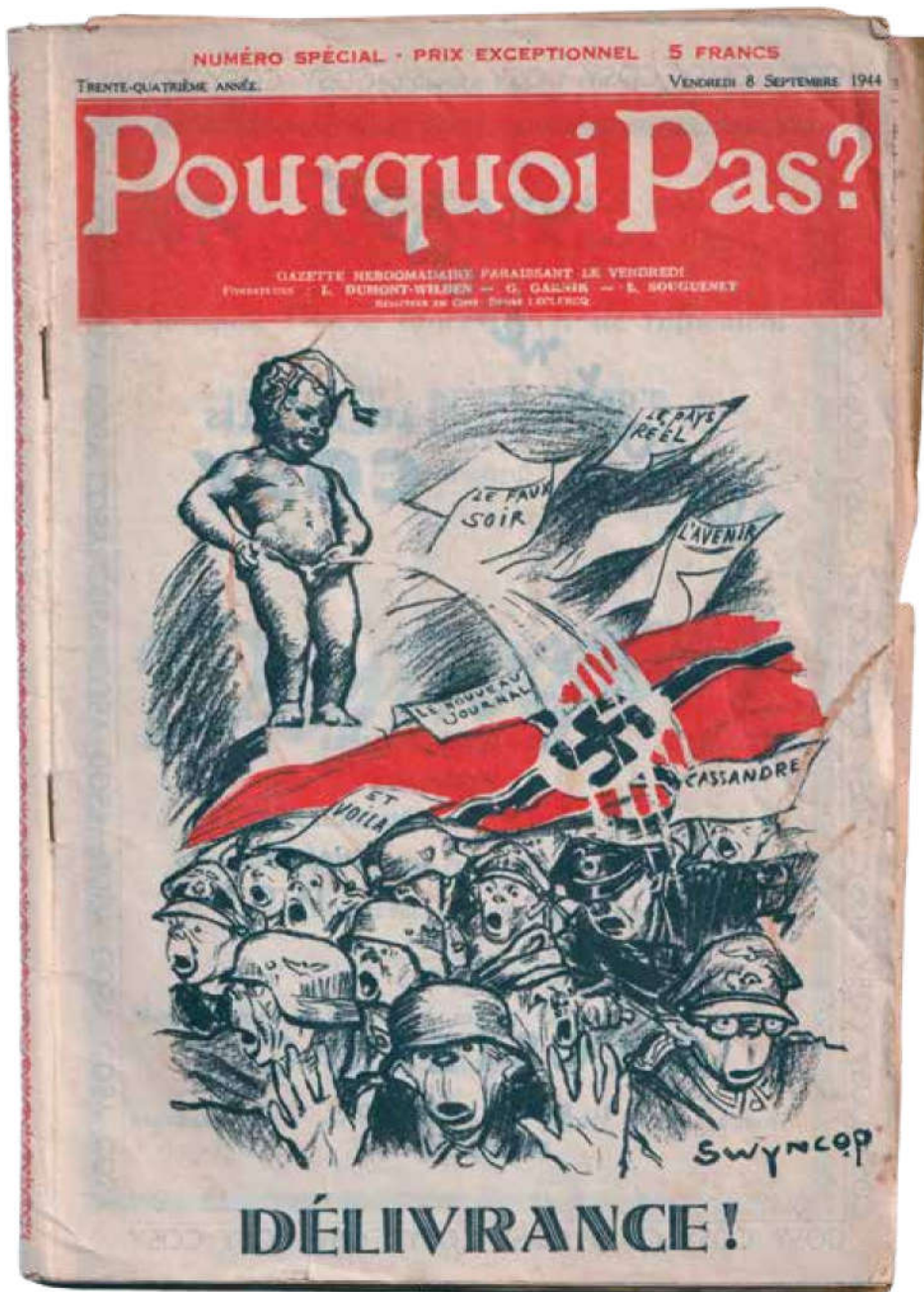
During the so-called Phoney War, British-French Allies and German forces were engaged in a static war while preparing their plans, defensive for the former, offensive for the latter. During the preparation of Case Yellow (*Fall Gelb*), the planned invasion of Belgium, Luxemburg, and the Netherlands, the German armed forces (*Wehrmacht*) also prepared for the envisaged occupation of Belgium. The establishment of an (ad interim) military administration for Belgium had been planned since October 1939¹¹. Within that framework, as early as January 1940, the Supreme Command of the German Army (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, acronym OKW) and more specifically its propaganda division (*Abteilung Wehrmachtpropaganda*, acronym OKW/WPr. or WPr.), set up a separate propaganda squad specifically attributed to Belgium and the Netherlands. This was

8. ROEL VANDE WINKEL, *Nazi newsreels and foreign propaganda in German-occupied territories. The Belgian version of Ufa's foreign weekly newsreel (ATW), 1940-1944*, PhD Thesis, Ghent, Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, Universiteit Gent, 2003. For the author, this was the beginning of a larger, long-term research project about film in German-occupied Belgium, see ROEL VANDE WINKEL, *Cinema in Occupied Belgium (1940-1944)* <www.cinema-in-occupied-belgium.bel>. First published 17 November 2020.

9. About literature in French-speaking Belgium, MICHEL FINCOEUR, *Contribution à l'histoire de l'édition francophone belge sous l'Occupation allemande 1940-1944*, PhD Thesis, Université libre de Bruxelles, 2005-2006. LUKAS DE VOS, YVES T'SJOEN and LUIDO STYNEN (eds), *Verbrande Schrijvers. 'Culturele' Collaboratie in Vlaanderen 1933-1953*, Gent, 2009.

10. MARNIX BEYEN, *Oorlog en verleden : nationale geschiedenis in België en Nederland, 1938-1947*, Amsterdam, 2002.

11. ALBERT DE JONGHE, *Hitler en het politieke lot van België*, Antwerpen-Utrecht, 1972, p. 18-23. WERNER WARMBRUNN, *The German occupation of Belgium 1940-1944*. Frankfurt-am-Main, 1993, p. 5-52.



The political weekly magazine *Pourquoi Pas?* (Why Not?) had been shut down under German occupation but appeared again on 8 September 1944, just a few days after the German army had left Brussels. The cover celebrated "liberation" from the Germans. Cartoonist Philippe Swyncoep drew "Manneken Pis" (a symbol of Brussels and Belgium), with the hat of the Belgian army, urinating on German military, on the German military flag, and (last but not least) on the print press that had been published in German-occupied Belgium. This cartoon vividly illustrates frustration about the PAB-controlled press. Source: private collection Roel Vande Winkel.

Propaganda Squadron B (Propaganda-Staffel B)¹². Such a propaganda formation is not to be confused with the so-called propaganda companies (*Propaganda-Kompanien*) that were operating within the *Wehrmacht* or the *Waffen-SS*¹³. Propaganda companies were trained to report about the war and were expected to operate near or at the front. Hence, they were mobile and there was no long term assignment to a designated area. Formations such as the *Propaganda-Staffel B*, on the other hand, were to follow *behind* fighting troops and to take over all propaganda activities in conquered regions. These different functions also required different personnel. Propaganda companies enlisted only men who had received military training and were fit for combat. Formations such as the *Propaganda-Staffel B*, however, also employed German personnel that were not (or no longer) military trained, but that had been chosen because, as civilians, they had acquired skills or qualifications that were considered useful. In other words, they were people whose professional occupations made them suitable for a specific function that was linked to a military rank that they (as civilians) did not have. In order to carry out the job they were needed for while functioning normally within the military structure and hierarchy of the *Wehrmacht*, these civilians were employed and, if necessary, assigned a provisional rank without meeting the usual military requirements in terms of training, etc. To distinguish these Germans from regular German officers, they were called 'Special leaders' or

Sonderführer. Throughout the war some of them would undergo military training that turned them into regular officers, while others would remain *Sonderführer* until the end of the war¹⁴. Some *Sonderführer* had formerly worked as propagandists, for instance within the structures of the NSDAP. Others had no (political) propaganda experience and had been employed because of their former professional or cultural activities such as journalists, photographers, editors, advertising managers, musicologists, philologists, etc. Others were also selected for their personal connection to and affinity with Belgium. For example, *Sonderführer* Willem Stocké was the son of a Flemish activist from the First World War who gained German citizenship¹⁵. On the other side of the linguistic border, Willy Peltzer was chosen for the rare skills in Walloon dialects he had acquired before leaving Belgium-annexed Malmédy in 1920¹⁶.

Detailed information regarding the establishment and formation of the *Propaganda-Staffel B* has not yet been found. Nevertheless, it is clear that the German Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda (*Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda*, acronym RMVP) wielded some influence. Although the *Propaganda-Staffel B* was a military unit, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels managed to exercise a considerable influence. In January 1940, Goebbels had already sent a representative to the *Propaganda-Staffel B*¹⁷. It is likely that the RMVP also suggested the names of various *Sonderführer*.

12. The study of the various correspondence left by the *Propaganda-Staffel B* demonstrates that the letter "B" does not stand for Belgium (Belgien) but refers to "*Propaganda-Staffel des Heeresgruppe B*". This means that the unit was directly subordinated to Army-Group B, responsible for the invasion of Belgium and the Netherlands. Only after its installation in Brussel, the unit changed the use of the letter "B" for Belgium. See for example CEGESOMA, AA 1417, 1/1, Report of the *Gruppe Propaganda* to the *Militärbefehlshaber* Alexander von Falkenhausen, Brussels, 15 November 1940 or the directives addressed to *Propaganda-Staffel B* by OKW/WPr. in BA-MA, RW4/187.

13. *Wehrmacht-Propaganda* and its units are studied by DANIEL UZIEL, *The Propaganda Warriors. The Wehrmacht and the Consolidation of the German Home Front*, Oxford, 2008. Also worth citing but to be used carefully is the post-war publication by the commander of OKW/WPr., HASSO VON WEDEL, *Die Propagandatruppen der Deutschen Wehrmacht*, Neckargemünd, 1962.

14. DANIEL UZIEL, *op. cit.*, p. 122-126.

15. ALBERT DE JONGHE, "La lutte Himmler-Reeder pour la nomination d'un HSSPF à Bruxelles. Quatrième partie: Salzbourg avant et après. Évolution politique d'août 1943 à juillet 1944", in *Cahiers d'Histoire de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*, n° 7, April 1982, p. 95-184.

16. MICHEL FINCOEUR, *Le théâtre d'amateurs sous l'occupation*, Master thesis in Histoire du spectacle, ULB, 2001-2002, p. 23-24.

17. Goebbels' diary entry of 16 January 1940, in E. FRÖHLICH (ed.), *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels. Teil 1: Aufzeichnungen 1923-1941. Band 7: Juli 1939-März 1940*, Munich, 1998, p. 273. The name of the person remains to be identified.

On 10 May 1940, the German army invaded Belgium, France, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. On 28 May, King Leopold III, commander-in-chief of the Belgian military forces, surrendered. Adolf Hitler, who had not yet decided on the political future of Belgium, considered installing a civil administration (*Zivilverwaltung*), like he had done in the occupied Netherlands a few days before, but finally opted for the military option. The military administration (*Militärverwaltung*) that had been installed after the capitulation, remained in power under the leadership of a military governor: General Alexander Freiherr von Falkenhausen. (His uncle, Ludwig von Falkenhausen, had governed Belgium during the First World War.) The military administration ruled Belgium (with the exception of the German-speaking East Cantons, which were annexed to the *Reich*) as well as the departments Nord and Pas-de-Calais in the northern region of occupied France. Von Falkenhausen's administration established itself in the Belgian capital, Brussels. The Military Administration in Belgium and Northern France (*Militärverwaltung in Belgien und Nordfrankreich*) remained in charge until mid-July 1944, when it was replaced by a civil administration. The impact of that decision was minor because the Allies liberated most of Belgium in the first days of September 1944¹⁸.

Little is known about the activities of the *Propaganda-Staffel B* during the 18 days that comprised the invasion of Belgium. The military formation must have been tasked with propagandistic actions targeting the Belgian population. The war diary of Army Group B recorded that, on 14th May 1940, 150,000 posters were distributed to inform the population of occupied territories about regulations they had to follow¹⁹. This was probably the work of the *Propaganda-Staffel B*. It is also unclear how many men were working for the military for-

mation at the time and who they were. After the Belgian capitulation and the installation of the military administration, the *Propaganda-Staffel B* was tasked with establishing a complete German propaganda apparatus in Belgium.

The Military Administration was divided into two main branches. The Commando Staff (*Kommandostab*), led by Bodo von Harbou, took charge of the military occupation of Belgium and Northern France. The Administrative Staff (*Verwaltungsstab*), led by Eggert Reeder, took charge of governing bodies and the economic exploitation of the occupied territories. Working under the jurisdiction of von Falkenhausen's Military Administration, the *Propaganda-Staffel B* was attached to Reeder's Administrative Staff. The unit settled in the Belgian capital and started working immediately²⁰. One of its priorities was, obviously, taking control of the Belgian press and making sure that there were again newspapers and radio broadcasts: to give the clear message that life was returning to normal but also send out media messages that were aligned to the German news media. The propaganda formation had many other tasks (which will be discussed below) but also needed time to find the right personnel. The unit took its final form in November 1940 and was renamed into the Propaganda Department Belgium (*Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien*, acronym PAB). To maintain its control over all areas of Belgium and Northern France, the *Military administration* installed several smaller military offices. These were called *Oberfeldkommandanturen* in large cities and *Kreis- or Feldkommandanturen* in other significant municipalities. Likewise, the PAB established its own antennas (*Propagandastaffeln*) in the *Oberfeldkommandanturen* of what it considered the most important cities: Antwerp, Bruges, Ghent, Liège, and Lille. Smaller units, called *Nebenstellen* or *Aussenstellen*

18. On the general topic of the *Militärverwaltung* in Belgium and Northern France, see ALBERT DE JONGHE, *op. cit.*; JULES GÉRARD-LIBOIS and JOSÉ GOTOVITCH, *L'an 40. La Belgique occupée*, Brussels, 1971; ETIENNE VERHOEYEN, *België bezet. Een 2synthese*, Brussels, 1993.

19. MARTIN MOLL, *op. cit.*, p. 610-611.

20. ELS DE BENS, *op. cit.*, p. 73.



On 25 April 1942, General Alexander Freiherr von Falkenhausen personally attended the inauguration of the exhibition "Das Deutsche Buch" (the German Book) at the Palace of Fine Arts (Palais des Beaux-Arts, Paleis voor Schone Kunsten) in Brussels. The exhibition, organised by the Referat Schrifttum (Gruppe Kultur) with the support of the Gruppe Aktiv-Propaganda, was heavily promoted in the print press, on the radio, and in the newsreel. Source : CEGESOMA Photo n° 7349.

were placed in other cities like Hasselt, Mons, and Charleroi²¹. In even smaller regions or agglomerations, individual representatives of the PAB were attached to the local *Kommandanturen*. The combination of those groups and the *Führungsgruppe* formed the PAB.

III. Mission, Structure, and Competences of the Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien (PAB)

In August 1941, the PAB finalised a lengthy document it referred to as its first annual report: an overview of its first year of activities (summer 1940-summer 1941)²². Even though – as mentioned above – such a report is to be treated with caution, it offers an interesting overview of how the PAB had organised itself since its instalment in Brussels. (For the sake of clarity, we will hereafter refer to the propaganda service as “PAB” even before November 1940 when it was still a *Propaganda-Staffel*.) At the early days of the occupation, the tasks of the PAB were numerous but could be divided into four main purposes. First and foremost, the public opinion had to be turned to believe that the German Reich was not responsible for the war and that Great Britain was entirely to blame. Secondly, the PAB was focused, in line with the policy of the Military Administration, to maintain peace and order among the occupied population, to assure that Germany could exploit optimally the resources of Belgium and Northern France. Thirdly, the PAB aimed to bring the public opinion to the acceptance of the “New Order”, in other words to accept Germany as the key economic and cultural centre of Europe. To this end, the PAB felt that the strong French influence

on Belgian culture had to be countered and Germanic culture had to be promoted. Lastly, the PAB tried, also as part of the “New Order” appraisal, to influence the Belgian population with positive reports about life in Germany under the National-Socialist rule. The latter was an integral part of the PAB’s policy. In its annual report of 1941, the unit specified that the “international and corrosive forces of Judaism and Freemasonry” had to be denounced as “permanent enemies of European culture”²³. To fulfil those tasks, the PAB was divided into six groups, each of which was designed to control a specific area of public life. The following schematic overview will describe those fields of competence.

Presse

The “Press Group” was responsible for controlling and censoring the Belgian print press. It was divided into several offices (*Referaten*) that were responsible for newspapers, periodicals, and illustrated press respectively²⁴.

Rundfunk

Since 1930, Belgium had a publicly funded national radio broadcaster (Nationaal Instituut voor de Radio-Omroep/Institut National de Radiodiffusion) that would broadcast programs in Dutch and in French. The “Radio Group” of the PAB took control of the equipment and, retaining some of the original Belgian staff, installed *Sender Brüssel* (Radio Brussels), which broadcasted in Dutch (as *Zender Brussel*) and in French (as *Radio Bruxelles*)²⁵.

21. The structure of the PAB evolved during the occupation. For example, the antenna in Liege was first a small *Aussenstelle* in 1940 before becoming a *Propaganda-Staffel* the following year. It is not the object of this article to study the evolution of the PAB in detail. Details are to be found in the internal correspondence, see CEGESOMA, AA1417, 1/1, Documentation concernant la Propaganda-Abteilung.

22. CEGESOMA, AA 570, *Jahresbericht der Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien beim Militärbefehlshaber in Belgien und in Nordfrankreich*, Brussels, August 1941, p. 2-3.

23. “Die internationalen, zersetzenden Kräfte des Judentums und der Freimaurerei als die ständigen Feinde der europäischen Kultur aufzuzeigen”, CEGESOMA, AA 570, *Jahresbericht der Propaganda-Abteilung (...)*, Brussels, August 1941, p. 1.

24. ELS DE BENS, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

25. For literature, see note 6 as well as ERIC DEROM, “One Orchestra, Two Artistic Policies, One Censor. Symphonic Music by the Great Symphony Orchestra of Belgian Radio (1940-1944)”, published elsewhere in this issue.

Film

The Film Group focused on the film sector of Belgium and to some extent also to Northern France. (This is explained in greater detail below.) This group also monitored the production of the Belgian version of German newsreels that cinemas were obliged to screen as part of every film programme. These newsreels were available in Dutch and in French, as the *Ufa Wereld Actualiteiten*/*Ufa Actualités Mondiales* (1940-1944) and as the *Belga Nieuws/Belga Actualités* (1943-1944)²⁶.

Kultur

The “Culture Group” was responsible for bringing every aspect of the cultural life of Belgium and Northern France to National-Socialist standards, from theatres to art, literature, and music. It also embedded the tasks relating to “Volkstum” – a concept that is hard to translate in its National-Socialist meaning. It focused on the ethnic layers of Belgian society the PAB was interested in. These were the Flemish and Walloon people but also the ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche*). This group tried to promote German culture and National-Socialist ideology with campaigns that were specifically designed for those ethnic groups. This “Volkstum” policy was of course also to be carried out “under the law of Race and Space²⁷”.

Aktiv-Propaganda

“Aktiv-Propaganda”, sometimes also spelled “Aktivpropaganda”, is another concept that cannot be translated verbatim. This group focused

on proactive propaganda actions and had the task of promoting National-Socialist ideology by organizing exhibitions and running propaganda campaigns that involved distributing thousands of leaflets and posters. To steer the mood of the population in a direction that was in the interest of the German Reich as well as in the interest of the German *Wehrmacht*, this group also had to monitor (and try to counter) information that was spread by, for instance, the resistance (underground press) or by BBC broadcasts. Listening to those programmes was forbidden in German-occupied Belgium, but people did it anyway, because it offered an alternative to the censored, monotonously uniform German-controlled press.

All these groups were placed under the jurisdiction of a commander and his staff, which was referred to as the *Führungsgruppe* (leadership group). In June 1940, *Oberleutnant* Finkh, who had commanded the *Staffel* during the invasion, stayed in The Netherlands and, after a short interim under *Oberleutnant* Wiesner²⁸, he was succeeded in mid-July by *Major* Felix Dr. Gerhardus, who became the first commander of the PAB²⁹. As was often the case in the hierarchical echelons of Nazi Germany and the countries it occupied, the chain of command above the PAB was complicated. As part of the Military Administration, it was, in theory, only subordinated to the *Wehrmacht* and to military instances such as the abovementioned OKW/WPr. By consequence, a German civil body such as Joseph Goebbels’ RMVP was not authorised to influence the PAB. In reality, things were different. As mentioned above, the propaganda ministry managed to exercise influence over the *Propaganda-Staffel B* many months before the German invasion. This influence was extended to the PAB, which

26. ROEL VANDE WINKEL, “Nazi newsreels in Europe, 1939-1945: The many faces of Ufa’s foreign weekly newsreel (Auslandstonwoche) versus German’s weekly newsreel (Deutsch-Wochenschau)”, in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 24, n° 1, 2004, p. 5-34; ROEL VANDE WINKEL, “Belgische onderwerpen van de door de bezetter gecontroleerde UFA en BELGA filmjournaals, 1940-1944.”, in *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis. Journal of Belgian History*, vol. 39, n° 1-2, 2009, p. 199-236.

27. “Eine aus dem Gesetz von Rasse und Raum sich ergebende Volkstumspflege zu betreiben.” in CEGESOMA, AA 570, *Jahresbericht der Propaganda-Abteilung* (...), Brussels, August 1941, p. 2.

28. BA-MA, RW4/187, Letter from OKH, *Chef Nachrichtenwesen* to OKW, *Operations-Abteilung*, Berlin, 13 June 1940.

29. CEGESOMA, AA 1417, 1/1, Report of the *Gruppe Propaganda* to the *Militärbefehlshaber* Alexander von Falkenhausen, Brussels, 15 November 1940.

depended on the RMVP on various levels. To perform its tasks, the PAB was also highly dependent on propaganda materials that were to be provided by the RMVP, and on German institutions that were controlled by the RMVP. (For instance: German radio broadcasters, the German print press, the German film industry, the German Culture Chamber....) The RMVP also provided the PAB with qualified staff and paid an allowance that varied between 30,000 and 120,000 Reich Marks per month³⁰. The strong control that the RMVP derived from these financial and logistical contributions is clearly reflected in the structure of the PAB, which mirrored those of the Propaganda Ministry departments and explains why the OKW/WPr. Accepted the ministry's interference.

Indeed, Goebbels' ministry played an important role in the propaganda apparatus in Belgium and Northern France, and over the years of occupation, it would try to extend its influence, which would lead to conflicts with the *Wehrmacht*. It is therefore no wonder that Major Dr. Gerhardus would declare after the war that his service had had two masters: the Military Administration and the Propaganda Ministry³¹. Gerhardus knew this from experience: Goebbels did not entirely trust him because of his pre-war involvement in the Catholic *Deutsche Zentrumspartei* (German Centre Party). After many months of debating and intriguing, Goebbels managed to have Gerhardus replaced by one of his subordinates: longstanding NSDAP member Karl Gunzer, who was previously leading the Radio Group. Gunzer's appointment as the new PAB leader in June 1942 was accepted but his involvement in the turf war between the Flemish collaboration parties *Vlaamsch Nationaal*

Verbond (VNV) and *Deutsch-Vlämische Arbeitsgemeinschaft* (DeVlag) would lead to new conflicts³². Meanwhile the influence of the RMVP over the PAB was resented by another German civil body: Joachim von Ribbentrop's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Auswärtiges Amt*, acronym AA) also claimed a role in the propaganda apparatus in Belgium and Northern France through the intermediary of the German embassy in Brussels³³. Before the invasion, this embassy had been tasked with monitoring and targeting Belgian public opinion on behalf of Nazi Germany. Letting go of that role was difficult and the embassy regularly tried to intervene, albeit not with much success. The embassy, which had been degraded to a representative of the AA, only managed to send a representative to the weekly press conference the PAB organized and to secure some responsibilities relating to political matters³⁴. The PAB also faced competition from other organisations such as the SS and the *Sipo-SD* but their influence was limited and is not relevant for this article³⁵.

Having sketched out the main structures and the main influences of the PAB, this article will now take a closer look at the ways in which the PAB attempted to influence individuals, groups, or organisations that organised various kinds of spectacles. As mentioned in the introduction: we will, from a top-down perspective, analyse how the PAB tried to streamline such spectacles and search for common elements (or differences) in its policy towards theatre performances, musical performances (operas, orchestras), and film screenings. The results of this policy cannot be discussed within this chapter and are to be analysed in further case studies³⁶.

30. ELS DE BENS, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

31. Interview by Els De Bens with Gerhardus (1968), paraphrased in ELS DE BENS, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

32. MARTIN MOLL, *op. cit.*, p. 615-617.

33. Most of the archives of this embassy (1940-1944) are lost. This is another complicating factor for research on the PAB.

34. JOHANNES SCHMID, "Comment gérer l'occupation de la Belgique? La propagande allemande en 1940", in STEFAN MAERTENS and STEFFEN PRAUSER (eds), *La guerre de 1940, se battre, subir, se souvenir*, Villeneuve d'Ascq, 2014, p. 155-164.

35. ELS DE BENS, *op. cit.*, p. 83-86.

36. This theme issue contains several examples: ERIK BAECK, "Opera Performances in Antwerp During the First and Second World War"; ERIC DEROM, "One Orchestra, Two Artistic Policies, One Censor. Symphonic Music by the Great Symphony Orchestra of Belgian Radio (1940-1944)"; and HEDWIGE BAECK-SCHILDERS, "Symphonic Concerts in Antwerp During the First and Second World War".



On 16 March 1943, Flemish nurses who had returned to Belgium (for a holiday) were interviewed about having worked in Germany for the German Red Cross. The interview was likely to highlight the benefits of working in Germany. This illustrates the propagandistic value of controlling the radio.

Source : CEGESOMA Photo n° 18157.

IV. The *Gruppe Kultur* and its collaborators

The *Gruppe Kultur*'s main objective was to control the cultural life in occupied Belgium and Northern France, ranging from music to theatre as well as visual arts. Nonetheless, this subject is very large and cannot be considered here in its totality. We will thus limit our range to its attributions regarding theatre, music, and cabarets. We will also focus on organisations that were really working, hands-on, in these cultural sectors. Larger organisations that were not practically involved to the same degree (such as the Flemish and Walloon Cultural Councils, which existed before the war already but were reformed and repopulated by the occupying forces) will therefore not be mentioned³⁷.

The first leader of the *Gruppe Kultur* was *Sonderführer* Friedrich Esser from 1940 to mid-1942. Not much is known yet on this figure³⁸. He was succeeded by Rolf Wilkening who arrived in Belgium around June 1940 as a member of the *Gruppe Kultur* and led for a short time the *Gruppe Aktiv-Propaganda*³⁹. Co-founder of the DeVlag before the war and former member of the press department of the German Embassy in Belgium, Wilkening had been in Belgium several times since the 1930s and was well aware of the political tensions within Belgium and within the *Vlaamse Beweging* (Flemish Movement)⁴⁰. Due to his affinities with DeVlag, his politics were essentially oriented towards Flemish organisations and he played a significant role in the struggle between DeVlag and the VNV, both of which hoped to play an important role in the political future of Flanders.

Wilkening also played the role of intermediary between the DeVlag and the German ministries in Berlin. In the end of 1943, he left the group for reasons that must be clarified and was succeeded by other members of the *Gruppe Kultur*: successively *Hauptmann* Paul Schotte, head of *Referat Musik*, Dr. Karl Schulte-Kemminghausen, head of *Propaganda-Staffel Antwerpen*, and then Dr. Hans Teske, the previous head of the *Referat Schrifttum*⁴¹.

Aside from Wilkening's group, another influential actor in occupied Belgium and Northern France was the *Gruppe Kultur und Volkstum* of the *Militärverwaltung*. This office, which was not part of the PAB, was headed by a leading German scholar of Belgium's cultural life. *Kriegsverwaltungsrat* Dr. Franz Petri was an academic specialized in the linguistic border between Wallonia and Flanders. As the advisor of Eggert Reeder, he played a leading role in the German cultural project for Belgium and Northern France which focused on two points. Firstly, an in-depth reorganization of the cultural field and, secondly, the strengthening of the ties with Germany while countering the strong influence of France⁴². The real separation of powers between the PAB and Dr. Franz Petri's office must still be properly determined. However, Petri's office played the role of theoreticians, setting the main course of action while Wilkening's group was responsible for implementing it concretely⁴³.

To work efficiently, the *Gruppe Kultur* was divided in several offices (so-called *Referate*), each controlling a particular field of cultural life⁴⁴. The post of head of the *Referat Theater* turned out to be rather unstable as five *Sonderführer* rap-

37. ETIENNE VERHOEYEN, "Kultuur, politiek en cultuurpolitiek tijdens de tweede wereldoorlog", in *Kultuurleven*, 1985, n° 52, p. 654-655.

38. Friedrich Esser is born in 1902 and served in the Propaganda-Ministry as *Gaukulturwart* before the war.

39. This information can be found in various reports on *Personalstand* of the PAB in BA-MA, RW4/161 and RW4/192.

40. For an in-depth study of the DeVlag and the involvement of Rolf Wilkening, see the works of FRANK SEBERECHTS, *Geschiedenis van de DeVlag. Van cultuurbeweging tot politieke partij. 1935-1945*, Ghent, 1991; see also FRIEDA MEIRE, "De DeVlag voor Mei 1940", in *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, 1982, n° 2-3, p. 419-466.

41. Barch, R-55, 219, *Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien. Stand am 1.8.1944*. On the leading members of *Gruppe Kultur* and especially Rolf Wilkening and Hans Dr. Teske, see also, MARNIX BEYEN, *op. cit.*, p. 93-96.

42. HERMAN VAN DE VIJVER, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

43. MARNIX BEYEN, *op. cit.*, p. 84-92.

44. Unless quoted otherwise, the names of the different heads of the *Referate* are taken from the various lists of personnel that the PAB sent regularly to the OKW/WPr, see BA-MA, RW4/161 and 162.

idly succeeded one another: Billerbeck, Vogel, Fisher, Klose, and then Göbel⁴⁵. Friedrich Billerbeck, a playwright himself, arrived in Belgium in June 1940 and headed the *Referat Theater* until the beginning of 1941. Fisher and Klose were, according to a post-war testimony of an eastern auxiliary working at the PAB, known for their poor knowledge of the French language, which was a non-negligible handicap⁴⁶. Göbel, on the contrary, spoke French fluently and had been living in Belgium before the war. The position of head of the *Referat Musik* was much more stable. Until the beginning of 1941, it was occupied by Cornelis Bronsgeest before being succeeded by *Hauptmann* (Captain) Schotte and his deputy, *Sonderführer* Dr. Gröninger⁴⁷. As mentioned above, the *Gruppe Kultur* also included the *Referat Volkstum*. This was headed by Lutz Pesch, also a DeVlag member⁴⁸, and by *Hauptmann* Wilhelm Dr. Kemp⁴⁹.

At its arrival in Belgium in May 1940, the *Gruppe Kultur* found Belgian and French cultural life at a standstill. The mobilisation of September 1939 had imposed a significant slowdown in cultural activities and the military disaster of May 1940 had worsened the situation. Theatres had closed, and members of professional and amateur theatre groups alike were dispersed. Some had been taken prisoner of war, some had fled to France... The same applied to orchestras and

musical bands. Thus, the first task of the *Gruppe Kultur* was to supervise the restart of cultural life in Belgium and Northern France. However, it was clear that this new cultural life would differ from the former. French cultural influence was to be limited whenever possible (in particular, but not only, in Flanders) and German cultural hegemony had to be promoted. For that purpose, everything was subordinated to the PAB's control. On 10 May 1940 already, the first directive published by the occupiers stipulated that any public gathering or demonstration was subject to the authorisation of the German authorities. This was, of course, directed primarily against the organisation of demonstrations, but applied by extension to any gathering, as any public gathering could lead to a protest demonstration. This remained an important directive throughout the occupation: there was no room for "spontaneous" gatherings or events and everything had to be planned ahead to make sure it could be monitored⁵⁰.

At first, the *Gruppe Kultur* tried to establish contacts with the already existing cultural actors in the occupied country. Due to Wilkening's position, it is not surprising that the DeVlag quickly became the key partner of the PAB in occupied Belgium during the first year of the occupation. According to the PAB's first annual report (1941), Flemish culture had been subjected to "years of oppression"

45. Philipp Vogel, born in 1905, and also a playwright, headed the *Referat Theater* for a significant amount of time.

46. CEGESOMA, AA 1418, 26, Rapport sur l'activité de la PA signed by Nabokoff, without date.

47. CEGESOMA, AA 1418, 26, Rapport sur l'activité de la PA signed by Nabokoff, without date. Before the war, Paul Schotte, born in 1897, was regional leader of the *Reichsmusikkammer* in Württemberg, see his personal file in *Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg, Staatsarchiv Ludwigsburg*, K 745 II Bü 1365, Personalakten Paul Schotte. Eduard Gröninger, born in 1909, was a musicologist from University of Cologne. See Barch, R55/1367, Personal list of *Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien*, undated but we estimate it around June or July 1942 and FRANK LATINO, "Walter Giesecking in Belgium, 1938-1944: The Controversial appearances of a Prominent German Pianist", in *Revue belge de Musicologie*, vol. 69, 2015, p. 269-281.

48. BRUNO DE WEVER, *op. cit.*, p. 439.

49. The case of the *Referat Volkstum* is quite complex and must still be clarified. Although it was in theory directly subordinated to the *Gruppe Kultur*, it seems that it was split up in 1941. In the beginning, it was headed by Lutz Pesch from Bruges then Gent who focused on the relations with Flanders. However, after the PAB began to take interest in cultural activities in Wallonia, Dr. Wilhelm Kemp was tasked to form the *Referat für wallonische Volkstumsfragen* attached to *Propaganda-Staffel Lüttich*. It seems that the competences in *Volkstum* were progressively attributed to the *Staffeln* who adapted their policy to the regional situation, always under coordination of the PAB commander. See BA-MA, RW4/193, *Stellenbesetzung am 15 Oktober 1942*, Brussels, 22 October 1942. See also various reports on the CCW from Dr. Kemp in CEGESOMA, AA1418, 143.

50. „Kriegsgerichtlich geahndet wird: (...) Das Zusammenrotten auf der Straße, das Verbreiten von Flugschriften, die Veranstaltung von öffentlichen Versammlungen und Aufzügen, die nicht vorher von einem deutschen Befehlshaber genehmigt worden sind, sowie jede andere deutschfeindliche Kundgebung"; CEGESOMA, AA 2125, *Heeresgruppen-Verordnungsblatt für die besetzten Gebiete*, 10th May 1940.

from French cultural propaganda and the DeVlag (established in 1935) had played a pioneering role in stimulating exchanges between Flanders and Germany⁵¹. In August 1940, Rolf Wilkening authorised DeVlag leader Jef Van de Wiele to resume publishing its *DeVlag* magazine. Wilkening did so without receiving authorisation from the Military Administration⁵². The same type of collaboration in Wallonia was not possible because there was no French-language equivalent to the DeVlag. This lacuna contributed to the creation of the *Communauté Culturelle Wallonne* (Walloon Cultural Community, acronym CCW) in the beginning of 1941. In Brussels, the *Gruppe Kultur* regularly used the Palace of Fine Arts (*Palais des Beaux-Arts/Paleis voor Schone Kunsten*) for its various manifestations⁵³.

For Northern France, the PAB first counted on the support of the *Vlaamsch Verbond van Frankrijk* (Flemish Union of France, acronym VVF), a small organization founded by Abbot Jean-Marie Gantois to promote Flemish culture in the French departments⁵⁴. This is related to the fact that French Flanders, located in the French Department of Nord, is a part of the historical County of Flanders and has/had an ethnic group that spoke/speaks a dialect of Dutch, the so-called “French Flemish”. However, its activities were so limited and, according to the PAB, too political to enable effective cultural work. In a similar vein, again on a small scale, the *Gruppe Kultur* also collaborated with the *Deutsche Sprachverein* (German Language Association) in Arlon to promote the German minority living in this area⁵⁵. The foundation of the German theatre in Lille (discussed

below) would then create the main collaborator of the *Gruppe Kultur* in Northern France.

V. Theatres under German Supervision

According to the PAB, before the German invasion, 30 theatres had been functioning in Belgium. (The definition of a “theatre” is not clear: the PAB probably referred to official theatres and not to polyvalent spaces used for – among other things – theatre performances.) Closed (for various reasons) during the military operations, they slowly began reopening during the summer of 1940. Reopening required permission from the Military Administration. This gave the *Gruppe Kultur* the opportunity to make a first selection. Only 27 out of the 30 theatres were allowed to resume their activities. The French-speaking theatres in Ghent and in Antwerp remained closed, which allowed the PAB, in its report to boast about drastically reducing the French influence in those two Flemish cities⁵⁶. That the PAB was boasting is particularly true for Antwerp: the company of the *Théâtre royal d’Anvers* (popularly known as the ‘Théâtre Français’ or the ‘French Opera’), which performed operas in French, had been disbanded by the city council Camille in 1933 (!) already, because the city could no longer afford to support two companies and preferred the Flemish Opera⁵⁷. In Brussels, the first major theatre to reopen was the *Théâtre royal des Galeries* on 28 June. It goes without saying that the Military Administration (PAB) did not just decide which theatre was allowed to re-open, but also which play(s) these theatres were allowed to perform⁵⁸. The theatres

51. “Jahrhundertelangen Unterdrückung”, CEGESOMA, AA 570, *Jahresbericht der Propaganda-Abteilung* (...), Brussels, August 1941.

52. FRIEDA MEIRE, *op. cit.*

53. A variety of examples can be found in VALÉRIE MONTENS, *Le Palais des Beaux-Arts : la création d’un haut-lieu de culture à Bruxelles (1928-1945)*, Brussels, 2000, p. 281-298.

54. On the VVF, see ETIENNE DEJONGHE, “Un mouvement séparatiste dans le Nord et le Pas-de-Calais sous l’occupation (1940-1944): le *Vlaamsch Verbond van Frankrijk*”, in *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine*, t. 17, n°1, January-March 1970, p. 50-77.

55. CEGESOMA, AA 570, *Jahresbericht der Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien* (...), Brussels, August 1941.

56. CEGESOMA, AA 570, *Jahresbericht der Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien* (...), Brussels, August 1941. In Ghent, the *Théâtre Royal Français de Gand* was not allowed to re-open.

57. We are indebted to Hedwige Baeck-Schilders for checking this information and refer to her article elsewhere in this issue.

58. CÉCILE MICHEL, *Le théâtre et la guerre. Étude sur l’institution théâtrale à Bruxelles pendant l’occupation allemande (1940-1944)*, Master thesis, ULB, 1991-1992, p. 30-31.



Het Muziekfonds (The Music Fund) was financially supported by the Referat Musik of the PAB. In November 1940, the Music Fund organized a Beethoven-Wagner concert, under the direction of German director Eugen Papst, in the Palace of Fine Arts (Palais des Beaux-Arts, Paleis voor Schone Kunsten) in Brussels. Source : CEGESOMA Photo n° 32465.

also had to deal with the curfew imposed by German authorities, which disrupted their program⁵⁹.

The first legislation regarding theatres, was published as late as 23 September 1940 by the Military Administration but confirmed and solidified a policy that had been imposed since the summer⁶⁰. It stipulated that theatres and other entertainment facilities could only reopen with an authorisation from the *Militärverwaltung*. In practice, it was the *Referat Theater* that had the authority to deliver such permits. This *Verordnung* (German ordinance) also stipulated that those permits could be withdrawn at any moment at the disclosure of German authorities⁶¹. In this way, the PAB managed to control the opening of any theatrical establishment: not just the established theatres mentioned above but also any other venue that was utilized to organise live performances. It also used its power to keep any Jewish actors out of the picture. For example, in October 1940, the *Gruppe Kultur* forced certain members of the management of the *Théâtre Royal du Parc* in Brussels to resign to remove any influence from Jews or the Freemasons⁶².

Once theatres were reopened, the main goal of the *Referat Theater* was to control and influence their choice of repertoire, in order to promote German playwrights and to counter influences from (other) foreigners. All theatrical plays of American or British origin were banned, with the exception of Shakespeare. The repertoire of Jewish artists was also immediately banned. The same applied to many Russian works. The gap that was thus created, was filled with works by German

playwrights but also by plays of Belgian, Dutch-or French-language writers. In other words, to counter the influence of French playwrights, the *Referat Theater* not only tried to increase performances of German repertoire (translated in French or in Dutch) but also promoted more local forms of theatre. In this context, plays in Flemish and in Walloon dialects flourished⁶³.

The case study of the *Koninklijke Nederlandse Schouwburg* (KNS) in Ghent of Karel Vanhaesebrouck shows that, although the change in the repertoire was significant after May 1940, a number of similarities remained. Plays of French origins became scarce and German classics from Goethe or Schiller appeared more often. However, as those German plays had already been performed before the war, the PAB influence only caused them to gain a more notable place in the repertoire. The real break was the disappearance of repertoire of American/British origin. Karel Vanhaesebrouck also shows that the situation of a theatre could vary significantly following its directors and their beliefs. If they were more open to the New Order ideology, their relationship with the PAB would be more cordial and they would be keener to adapt to orders of the *Referat Theater*. However, even a Flemish activist like Staf Bruggen, head of the KNS, could work in relative freedom without too much interference from the *Referat Theater*. Under Bruggen's supervision, plays that could have been censored or forbidden, were still shown. He also managed to turn down several invitations to travel to Germany⁶⁴. Nonetheless, the PAB could also exert its influence directly on theatres. Thus, the *Referat*

59. MARIANNE KLARIC, *La vie musicale à Bruxelles sous l'occupation, 1940-1944*, Master thesis, ULB, 1984-1985, p. 12.

60. Verordnung über den Betrieb von Theatern und Unterhaltungsstätten vom 23 September 1940. Published in German, Dutch and French in the *Verordnungsblatt des Militärbefehlshabers in Belgien und Nordfrankreich für die besetzten Gebiete Belgiens und Nordfrankreichs*, n° 15, 28 September 1940, p. 215-216.

61. CEGESOMA, AA 2125, *Verordnungsblatt des Militärbefehlshabers in Belgien und Nordfrankreich*, n° 15, 28 September 1940.

62. "Auf dem Theatergebiet ist der jüdische und freimaurerische Einfluss vollends ausgeschaltet, nachdem die jüdische Leitung des Theaters "Royal du parc" auf Veranlassung der Staffel "freiwillig" von der Leitung zurücktrat." GRMA, T-77, 982, *Propaganda-Lagebericht für die Zeit vom 25.10. bis 10.11.*, Brussels, 10 November 1940.

63. CÉCILE MICHEL, *op. cit.*, p. 32-33.

64. KAREL VANHAESBROUCK, *Schouwburgleven en culturele collaboratie in Gent tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, Master's thesis, University of Antwerp, 2000-2001, consulted on http://www.thesis.net/weglanten_schouwburgleven/schouwburgleven_inhoud.htm (consulted on 22 February 2021); KAREL VANHAESBROUCK, "Geen rijker kroon dan eigen schoon? De programmatiepolitiek van Staf Bruggen en Hendrik Caspeele in bezettingstijd", in *Wetenschappelijke Tijdingen*, 62, n° 1, 2003, p. 48-64.

Theater sometimes directly intervened in their activities, allocating funds and specialized personnel, or even sending a German stage director to supervise particular performances, like it did for the organization of special shows for *Wehrmacht* troops in the Opera of Ghent⁶⁵.

Several Dutch-language plays (written by Flemish or Dutch playwrights) were rather successful in Flanders, particularly in Ghent during the first winter of the occupation⁶⁶. Several German theatre groups were also invited to tour and perform in Belgium and Northern France. The PAB also financed the reopening of the Alhambra Theatre in Brussels in 1942, in order to promote a “purely Germanic life attitude and world vision” according to a member of the *Referat Theater, Sonderführer Philipp Vogel*⁶⁷. Interestingly, the management of this theatre was given to Adolf Clauwaert, who had also served as the director of this theatre in German-occupied Brussels in 1915-1918⁶⁸! Again, Clauwaert invited Flemish and German theatre groups to perform⁶⁹. Alhambra must have been of special symbolic importance considering its function in the First World War. It was also the place where in January 1918 the independence of Flanders was declared. (As the example of Clauwaert and the Alhambra illustrates, in-depth comparative research about and between both World Wars is necessary.)

The situation in Northern France was again particular. Theatres began reopening slowly in the fall

of 1940. In May 1941 the *Opéra de Lille* received the honorary title of *Deutsches Theater* (German Theatre). This rare distinction was only shared in Western Europe with *Deutsches Theater Oslo* and *Deutsches Theater in den Niederlanden*⁷⁰. It meant that it was directly dependent on the German Propaganda Ministry in Berlin. Although it was mainly focusing on representations for the German Army (so-called *Truppenbetreuung*), it was one of the main actors responsible for promoting German culture and benefited from large funds provided by Goebbels’ ministry. Its theatre company even toured France and Belgium during the 1942-43 season⁷¹.

Aside from controlling the program of the main Belgian theatres, the PAB’s *Referat Theater* also tried to take control over the many amateur theatre groups. In order to do so, it preferred an indirect approach by taking over control of two umbrella corporations: the *Algemeene Tooneelcentrale* (General Theatre Centre, acronym ATC) in Flanders, and the *Commission interfédérale des cercles dramatiques de langue française et wallonne* (Interfederal Commission of French and Walloon Language Dramatic Circles) in the French speaking part of the country. In Flanders, the ATC comprised previously existing theatre organizations. It did not really take all these small amateur companies over (which would have been impossible) but acted as their intermediary with the PAB and asked permission for the plays they wanted to perform⁷². The ATC was part of a bigger organi-

65. SANNE BAECK, *Van Théâtre Royal Français de Gand naar Vlaamse Opera in drie bedrijven. Over de invloed van de Duitse bezetter op het Gentse Operaleven tijdens Wereldoorlog II*, Master’s thesis, Universiteit Gent, 2011-2012, p. 71-72. Sanne Baeck also analyses in detail the funding allocated by German authorities to the Opera of Ghent, see SANNE BAECK, *op. cit.*, p. 31-33.

66. HERMAN VAN DE VIJVER, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

67. “zuiver Germaanse levenshouding en wereldbeschouwing” in “DeVlag”, October 1942, cited in HERMAN VAN DE VIJVER, *op. cit.*, p. 56. Jahresbericht der Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien beim Militärbefehlshaber in Belgien.

68. In June 1944, he was succeeded by Jozef Sterkens. AELBRECHT PEERENBOOM and LUC VANDEWEYER, “Alhambra”, in REGINALD DE SCHRIJVER (et al) (eds), *Nieuwe Encyclopedie van de Vlaamse Beweging*, Tielt, 1998, p. 264-265.

AELBRECHT PEERENBOOM and FRANZ DENYS, “Clauwaert, Adolf”, in REGINALD DE SCHRIJVER (et al) (eds), *Nieuwe Encyclopedie van de Vlaamse Beweging*, Tielt, 1998, p. 738.

69. HERMAN VAN DE VIJVER, *op. cit.*, p. 54-56.

70. ANSELM HEINRICH, *Theatre in Europe under German Occupation*, London, 2017.

71. ETIENNE DEJONGHE, “Être ‘occupant’ dans le Nord (vie militaire, culture, loisirs, propagande)”, in *Revue du Nord*, t. 65, n° 259, October-December 1983, p. 707-745.

72. LIESBET LAUREYSENS, *Cultuurleven en cultuurbeleid tijdens het Duitse bezettingsregime. Een verkennend en vergelijkend onderzoek van de Antwerpse casus*, Master thesis, Universiteit Gent, 1983, p. 91. NICO WOUTERS, “Algemeene Toneelcentrale”, in REGINALD DE SCHRIJVER (et al) (eds), *Nieuwe Encyclopedie van de Vlaamse Beweging*, Tielt, 1998, p. 263.



The Flemish Alhambra Theatre in Brussels had great symbolic value for Flemish-nationalists and served as a venue for gatherings of collaborationist groups like the VNV or the DeVlag. This picture shows DeVlag leader Jef Van de Wiele, addressing his party members on 20 January 1942. Source : CEGESOMA Photo n° 18860.

zation, *Volk en Kunst*, responsible for promoting Flemish cultural life under German rule and was directed by Frans Haepers who simultaneously was the chairman of the ATC. Due to Haepers' allegiance to *DeVlag*, the ATC was caught in the struggle between the latter and the *Vlaams Nationaal Verbond* (Flemish Nationalist Union, acronym VNV), which had established *Volk en Kunst* and which was in a constant power struggle with the *DeVlag*, since both organisations hoped to play a leading role in the future of Flanders. In 1943, the conflict with Haepers resulted in a hard separation between the ATC and the organizations affiliated with the VNV⁷³. As correspondence between the leader of the PAB, Major Gunzer, and one of the *Verwaltungsstab* cultural advisor, Eugen Löffler, demonstrates, the PAB wanted to create a Chamber of Culture (*Kulturkammer*) similar to Nazi Germany to control the theatres. However, this vision was refuted by Löffler on the argument that such quick change could endanger the general cultural policy of the *Militärverwaltung*⁷⁴. As these examples demonstrate – and again, more research is needed – the PAB was not simply taking control of everything but had to work with local intermediaries and had to navigate between various collaborationist organisations.

In French-speaking parts of Belgium, the *Commission interfédérale* had already existed before the German invasion. It was created by the Belgian government to centralize the structure of amateur theatre in Belgium. It was very convenient for the *Referat Theater* that there already was a pre-war Belgian organisation that grouped all francophone amateur theatres because it enabled them to instrumentalise it to send out directives. They only had to extend it to Northern France. In 1940,

Raoul Renaux took the leadership of the *Commission interfédérale* which encompassed nearly 3000 troupes and theatre groups performing in French or in Walloon dialects⁷⁵.

Each of the organizations published a periodical that they used as a main organ of information for their members. The ATC used *Tooneelven* and the *Commission interfédérale* published *Vox theatri*⁷⁶. The case of the latter deserves a more in-depth study to comprehend the relations between a corporation and the PAB. Before the war, the main organ of the *Commission interfédérale* was *Pro Arte* but its editor refused to collaborate with the occupiers⁷⁷. In January 1941, the PAB section responsible for periodicals (*Referat Zeitschriftenpresse*) was thus forced to approach another periodical, *Vox theatrae*, that would become the main organ of the *Commission interfédérale* but that would also replace the multitude of other French-speaking theatre periodicals. The *Referat Zeitschriftenpresse* allowed the periodical to be published without any form of pre-emptive censorship and only with a minor grammatical modification of its title. In April 1941, the first issue of the new *Vox Theatri* was published, followed by four other issues during the year. In May 1942, the printer of *Vox Theatri* was arrested by German police for clandestinely printing an illegal journal, The *Referat Zeitschriftenpresse*, then tried to take advantage of the situation to force *Vox Theatri* to submit to a pre-emptive censorship. Nonetheless, the coup failed and the *Commission interfédérale* decided to cease publishing and return to a more discreet manner of communication. From then on, it only sent directives to its members via mail to avoid any influence from the PAB⁷⁸.

73. ROGER RENNEBERG, *Het Vlaamse amateurtoneel. Topografie van een verzuiling*, PhD Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2002, p. 41.

74. MARNIX BEYEN, "Wetenschap, politiek, nationaal-socialisme. De cultuurpolitiek van het Duits militair bezettingsbestuur in België, 1940-1944", in *Bijdragen tot de Eigentijdse Geschiedenis*, vol. 11, 2003, p. 47-70. For the original document, see CEGESOMA, AA1417, 1-3, Letter of Eugen Löffler to Gunzer, Brussels, 12 March 1943.

75. MICHEL FINCOEUR, *op. cit.*, p. 4-6.

76. ROGER RENNEBERG, *op. cit.*

77. MICHEL FINCOEUR, *op. cit.*

78. LAURENCE PIOROPAN, *Le phénomène théâtral en Belgique romane 1930-1960: histoire, sociologie, herméneutique*, PhD thesis, University of Louvain, 2005, p. 310-312.

As we have seen, contacts between the *Referat Theater* and its umbrella organizations were complicated. Theoretically, the latter were responsible for selecting the theatre companies or groups that were allowed to perform. There can be no doubt that it was ultimately the *Referat Theater* who made such decisions. The *Referat Theater* also exercised pre-emptive censorship regarding which plays were allowed. However, both the ATC and *Commission interfédérale* were keen on protecting their members and often managed to get permission for plays that were officially forbidden by the *Referat Theater*⁷⁹. When the latter tried to force every French speaking amateur theatre group to affiliate to the *Commission interfédérale* and accept a more stringent censorship system in 1943, the resistance of its directors was so strong that the PAB was forced to bring the matter before the *Militärverwaltung*, which did not intervene⁸⁰. After this crisis, the *Referat Theater* tried to extend its influence by other means. Due to difficulties in censoring plays in Walloon dialects, it decided to simply ban such works unless the *Commission interfédérale* would take over and guarantee an efficient censor. However, the organization declined and, finally, Joseph Mignolet from the *Communauté Culturelle wallonne* founded a new office specialized in the matter which was abundantly funded by *Propaganda-Staffel Lüttich*⁸¹.

Prior to the German invasion, the *Commission interfédérale* had its own library, which provided their members access to a large collection of written plays. These collections also had to be approved by the PAB. In fact, the literature

office (*Referat Schrifttum*) published a blacklist in September 1941 forbidding books which were considered to be anti-German. The *Commission interfédérale* decided to hide its “forbidden works” rather than submitting them to the PAB⁸².

VI. Cinemas⁸³

The *Gruppe Film* was initially led by *Sonderführer* Robert van Daalen, a German cinema manager of Dutch origin. In the first weeks of the occupation, a number of regulations were issued. These were finally summarised and supplemented in the ‘First ordinance of 6 August 1940 concerning the new regulation of the cinema in Belgium’⁸⁴. Only a limited number of similar ordinances would follow during the course of the occupation, as the PAB preferred to have Belgian organisations proclaim and enforce the regulations it drafted. It is precisely for this reason that the Ordinance of 6 August 1940 not only specified that films could only be distributed and exhibited if permission (for that specific film) had been obtained from the Military Administration (hence the PAB), but also that film distributors and exhibitors had to be members of either the professional organisation of film distributors or of film exhibitors.

Indeed, in order to control the Belgian film sector, the PAB decided to work with Belgian professional organisations that had already existed before the war. At the beginning of August 1940, all film distributors were forced to join the *Chambre Syndicale Belge de la Cinématographie et des Industries*

79. HERMAN VAN DE VIJVER, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

80. LAURENCE PIOROPAN, *op. cit.*, p. 311-312.

81. MICHEL FINCOEUR, *op. cit.*,

82. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

83. This section of the article is largely based on (and re-using excerpts from) ROEL VANDE WINKEL, “Film distribution in occupied Belgium (1940-1944): German film politics and its implementation by the ‘corporate’ organisations and the Film Guild”, *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis*, 20, n° 1, p. 46-78; ROEL VANDE WINKEL, “Jan Vanderheyden and Edith Kiel: ‘Leading’ the Belgian Film Sector While Taking Orders From the German Propaganda Service”, in PAVEL SKOPAL and ROEL VANDE WINKEL (eds), *Film Professionals in Nazi-Occupied Europe: Mediation between the National-Socialist Cultural “New Order” and Local Structures*, Basington-New York, 2021, p. 87-117. Data on film exhibition are based on ROEL VANDE WINKEL, *Cinema in Occupied Belgium (1940-1944)* www.cinema-in-occupied-belgium.be.

84. Erste Verordnung über die Neuordnung des Filmwesens in Belgien vom 6. August 1940. Published in German, Dutch and French in the *Verordnungsblatt des Militärbefehlshabers in Belgien und Nordfrankreich für die besetzten Gebiete Belgiens und Nordfrankreichs*, n° 9, 7 August 1940, p. 145-147.

qui s'y rapportent (Syndicate Chamber of Cinematography and Related Industries). Likewise, all cinema owners were forced to join the *Vereeniging van Belgische Kinemabestuurders – Association des Directeurs de Théâtres Cinématographiques de Belgique* (Union of Belgian Cinema Managers). Before the war, membership in such organisations had been voluntary, but now membership was required for one to be allowed to work in the sector. Membership requests had to be approved by the PAB, which could also withdraw memberships at any time. This way, both professional associations were used by the PAB to impose its will on the sector. The many orders that the PAB would give in the following months and years were only exceptionally published as official decrees from the Military Government. Instead, the PAB preferred to have such measures promulgated by the Syndicate Chamber of Film Distributors and/or by the Union of Belgian Cinema Managers. The two professional organisations thus acted as a façade for the German administration.

The Syndicate Chamber of Film Distributors and the Union of Belgian Cinema Managers often encouraged their members to work together in 'corporate spirit'. In theory, corporatism offered solutions to all problems since film exhibitors and distributors working within one corporation would fraternally resolve all disputes. In reality, this corporate model was used to force everyone into line. After all, it was not the professional organisations themselves, but the German authorities who decided what the sector should or should not do. The system was as simple as it was effective. The PAB forced the corporate organisations to issue numerous guidelines, large and small, that determined the actions and omissions of the entire film sector. Within the organizations, these guidelines had the character of laws. Anyone who did not follow the guidelines was expelled from the organisation in question by 'disciplinary committees'. Since it was no longer allowed to work in the film sector without organisational membership, expulsion was equivalent to being banned from all professional activities. This created a form of parallel justice: individuals and companies could be

punished with fines and temporary or permanent closures without any intervention by the Belgian labour court or any other courts.

Within this system, the PAB drastically reformed the Belgian film sector. American, British, and Soviet-Russian films – not to mention films by Jewish directors or films with Jewish actors – were banned in the summer of 1940. Other measures were introduced more slowly. Jewish-owned distribution companies and cinemas were closed down or confiscated. Belgian film censorship was made superfluous and was eventually abolished. A variety of measures were taken to push smaller Belgian film distributors out of the market. Of the more than 110 film distributors that were active in Belgium before the German invasion, less than twenty remained in the spring of 1941. By drastically reducing the supply on the market, a gap was created, which the PAB then tried to fill as much as possible with German films. Nevertheless, there were so many cinemas and the demand for new films was so high that the PAB could not prevent French film from also capitalising on the situation. The cinema sector was also radically reformed, resulting in the forced closure of cinemas that the PAB considered too small, too unprofitable, or unsuitable for any other reason.

Most of the directives and regulations that introduced these reforms were written or dictated by the PAB. Nevertheless, they were usually signed or ratified by the Belgian board members of corporate organisations. It was therefore essential for the PAB that these board members were sufficiently accommodating. Some Belgians cooperated effectively, while those who protested or were considered undesirable by the PAB were replaced. The Syndicate Chamber, which had been chaired by film producer Jan Vanderheyden since July 1940 cooperated relatively well. A problem arose in July 1941, when the directors of a number of distribution companies that were forced to close down, tried to remove Vanderheyden and his management board, but the PAB nipped this resistance in the bud. It was argued that since the distribution companies had in fact been closed down, they were therefore

no longer considered members of the Syndicate Chamber and thus were no longer permitted to vote on the management board of the organisation. This logic was accepted by the remaining members.

By contrast, the Union of Belgian Cinema Managers, chaired by André Ridelle, was more resistant to the German authorities. In the summer of 1941, the General Assembly and the Board of Directors - which had the power to assert rights based on the pre-war statutes - did not agree to the measures 'requested' by the PAB. The PAB and the Military Government intervened drastically. On 25 October 1941, a new organisation was established, the *Vereeniging der Kinemabestuurders van België-Association des Directeurs de Cinémas de Belgique* (Association of Belgian Cinema Managers). Subsequently, the Military Board issued an ordinance, which replaced the pre-war organisation with the new one. The members were simply transferred from the old Union to the new Association, which had a different president (Emile Van Tuyckom) and a new management board. Those who were not satisfied with this could leave the Association, but, of course, this meant no longer being able to practise their profession.

Cinema exhibitors lost to a considerable extent to choose the programme they were offering. Every screening had to consist of three elements: a newsreel with French or Dutch commentary (produced in Belgium by a German-led team, closely supervised by the PAB), a short production and one feature film. As the war dragged on and as new films became scarce, exhibitors just had to accept the films that were offered to them. Nevertheless, owners of smaller cinemas who did not get access to the newest productions anyway, must have had some agency to choose the film they wanted to screen.

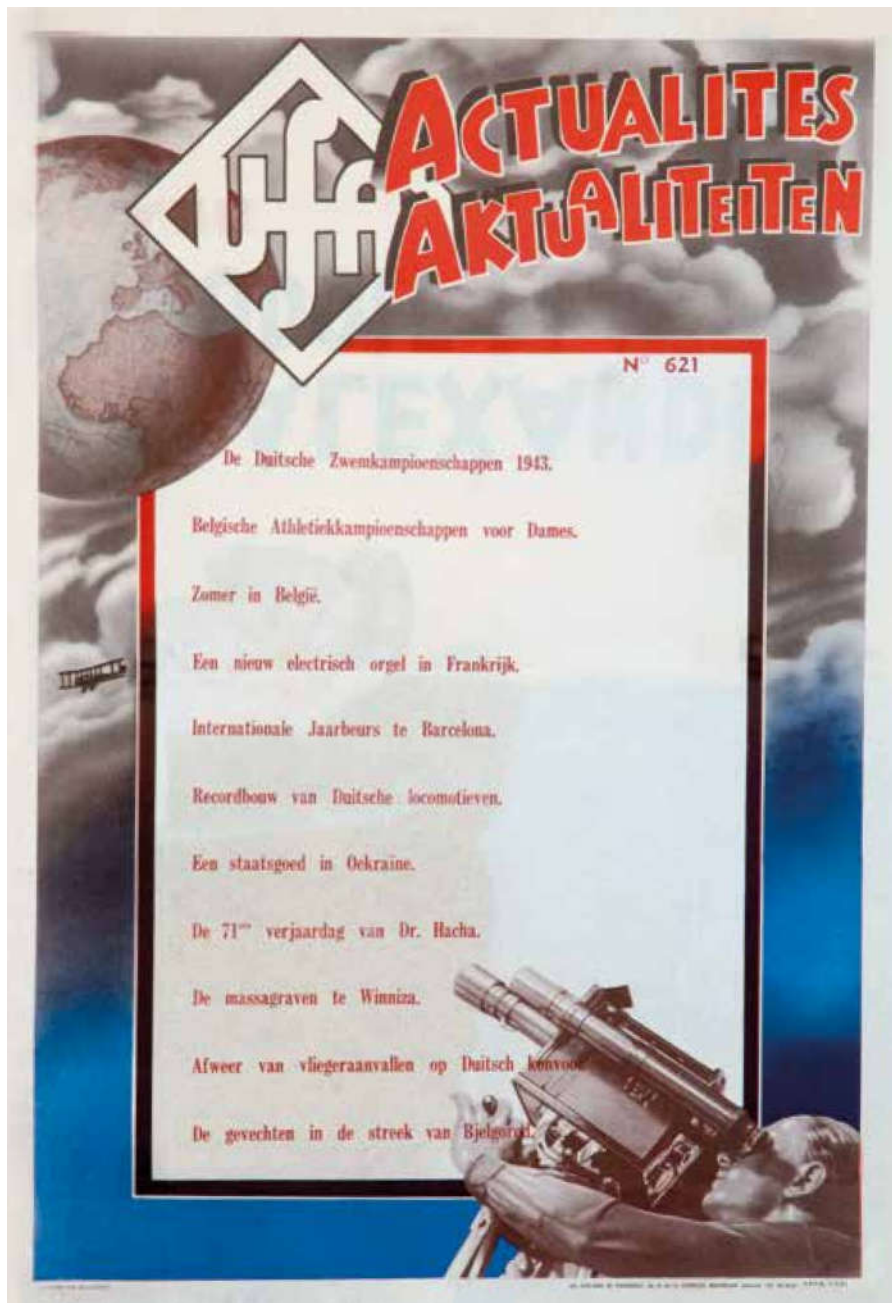
In July 1943, the Syndicate Chamber and the new *Association of Belgian Cinema Managers* were

brought together under one umbrella organisation known as the *Filmgilde - Guilde du Film* (Film Guild). Jan Vanderheyden became the 'Leader' of the Film Guild. (The word *Leider* (Dutch) or *Chef* (French) was often written with capital 'l' or 'c': this was consistent with the National-Socialist Führer cult.) This merger was covered extensively by the Belgian censored press, who portrayed Vanderheyden as the primary figure of the Belgian film industry. Before and after his formal appointment as 'Leader' of the Belgian film sector, Vanderheyden was publicly criticised by film critic Jeanne de Bruyn in the VNV newspaper *Volk en Staat*, who regretted his lack of artistic vision and ambition.

The economic rationale behind the promotion of German films was enormous. Since most German film companies had been nationalised (secretly bought by the German state) even before the start of World War II, the German government had an economic interest in providing German films with the largest possible market share internationally. Obviously, ideological factors also played a part. A consequence of the *Flamenpolitik* was that Flemish cinemas could only screen German films in their original version (with subtitles) and not in the French-dubbed versions that were sometimes also available. These were reserved for cinemas in Wallonia. In Brussels, cinema owners were allowed to choose, which meant that many cinemas, when possible, screened French versions of German films.

All in all, as far as the PAB was concerned, the Belgian film sector proved relatively easy to manage. There was no significant protest against the lack of German support for Belgian domestic film production. About 80% of the film distributors that had been active before the German invasion, were closed down in less than a year. Nearly 33% of the approximately 1100 cinemas that had operated before the German invasion, had been closed. Approximately 740 remained open⁸⁵. The PAB

85. Throughout the occupation, cinemas were opened, closed, renamed, repurposed.... The database behind the research website www.cinema-in-occupied-belgium.be currently contains data for 965 cinemas that operated in occupied Belgium, in some cases for only a couple of weeks or months, in other cases throughout the whole occupation. But there was no moment, at least not during the occupation, when all 965 of these were simultaneously in business.



Poster for the Belgian version of Ufa's foreign newsreel. This issue was released on 30 July 1943. Like most other issues, the newsreel started with topics that were of general interest (German swimming championships, Belgian athletics championships for women, Brussels in the summer season) and ended with military news (Germans fighting at the Eastern front and taking many prisoners of war). The ninth subject shows a pit filled with corpses of Ukrainians, victims of 'Soviet terror', being dug up in Vinnytsia. The commentator lashed out at the GPU but did not mention the numerous massacres of Jews, committed in that city in 1941-1942, after the German invasion. Source: private collection Roel Vande Winkel.

claimed however that cinema attendance in Belgium was at the same level as before the war. In other words: the number of cinemas had been decreasing, but the cinemas that were still in operation, drew in average higher numbers of visitors and were therefore more successful⁸⁶. All of this helped enlarge the market position of German cinema in Belgium and in particular in Flanders, where some French films were either withheld from distribution while others were screened in German-dubbed versions. (Nevertheless, several French films were screened in their original French version.) All of this was done with the support of Belgian figureheads like Vanderheyden. Those who did not want to lend their support, like Ridelle, were removed.

Nevertheless, it was not a complete success story. Audiences could be forced to watch the German-controlled newsreels in silence but could not be forced to accept newsreel versions of current events. German films were popular and attracted large audiences but could not replace French films altogether. On the contrary, as the war dragged on and German film production started to sputter, the PAB had to accept that more films from France and other countries allied with Nazi Germany (Hungary, Italy) had to be imported in order to meet the demand of Belgian cinemagoers.

VII. Music and Cabarets

In a similar fashion to theatres, musical life was also disrupted by the mobilization of 1939 and the German offensive in May 1940. Nonetheless, it experienced a significant resurgence as soon

as June 1940 with concerts staged by reformed orchestras, particularly in Antwerp and Brussels⁸⁷.

Since its creation, the *Referat Musik* had started reorganising musical life and established, like in so many other fields of public life, a new form of censorship. No musical performance whatsoever was allowed unless it had been authorized by the *Referat Musik* or its representatives in the antennas or *Kommandanturen*. The works of Jewish and British composers were immediately forbidden. Following the German invasion of the Soviet-Union (June 1941) and the German declaration of war to the USA (December 1941), works by Russian and American composers were also no longer allowed. Jewish musicians were also banned from participating in any performance. In theory, the PAB advocated for a more traditional and classical view of music and thus, also banned contemporary composers. Also in opera, classical German composers like Richard Wagner were promoted to counter French influence⁸⁸. In order to do so, *Hauptmann Schotte* did not hesitate to intervene personally, as he did with the *Chapelle Musicale de la Reine Elisabeth* in 1942 to order it to replace Igor Stravinsky's works and other Russian composers with German works⁸⁹. In reality however, the situation discorded from the *Referat Musik's* expectations. French music was still played until the end of the occupation, especially by the Société Philharmonique in Brussels. Wagner did not become the mostly played "Germanic" composers and had to share the stage with others like Beethoven, Bruckner or Dvorak⁹⁰.

The promotion of German music culminated in May 1942 with the organisation by *Referat Musik*

86. CEGESOMA, AA 570, *Jahresbericht der Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien*, p. 66-68.

87. For more information on the field on musical life in occupied Belgium, see the special issue of *Revue belge de Musicologie/Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Muziekwetenschap*, vol. 69, 2015.

88. MARIANNE KLARIC, *op. cit.*, p. 8-20; HERMAN VAN DE VIJVER, *op. cit.*, p. 62-67.

89. Correspondence between *Hauptmann Schotte* and the President of *Chapelle Musicale de la Reine Elisabeth*, 1942, cited in MARIANNE KLARIC, *op. cit.*, annex 6.

90. Eric Derom greatly contributed to nuancing the influence of German music propaganda in occupied Belgium. See ERIC DEROM, "Symphonic Music in Occupied Belgium, 1940-1944: the Role of 'German-Friendly' Music Societies", in *Revue belge de Musicologie*, vol. 69, 2015, p. 109-125; ERIC DEROM, "Symphonic Music in Occupied Belgium, 1940-1944: the Role of 'German-Friendly' Music Societies", in DAVID FANNING and ERIK LEVI, ed., *The Routledge Handbook to Music under German Occupation, 1938-1945. Propaganda, Myth and Reality*, Oxford, 2020. We are grateful to Eric Derom for his valuable advice regarding this contribution.

with the help of the DeVlag and the Flemish Cultural Council of the *"Mozart Herdenking in Vlaanderen"* in Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent at the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Mozart's death (at the end of 1791)⁹¹.

Additionally, the *Referat Musik* was confronted with the rising success of jazz music, considered as "negroid" and Jewish degenerate art by National-Socialist Germany. However, despite those considerations, it found great success among the population of the occupied countries and even in Germany. Officially, works from Anglo-Saxon or Jewish origins were banned but popular jazz tunes continued to be played with their title translated in Dutch. The PAB banished musical terms like "swing" and "hot" but launched a campaign promoting European jazz to try to contain the influence from its foes. Belgian jazz bands such as the Jean Omer Orchestra were even featured in the German-controlled newsreels that were screened in all cinemas⁹². Belgian Jazz performers were also broadcast on the Belgian German-controlled radio (*Sender Brüssel*) and even invited to perform in Berlin⁹³.

To establish a relative control over the spread of jazz music, but also to try reducing the success of French songs, *Hauptmann Schotte* and his *Referat* had to bring the cabarets to line. They published several directives forbidding any performance with allusions to the war or to politics, promoting German and local works to counter French and jazz influence. Like in other areas, Jewish artists were also banned from performing. Results were mixed. As we have seen, the *Referat Musik* was unable to restrict the jazz expansion, but it was also unsuccessful in countering French music. The vast network of cabarets made it difficult to

establish an efficient censorship. In addition to this, just like the *Referat Theater* had trouble with Belgian dialects, it had difficulties in censoring works in local language and Belgian artists took advantage of the situation with allusion to the war or to politics in Brussels-located dialects for example without being spotted by the PAB⁹⁴.

Similar to what the *Referat Theater* did with the Alhambra Theatre in Brussel, the *Referat Musik* also established its own institution to promote its vision of musical life. Its first action was to financially support *Het Muziekkfonds* (The Music Fund), a former Flemish cultural organization founded before the First World War by Adolf Clauwaert, the future director of the Alhambra. Forbidden after 1918, it was reactivated by him in the Fall of 1940 and played a significant role in promoting German and Flemish culture in the Belgian capital. As soon as September 1940, it organized a major representation of the "Rubens-Cantate" by the Philharmonic Orchestra of Antwerp involving 600 artists. In 1942, it seems that the PAB was not satisfied with Clauwaert's work and a member of the *Gruppe Rundfunk, Sonderführer* Spanuth, decided to form a new German-friendly music society, the *Philharmonie Brüssel*, a name voluntarily close to the Belgian *Société Philharmonique de Bruxelles*. With the collaboration of DeVlag, it engaged the symphony orchestra of *Zender Brüssel* for its concerts with the aim of becoming the leading factor of promoting the views of the PAB regarding musical life⁹⁵.

While *Het Muziekkfonds* focused on promoting Flemish music, the purpose of *Philharmonie Brüssel* was to promote German composers and musicians. Both organizations invited famous German conductors like Hermann Abendroth or Hans

91. MARIE-HÉLÈNE BENOIT-OTIS and CÉCILE QUESNEY, "Mozart vecteur de la propagande nazie en Belgique occupée, 1941-1942", in *Revue belge de Musicologie*, vol. 69, 2015, p. 61-76.

92. ROEL VANDE WINKEL, *Nazi newsreels and foreign propaganda in German-occupied territories. The Belgian version of Ufa's foreign weekly newsreel (ATW), 1940-1944*, Part 1, p. 370-371.

93. ELS BUFFEL, "Jazz als protest? Een casestudie naar het organisatorisch jazzlandschap in bezet België, 1940-1944", in *Revue belge de Musicologie*, vol. 69, 2015, p. 219-237.

94. HUGO RODRIGUEZ and ITZANA DOBBELAERE, "Les cabarets montmartrois ou cabarets de chansonniers à Bruxelles sous l'Occupation" in *Revue belge de Musicologie*, vol. 69, 2015, p. 239-255.

95. ERIC DEROM, "Symphonic Music in Occupied Belgium, 1940-1944: the Role of 'German-Friendly' Music Societies".



In April 1943, the renowned French jazz guitarist and composer Django Reinhardt performed with his quintet at the Capitole in Ghent. The Capitole mainly functioned as a cinema, but also hosted other kinds of performances. The Belgian musician Roger Rose and his band were the support act. The poster describes both bands as 'Europe's greatest jazz formations and music-hall attractions'. Source : Archief Gent, MA_ROM_XVI_AF_04680.

Knappertsbusch to perform in occupied Belgium. Nevertheless, the Belgian population did not seem interested in attending (and may have been boycotting) performances from both musical groups. Their audience mainly consisted of German soldiers of the *Wehrmacht* or collaborators⁹⁶.

In Flanders, Flemish composer Emiel Hullebroeck and his *Kunstenaarsgilde* (Artists Guild) played a leading role in the organization of musical life. It focused on promoting Flemish artists in all fields in Flanders itself as well as abroad. Created in January 1940, it continued its activities throughout the occupation. In 1941, it took its definitive form under German supervision and was divided in several chambers (*kunstkamers*) each responsible for a particular field. The chamber for music played the role of a corporation to coordinate Flemish cultural life. In October 1940, Emile Hullebroeck's organization banned any member of the Freemasonry or of Jewish origins⁹⁷.

VIII. Copyright⁹⁸

Copyrights to musical compositions and to written works such as novels, theatrical plays and film scripts are usually protected for several decades after the death of the author. Controlling copyright and charging people and companies for using copyrighted materials is a profitable business. In Belgium, since the 19th century, that market had by and large been controlled by the French, Paris-based companies *Société des auteurs et compositeurs dramatiques* (acronym SADC, representing playwrights and composers working in the field of dramatic arts) and *Société des auteurs, compos-*

iteurs et éditeurs de musique (acronym SACEM, representing authors, composers, and music publishers). In 1922, the abovementioned Flemish composer Emiel Hullebroeck had already created the *Nationale Vereniging voor Auteursrechten* (National Authors' Right Society, acronym NAVEA) to break the monopoly of SACEM and of the smaller SADC. By 1940, NAVEA was still competing with both companies and particularly with SACEM. After the German invasion, occupying forces decided to intervene. In the eyes of the PAB, there were several reasons to do so. On an international level, Nazi Germany tried to compete with SACEM in order to promote the model of its own company, STAGMA (*Staatlich genehmigten Gesellschaft zur Verwertung musikalischer Aufführungsrechte* or State-Approved Society for the Utilization of Musical Performance Rights)⁹⁹. Within Belgium, reducing and even eliminating the power of SACEM and SADC meant another opportunity to cut back French influence. In its Ordinance of 2 January 1941, the Military Administration granted NAVEA the exclusive right to collect and distribute copyrights in Belgium and prohibited all further activities of SACEM and SADC¹⁰⁰. Suddenly, NAVEA had a total monopoly. Executing that monopoly and revising all the contracts with people that were formerly represented by SACEM and SADC was a long process. In some cases, like the *Commission interfédérale des cercles dramatiques de langue française et wallonne*, which did not want to cut its ties with the SADC, it would drag on until the end of the occupation¹⁰¹. Nevertheless, even though it was not visible to the general public, this copyright battle was of great importance because it affected all kinds of spectacles: organisers of theatre per-

96. STEFAN FRAGNER, *Music in the Shadow of Politics. The Brussels Société Philharmonique and the German Occupation*, master's thesis, Universiteit of Oxford, 1994, p. 32. MARIANNE KLARIC, *op. cit.*, p. 8-20; HERMAN VAN DE VIJVER, *op. cit.*, p. 62-64.

97. LIESBET LAUREYSSENS, *op. cit.*, p. 53-60.

98. Unless otherwise noted, this section is based on Sabam, *SABAM 75 : 1922-1997*. Brussel, 1997, p. 10-31; PIET NUTEN, *Hullebroeck en zijn beteekenis*, Antwerpen, 1939, p.81-94; JAN CORBET, "Nationale Vereeniging voor Auteursrecht (NAVEA)", in REGINALD DE SCHRIJVER (et al) (eds), *Nieuwe Encyclopedie van de Vlaamse Beweging*, Tielt, 1998, p. 2156-2157.

99. BENJAMIN G. MARTIN, *The Nazi-Fascist New Order for European Culture*, Cambridge, 2016, p. 25-27.

100. Verordnung über die Vermittlung schriftstellerischer und künstlerischer Urheberrechte in Belgien vom 2 Januar 1941. Published in German, Dutch and French in the *Verordnungsblatt des Militärbefehlshabers in Belgien und Nordfrankreich für die besetzten Gebiete Belgiens und Nordfrankreichs*, n° 29, 6 January 1941, p. 465.

101. MICHEL FINCOEUR, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

formances, musical performances but also cinema owners (who often played records in between film screenings) were forced to join NAVEA and to pay royalties on the activities they were organising. After the liberation, SACEM would fight hard to regain its status but failed. NAVEA lost its monopoly but kept its pole position. It changed its name in 1945 into *Société d'Auteurs Belge – Belgische Auteurs Maatschappij* (*Society of Belgian Authors, acronym SABAM*) and is still a key player (sometimes accused of monopolism) in all disciplines where copyrights are involved.

IX. Conclusion

Throughout the occupation, did the PAB have a general, consistent cultural policy and more specifically a unified policy vis-à-vis cultures of spectacle? The answer to that question is “no”. There are various reasons for this. First, there was no blueprint prepared when the Germans invaded. Second, there was no consensus about what had to be done and about who was in charge. Even though there was a general agreement that Belgium (and in particular Flanders) had to be brought closer to Germany, there was no detailed agreement as to the best ways to reach that goal. One had to improvise. In some cases, members of the PAB were able to use experiences acquired during the previous war and occupation (1914-1918) and sometimes even to use the very same people (Belgians, especially Flemings) who had played a similar role in the previous war. This was especially the case in the music and theatre world, where the way in which the spectacle was staged had not changed drastically in the interbellum. In the film sector, things were rather different: the introduction of sound film, the transition from shorter productions to longer feature films and the expansion of German film production had changed the playing field. But even in sectors where one could call on experiences from the previous war, much had changed. In all areas, therefore, improvisation was necessary and ad hoc measures were quickly introduced in the summer and fall of 1940 and then legalised or adapted.

Despite the major differences between different ‘cultures of spectacle’, we can also see some distinct similarities. Striking, but not surprising, is the determination to remove cultures that were considered ‘alien to the people’, at least from a National-Socialist point of view. There was a clear understanding that influences of ‘Jewish’ culture, of Anglo-American culture and/or of Soviet-Russian culture needed to be removed. The PAB deployed a significant effort in limiting French and an English influence on Belgium, especially but not exclusively in Flanders. The gap created by this cultural “cleansing” was of course to be filled with local and/or German(ic) culture. This was especially the case in Flanders, where great efforts were made. To accomplish this, the PAB and its subordinates multiplied the exchanges between the two countries, sending successful artists in the *Reich* and filling the scenes in Belgium with renowned or lesser-known German artists whenever possible. All those measures served to confirm the new position of Germany as the leading cultural centre in Europe instead of France.

At the same time, a kind of pragmatism prevailed whereby the bilingual (and de facto mainly French speaking) character of Brussels was not questioned, despite paying lip service to the “Flemishification” of Brussels. The same pragmatism, but also shrewdness, is evident in the decision to work as much as possible with existing, Belgian (or Flemish or Walloon) associations and to have German cultural policies implemented by them.

Another striking aspect is the fact that the PAB tried as much as possible to remain in the shadows. Whenever possible, its offices counted on organizations and, in particular, on corporations which already existed before the invasion. When those did not exist, the PAB contributed greatly to their creation like it did with the ATC. The PAB tried to use those corporations as stooges, who transmitted their orders and allowed to steer the different ‘cultures of spectacle’ indirectly, allowing each *Referat* to reshape its field to its convenience and remove undesired actors. The PAB limited the use of direct orders, as we can see with the relatively small

number of *Verordnungen* regulating each field. In this way, the PAB's offices tried to reduce their visibility to ensure that the public remained unaware of German influence. The downside of this process was that the PAB was very dependent on a willingness to collaborate from Belgian umbrella organizations (and of the men formally leading those organizations). Although each *Referat* tried to place trusted men in charge, it often led to conflicts which subsequently limited its impact. The real failures and success of the corporatism or corporatist system built and used by the PAB in its ensemble remain to be studied, especially when seen in a bigger picture including other fields of culture including media like the press and the radio controlled by the PAB.

An inconvenient truth is that some of the decisions taken or enforced by the occupying forces seem to have solved problems that had existed before the war, but had not been addressed by the Belgian government, which did not really have a clear cultural policy¹⁰². This was indirectly recognized after the liberation when such meas-

ures were not reversed. A clear example is the case of NAVEA-SABAM. By allowing the Belgian organisation to keep its semi-monopoly, the dominant position of French copyright associations (who had lost all their members to NAVEA) was definitely undercut. In the Belgian film industry, after the liberation, no one was inclined to openly admit that some of the German-enforced regulations (the introduction of minimum entrance fees for cinemas and the introduction of standardised rental contracts between film distributors and film exhibitors) had been much-needed and had solved problems the Belgian film sector had been struggling with for decades. But it was no coincidence that such measures were silently retained after the war¹⁰³. This is an interesting topic for future research. That remark applies to many issues that have been discussed in this article. More research about the overarching PAB activities, in- and outside the cultural field, is currently being undertaken by the authors of this text. But more can and should be done. We hope this article will invite other researchers to tackle related subjects, preferably from a comparative perspective.

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102. ETIENNE VERHOEYEN, "Kultuur, politiek en cultuurpolitiek tijdens de tweede wereldoorlog".

103. ROEL VANDE WINKEL, "Jan Vanderheyden and Edith Kiel: 'Leading' the Belgian Film Sector While Taking Orders From the German Propaganda Service".

