

Jef Lipkes' analyse voldoet echter op twee punten niet. Ten eerste stelt hij de bestaande historiografie verkeerd voor. Dat pure paniek onder de troepen niet volstaat als uitleg voor de wreedheden tegen burgers, is zeker juist, maar het is ook al eerder gezegd. Niemand twijfelt eraan dat pure paranoia geen voldoende verklaring vormt voor de vele rituele "straf"-maatregelen, zoals het bizarre "tribunaal" op de *Place des Tilleuls* in het stadje Andenne, waar de bijeengedreven mannen systematisch werden gedecimeerd. Paniek kon zeer wel worden gevolgd door wraakacties in koelen bloede. De *franc-tireur*-illusie wortelde trouwens zelf al in een wraakzuchtig wereldbeeld. Weerstand tegen de Duitse opmars vanwege een verachtelijk land als België gold als wezenlijk illegaal, als een soort brigandage; de Duitse opmars was in die optiek een strijd tegen inferieuren, waarin waarschuwend wreedheden waren geoorloofd. Kortom, het *franc-tireur*- en het terroriserings-perspectief sluiten elkaar niet wederzijds uit. Ten tweede biedt Lipkes geen enkel bewijs voor zijn *agent-provocateur*-campagne. Noch legt hij uit welke vorm die campagne dan zou hebben gehad. Ging het om een vooraf gemaakte keuze van doelwitten in het te veroveren land? Of om een reeks van geïmproviseerde beslissingen om angst te zaaien in een pas ingenomen gemeente? Waarom brak in sommige gemeentes wél geweld uit en in andere niet? De schrijver werpt op geen van deze vragen licht. Het blijft bij onheilspellende zinspelingen op duistere Duitse plannen; dat blijkt ook uit de tendentieuze maar nergens onderbouwde titel van het boek. In dit hoofdstuk, zoals in de rest van het boek, verdrinken Lipkes' soms terechte opmerkingen in

een zee van verwarring, afdwalingen en overdrijvingen.

Ook de twee hoofdstukken over de ontkenning van de massamoorden in Groot-Britannië, de USA en Duitsland blijven onscherp. De epiloog tenslotte bindt de strijd aan met een serie dwalingen over de Eerste Wereldoorlog die in het geheel niets met de burgermoorden van 1914 te maken hebben. Ook hier is wat Lipkes te zeggen heeft niet altijd onterecht, maar dringt de vraag zich op wat dit boek nu precies wil bereiken. *Rehearsals* lijkt inderhaast op de markt gebracht om in te haken bij een hernieuwde interesse in 14-18; een wat doortastender rol van de uitgever was hier op zijn plaats geweest.

*Sophie De Schaepdrijver*

#### **IV. Tweede Wereldoorlog / Seconde Guerre mondiale**

PAUL ARON & JOSÉ GOTOVITCH (EDS.)  
«Dictionnaire de la Seconde Guerre mondiale  
en Belgique»  
Brussels, André Versaille éditeur, 2008, xxvi + 527 p.

Let us celebrate. It is in the nature of volumes of this kind that they are essentially monuments to what has been achieved. In this case, however, it seems particularly appropriate. This dictionary, written overwhelmingly by historians who hold Belgian identity cards (and jobs), even if they would not all regard themselves as Belgian historians, stands as a monument to the energy and commitment with which since the beginning of the 1970s successive generations of contemporary

historians have analysed the history of Belgium before, during and after the Second World War. One only needs to reflect on how impossible it would have been to write this volume twenty years ago, or indeed how impossible it would still be to conceive of publishing an equivalent volume for the years of the First World War, to appreciate the historiographical achievement that underpins its assured and comprehensive tome. This is a work of impressive scholarship, which enables the reader to proceed from “*Abris antiaériens*” to “*Voyages (en Allemagne)*” in the hands of a uniformly capable team of fifty-five contributors, even if one of them inadvertently moves the date of the Belgian capitulation to 18 May 1940 (p. 295). Indeed, there is a certain air of finality to the volume: the fundamental research having been accomplished, the time has now come to communicate its findings to a broader public, to satisfy the demand for enlightenment, as the editors express it in a phrase that appears to have descended from a bygone age, felt by “*l’homme cultivé*”.

This is therefore a volume written by professionals, but not primarily intended for them. It serves less as an exploration of work to be done, than as a statement of what we now know. And that of course is a great deal. The conception of the volume, as well as the tone of its contributions, mirrors very closely the dominant themes of the historiography of recent decades. Thus, it is a volume which contains more victims than heroes, more suffering than celebration and more bureaucracies than individuals. The tone is indeed sombre, at times almost unbearably so. Entries on crimes, persecution, oppression,

punishment and destruction predominate, and it feels almost illicit to turn, after reading entries on Genocide, the *Gestapo* and Pillage, to one on Sport (from which one learns that Lierse won the Belgian football championship in 1941). Such relief is, however, short-lived. Aron and Gotovitch’s *homme cultivé* will find his reading dominated by subjects such as the New Order, Deportation, Obligatory Labour and the Jewish Question, which leave no doubt as to the implacable suffering caused by the Occupation. Nor will he be allowed to think that this was overwhelmingly the work of the Germans. Belgian complicity and collaboration with the Nazi occupier features prominently, especially through the series of accomplished articles, mainly written by Bruno De Wever, on forms of Flemish Nationalist collaboration. There are in contrast some excellent articles on Resistance, notably a synthetic overview by Fabrice Maerten which skilfully summarises the themes of recent research, but their tone is consciously muted. Resistance, we are repeatedly told, was the work of minorities and operated within rather than outside the broader textures of Belgian society. Even the Information Networks, probably the most remarkable achievement of the Resistance groups, are approached in the article by Emmanuel Debruyne in a consciously downbeat manner, which emphasises the successes of the German police in dismantling many of the networks. Thus, if one can easily imagine a figure such as Henri Bernard deploring the absence in this volume of the achievements and spirit of the Belgian people, that serves merely to demonstrate how far the historiography of recent decades has taken us beyond the

patriotic discourses, but also the ways of thinking, of the past.

It is sometimes only by invoking a figure such as Bernard that one can appreciate the extent of the change encapsulated in the sombre colours and emphasis on institutions and collective experiences evident throughout the dictionary. Perhaps most striking is the almost complete absence of individuals. Citing not unreasonably the achievements of the new National Biography, the editors have chosen to exclude any biographical entries. *L'homme cultivé* will therefore search in vain for entries on figures such as Spaak and Pierlot, or indeed Degrelle and Elias (though he will find them in the Index). The decision is understandable, but the results are sometimes unfortunate, especially as political leaders such as Spaak and Pierlot, as well as less visible figures such as Walter Ganshof van der Meersch, the Baron De Launoit or André De Staercke have been in recent years among the most fertile areas of research. Most remarkable, however, is the treatment of Leopold III. Even if he is accorded, albeit under the impersonal title of "*Roi*", the only biographical entry, the article (written by José Gotovitch) is among the least satisfying in the volume. It is almost perfunctory in tone, and explains little of the King's complex manoeuvrings under the Occupation. If this is a volume largely without actors, it is also one in which political forces play a somewhat secondary role. There are entries on all of the major political parties, including an excellent one by Marc D'Hoore which explains the somewhat neglected history of the Liberal Party; but politics emerges more as a consequence or by-product of other

larger forces. This is perhaps above all the consequence of the emphasis placed in recent decades on the war and the German Occupation as *crisis*. The editors echo this theme strongly in their Introduction, presenting the war, in terms which will be strongly familiar to all historians of twentieth-century Belgium, as "*un moment de crise*", when all of the political, economic and ideological dimensions of a society, hidden from view in more normal times, came to the fore. From this perspective, what matters are less origins and narrative, than the dimensions and consequences of the crisis. Consequently, the volume tries to avoid focusing on events, especially those involving battles, and is less concerned with beginnings than with ends. Thus, apart from a marvellously opinionated article by Francis Balace on the shortcomings of the Belgian armed forces, there is relatively little in the dictionary on the phoney war of 1939-40, but several substantial articles, including one by Gotovitch on the Royal Question, which extend their reach substantially beyond the end of the war.

Where, however, the volume undoubtedly offers a new dimension is in the prominence it accords to culture, and more especially to artistic and literary culture. This can be surprising. The historian perusing the letter C will encounter sadly familiar subjects such as "*Camps de concentration*", "*Collaboration*". "*Commissariat aux Prix et Salaires*" and "*Congo Belge*" but also less familiar ones such as "*Caricature*", "*Censure*", "*Cinéma*" and, indeed, "*Cuisine*". This emphasis, which no doubt reflects the editorial influence of Paul Aron, has many benefits, not least of which is the way in which the editors' *homme cultivé* can

choose to jump from one cultural entry to another, rather like stepping stones across the murky waters of suffering and exploitation, and thereby read a cultural history of the war years which does not exist in any other volume. This comes, however, at the cost of raising the unavoidable issue of balance. The articles on museums, opera, crime novels, photography, literary prizes and music halls, as well as in a rather different key the one on psychiatric institutions, stand out as examples of the wealth of subjects which remain to be explored. But they also demonstrate the impossibility of capturing in any volume the multi-dimensionality of the experience of the war years. Why literary translations and not accountancy? Why theatre and fashion but not fishing and monasteries? Why youth but not the elderly? And why no entries on particular cities or regions?

What such questions of course demonstrate is that, notwithstanding the trappings of professional rigour and sober presentation, any volume of this kind is based on a pyramid of choices. The decision to remain within the formal structures of an alphabetical presentation serves, however, to render these choices more implicit than explicit. The accidents of the alphabet create some arresting juxtapositions: “Folklore” and “*Forces belges en Grande-Bretagne*”, and somewhat inevitably “*Rexisme*” and “*Roï*” (followed by the less predictable “*Roman policier*”). But they also disguise the organising principles that lie at the heart of the volume. Many of the most substantial entries in this volume are, in truth, more essays than dictionary entries. Thus, to cite only a few of the more notable examples, those on

the German and Belgian administration by Benoît Majerus, Nico Wouters and Bénédicte Rochet, by Fabrice Maerten on Resistance, by Dirk Luyten on economic themes or on daily life by Jacques Wynants, form the central analytical rocks of the volume. Each, one senses, points towards what could have been a thematic rather than alphabetical presentation, in which the major axes of the volume (German occupation, state structures, socio-economic change, persecution, resistance and culture) could have become distinct sections of the dictionary.

In the end, however, the common purpose that unites the dictionary is less one of theme than that of an individual. This volume is, the substantial contribution of Paul Aron notwithstanding, *la brique Goto*. José Gotovitch is the author of sixteen of the entries, ranging from Free Masonry to Torture, but including some of the most substantial. In truth, however, his intellectual preoccupations, energy and influence are apparent throughout the volume. Not only are many of the contributors his former students and colleagues, but what one might describe as his way of seeing the war provides the central organising principle. In the beginning, of course, was *L'an 40*, co-written by Gotovitch with Jules Gérard-Libois and which had an enormous impact when it was originally published in 1971. In some respects, the strengths of this dictionary are the same as those of *L'an 40*: the same lack of indulgence for those in positions of authority, the same wish to go beyond events to penetrate what one might term a politico-structural history of the war. But the dictionary also demonstrates how dramatically Gotovitch's field of

vision has expanded over the intervening decades to encompass themes such as gender, daily experience, exile and the post-war years. If, as a consequence, the dictionary lacks something of the focus of *L'an 40*, it also demonstrates triumphantly how formative and fertile has been his influence on the way we perceive the Second World War in Belgium.

*Martin Conway*

FLORE PLISNIER

**«Ils ont pris les armes pour Hitler. La collaboration armée en Belgique francophone 1940-1944»**  
Bruxelles, Éditions Luc Pire/CEGES, 2008, 208 p.

Le titre volontairement ‘accrocheur’ de cet ouvrage est renforcé par le bandeau imposé par l’éditeur et qui laisse présager un ‘scoop’ historique<sup>5</sup>. L’affirmation péremptoire du préfacier Fabrice Maerten selon laquelle il peut “paraître étonnant que jamais jusqu’à ce jour, une étude scientifique n’ait été consacrée aux diverses facettes de la collaboration armée en Belgique francophone” fait, nous semble-t-il, bon marché des nombreux travaux d’Eddy De Bruyne traitant tant de la collaboration policière avec l’occupant que des combattants de la Légion Wallonie et de ses succédanés, recherches reposant sur vingt ans de dépouillement des archives de l’Auditorat. Pourquoi ne pas évoquer non plus les innombrables mémoires de fin d’études défendus dans nos universités, dont certains ont été publiés ? L’auteur a d’ailleurs l’honnêteté, moins fréquente

qu’on ne le penserait, de les recenser dans sa bibliographie.

Rendons à Flore Plisnier le mérite d’avoir voulu, en un volume, ‘tout’ couvrir, des combattants du front de l’Est aux *V-Männer* des polices allemandes en passant par la Garde wallonne, le *NSKK* et les diverses milices mises sur pied par le Parti rexiste. Cela permettra au lecteur ‘pressé’ d’avoir une idée des facettes et articulations multiples du phénomène. Mais abondance de biens nuit, pour ne pas rappeler le proverbe qui veut que ‘qui trop embrasse mal étreint’. Le livre est à l’origine un ouvrage de commande, rédigé à la demande de Marcel Franckson, président de la fraternelle du service Hotton. Flore Plisnier a donc eu la tâche combien difficile d’étendre à toute la partie francophone du pays ce qu’elle a retiré de son mémoire de licence défendu en 2002 à l’ULB, une étude vraiment scientifique, elle, dans sa démarche heuristique et son analyse, *Le rexisme et l’ordre nouveau dans la région de Charleroi de 1933 à 1944*.

C’est là que le bât blesse. Les sources judiciaires de l’époque de la répression qu’elle a minutieusement dépouillées dans le cadre de son mémoire (affaires bande Laitat, bande Cheron, bande Duquesne, bande Jayé) sont toutes relatives au seul Pays noir mais restent les seules sources originales de son livre qui ambitionne de traiter de toute la Belgique francophone. Elles lui permettent d’élaborer une série de graphiques sociologiques.

<sup>5</sup> L’ouvrage est aussi paru en néerlandais sous le titre *Te wapen voor Hitler. Gewapende collaboratie in Franstalig België 1940-1944*, Anvers/Amsterdam, Meulenhoff/Manteau/SOMA, 2008, 181 p.